

Half Circle



Number 43 - July 2010

(Please increase picture size to 150% for a better read!)

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.

Catching up with Yogi Bear - by Claude Ducker

Ed's note - please refer to the article from Kevin Mulligan in Half Circle 42 when reading this.

For many years I have wanted to catch up with "Yogi" to personally thank him for the wonderful job he did as a combat engineer temporarily allocated to 7 Platoon on 4 July 1969. However, nobody could ever tell me his proper name; let alone how to contact him. I was therefore grateful for Kevin Mulligan's contribution to "Half Circle" where he informed us that Yogi's name is Robert Earl. I am also grateful to Don Harrod for producing "Half Circle" and thus making such contacts possible.

For those who were not with C Coy at the time I should mention at the outset that "Yogi" showed outstanding bravery and dedication when 7 Platoon experienced the explosion of two M16 mines on the night of the Long Hais mine incident. He had previously been involved in the Battle of Binh Bah where he had an effective confrontation with a VC in a tunnel. But first let me tell you how "Yogi" happened to be out with C Coy that night. I was highly amused when Yogi recently told me the story in our nearly one hour long phone conversation.

He and two other sappers had been given a task that morning to build a hut near an Officer's Mess at Nui Dat. Apparently the hut had to be completed that day for a senior officer arriving from Australia that evening. A concrete slab had already been made ready the previous day. After they got only one post in, Yogi got thirsty and went on a recce to the nearby officers mess where things had been laid out for a function that night. Yogi found a large punch bowl surrounded by cups. It had a lot of ice cubes in what Yogi thought was a fruit punch. Yogi thought nobody would notice if he quenched his thirst, and as nobody seemed close at hand he had a few more drinks of what seemed to be the nicest drink he had since his arrival in Vietnam. He invited his two mates but they were not game to help themselves. Yogi, enjoying the pleasant effects of the punch, slipped back into the mess tent and allegedly picked the bowl up and slurped up the lot. Soon after, the engineer officer who had given the three sappers the task of

completing the hut, returned and was dismayed with the lack of progress. Indeed Yogi was being held up by his two mates while the officer addressed them and Yogi was promptly put on a charge. Yogi, on hearing that a small team of combat engineers was being sent to join 5 RAR that afternoon, decided to escape his fate, and decided on his own bat to join their party and to travel out to the land cleaning area where large ploughs were used to deny the enemy cover when approaching Dat Do and other villages.

C Coy had the task of protecting this operation just north of the Long Hais. We were also allocated some ambush tasks. Naturally I was happy that some combat engineers were made available to the company as the enemy were using M16 mines against us, stolen from the so called barrier minefield. I had some reservations about this 7 Platoon ambush task because of the lack of cover from view of the approach, and the fact that one of our other companies had recently been given a similar task in that area. I was therefore pleased that a combat engineer was available to be with the patrol. (Presumably Yogi's condition had somewhat improved by the evening! or was there a day in between?)

7 Platoon was unlucky in that the APCs became bogged short of the area of their objective, causing the delay in reaching the area of their final ambush position.

After the first mine exploded at 2109 hrs causing several casualties, David Mead, the platoon commander (also wounded that night) requested a casualty evacuation "dust off" helicopter. He sounded calm and controlled on the other end of the radio. Yogi, despite having been wounded in the shoulder, declined to be evacuated and kept prodding for mines and laying a tape towards