

Half Circle



Number 109 - January 2016

(If this is hard to read, try increasing the picture size to 150%!!)

This informal publication is for the members of C Coy 5 RAR (2nd tour), South Vietnam, 1969/70, and for the families of those who are no longer with us. It is non-political, and is designed for us to have a laugh at ourselves, re-live our memories, and maintain camaraderie. Formal advice, when needed, should be sourced from Veterans' Organisations.



AT THE RAP:

Barry Baker - medical

Barrie Taylor – oncology treatment

Geoff Ford – oncology treatment

John Hellyer – cardiology and medical

Don Frohmuller – vertebral injury

Colin Summerfield – medical

NEW APPOINTMENT: The new OC C Coy 5RAR is **Major Tom Green**, replacing MAJ Jarrod Brook, who has moved to OC Support Coy. We wish MAJ Green every success in his new role, and if we can help him with any tips on how C Coy should be run, he only needs to contact us.

WELCOME TO 2016 – TRY THIS MEMORY JOGGER FROM 47 YEARS AGO!

1968 – The Battalion was brought up to strength, with many new faces being posted in during May/June. Many soldiers had not yet seen their 20th, let alone their 21st birthdays. That year was spent training – day, night, weekends, exercises, Hercules flights to places that haven't even been discovered yet, jungle training at Canungra, more exercises, Shoalwater Bay, CSM Jack Lake barking at us – does this bloke EVER stop?, more exercises, then a short period of leave.

1969 – January - The Advance Party flew to Vietnam to prepare for the arrival of the main body.



1969 - February – The Battalion was transported from Holsworthy to the Garden Island Naval Base and embarked the HMAS Sydney. Each Coy was herded into a “Mess Deck” – a large steel room with no space once 110 men had filled it. Bedding was a hammock for anyone silly enough to string one up – the hammock stayed still, and the ship swayed around it. As a result, quite a few of us enjoyed the view whilst hanging over the side rail of the ship. Nobody will forget the “Crossing the Equator” ceremony, nor the daily rifle exercises on the Flight Deck. The meals were excellent, and we could purchase one 750mL can of beer per day for the princely sum of 20 cents. Some enterprising diggers sought out their seasick counterparts and relieved them of their beer ration. Ahh, mateship!

Mid February – the HMAS Sydney entered Vung Tau Harbour, and we were herded into LCMs for the trip to the shore. From there, we boarded Chinook helicopters for the 30km ride to Nui Dat.



Nui Dat – The Chinooks landed, and kicked up the greatest dust storm ever seen on this planet. Welcome to Vietnam! We grabbed our gear, and were trucked to nearby Ap An Phu, the section of Nui Dat that was to become our home for the next 13 months. 1RAR had vacated the area that morning, at the completion of their tour.

First impressions are the lasting ones - we entered a rubber plantation and were confronted by rows of tents strategically placed around our perimeter, about nine per platoon, with Coy HQ more centrally located. There was a “kitchen” – a hut with no effective screening for flies, no running water, and a couple of “Choofas” for cooking. There was not even any refrigeration, but it did have electric lighting.

Adjacent to this was a long, darkened hut, fitted with trestle tables and chairs. This was the mess hall. Outside, another hut was designated as the boozer, but good old CSM Lake made us well aware that we wouldn't be seeing much of the inside of this facility. The OC had a hut called “Yarralumla”, and below

this was the Company CP – the most claustrophobic room on the planet. There was a timber flight of steps going down to this timber-lined room, but time and moisture from monsoons had made the walls sag inwards. In this room, the Company radio systems were located. The Orderly Room was a wooden hut, and the Company Aid Post was a box in the Medic's tent.



The tents were Second World War canvas issue with duckboards for floors. They had the strongest, stalest and most mouldy odour that one could imagine. They leaked as we found out when the Monsoon season struck. There was no power other than a single light globe, but a digger's ingenuity and a bit of wiring allowed adaptors to be made to power tape decks (very modern then!). There were four men to each tent, with the accommodation comprising a bed, mosquito net, chair, communal table, personal trunk, and an old ammo box for shaving gear, etc. The water supply was a jerry can sitting on the sandbags which surrounded each tent. I'm not saying that it did happen, but there was always the possibility that some of the tent flooring could have been raised, revealing a cache of the amber liquid. We were also naïve enough to think that the officers didn't know!

Showers consisted of four canvas buckets strung from a beam in a small screened shed. The buckets would be lowered and filled with cold water, raised and tied off. The digger would turn the shower rose to allow enough water to fall to get wet, then turn it off. The trick then was to soap the body down, and again turn the rose to have a rinse. On occasions, water was tipped into a 44 gallon drum tipped sideways, and petrol poured into a pit below the drum. The pit was then set on fire, the water in the drum was heated (sort of), bucketed out and a warm shower was obtained.

Toilets consisted of a small shed with a huge pit dug underneath. A long plank was situated in the shed, and four holes cut into it. This was the toilet block. No privacy divisions, no doors, nothing.

Urinals were of a different kind. A hole was dug into the ground, and a bottomless 44 gallon drum lowered into it. Part of the drum would be above ground level, and covered with fly wire. Lime was spread around the area. The soldier would simply urinate into the drum, which was called a "Pissaphone". If a digger ever fell into a Pissaphone, he would automatically be banned from his tent for as long as his co-habitants deemed necessary.

The food. Bloody terrible. Most of it was supplied through American sources, and “fresh” meals generally comprised powdered eggs, powdered potato, some local produce, but nothing that could be considered wholesome. We could not blame our cooks – they did a great job with almost no resources, and copped all that the diggers gave them. Our Sergeant cook, the late Paddy Cahill, was famous for his “Paddy’s Buns”, bread rolls with a bit of salad in them. It was always said that if the enemy struck whilst we were eating Paddy’s buns, we could always use them as missiles to defend ourselves. They were good, though.



The Boozer. The tin hut mentioned above was seldom used due to operational reasons, but when it was used, it had a great work-out, with many cans of the amber liquid consumed in the shortest possible time. Roger Lambert, PL COMD of 9PL, found out one night just what happens if somebody tries to shut the boozer – Roger found himself strung up by the legs from the rafters of the boozer, with about 120 blokes cheering on those who dared to commit such an act. The boozer was aptly named “The Mushroom Club” by our First Tour diggers, and a giant painted mushroom adorned the entrance. The day after we arrived in Vietnam, the only means of refrigeration – a chest freezer – broke down and never worked again. For the next thirteen months, when the boozer was to be opened, ice had to be requested / obtained / bartered for or simply stolen from any available source.

There s one more very important thing to remember – we walked into an established camp at Ap An Phu – it is the 5RAR First Tour blokes that did it hard and established it for us. They had absolutely nothing when they arrived in Vietnam, and as primitive as it was – they provided it for us. Thank you.

The challenge – for someone else to write about their first impressions.
Don Harrod

MEMBER PROFILE – 215732 LCPL JOHN ARNOLD HELLYER:

My story starts in Newcastle NSW in 1963. I was two years out of school and working in a glass works. I was involved in learning glass blowing, making light globes, and a bit of lab work. In December 1963 I applied to join the Army, and on 24th April 1964, I arrived at Kapooka. Three months at Kapooka, then a Corps Allocation interview. I nominated Medical Corps. The whole platoon was then loaded onto a bus and dispatched to Bardia Barracks at Ingleburn – we all remember this as the (then) Infantry Centre. This was probably my first introduction to Army humour. After that training finished I ended up Holsworthy 1RAR for six months then posted to the new Battalion 5RAR along with a lot of older 1RAR men, Norm Womal (KIA Vietnam), Dick Bartley, Blue Milham and Dave Fazackerley the more notable men. 1965 was filled with intensive training, and I found that Coy HQ C Coy 5RAR was now my home. When we arrived in Vietnam, I was appointed the Company Blowfly, and carried out this task for four months. I was then transferred into 9PL, and my 21st birthday on 13th February 1967 was spent in the scrub near a small village. The very next day we suffered severe casualties – the OC, 2IC and Artillery FO all killed. I was only metres away.

A couple of months later we returned to Australia and were re-united with our families, including my girlfriend who was soon to become my wife. Then the Army humour machine struck again – I was appointed Lance Corporal, and asked what career path I wished to follow. Once again I nominated Medical Corps, and was quickly corrected – what job in 5RAR do you want? I was accepted to undergo a clerical course. During this time I lost my father and did not complete the Army Pay segment of the course. Consequently, I failed the course, but returned to 5RAR as the Pay Clerk in D Coy – a bit ironic!

1969 - again all aboard the Vung Tau Ferry (HMAS SYDNEY) and Vietnam here we come again! After six months I returned to my real home in Nui Dat – C Coy – as the Pay Rep. Same tent, different blokes, but Charlie Company was still the same. In 1970 we returned to Australia, and I was discharged. About six months later I received a survey letter “Why did you seek discharge from the Army after six years?” After having spent two years and 47 days in Vietnam, I sent a message back – “No bugger asked me to stay”. So ended my Army career. Now, I must admit that I would do it all again – bloody oath I would. With lifetime mates like the ones I have, there is no question.

The following photo show some familiar faces from the WA 5RAR Christmas lunch, held in Mandurah, WA on 21st December. Some of those faces which are most recognisable belong to Terry Bates, Terry Major, Peter Guyatt, Alan McNulty, and special guest (centre of photo) Kim (Hippie) Locke. Kim has been very ill, and is now in nursing home care.



Happy New Year to all. We now look forward to the C Coy 5RAR (Vietnam, 2nd tour, 1969/70) reunion in Canberra on 15th - 17th March 2016. If anyone has any queries on this, please contact Barry Morgan at b.kmorgan@bigpond.com

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod – donharrod@bigpond.com, 0418 423 313, with help from John Hellyer, Alan McNulty, Geoff Pearson and Barry Morgan.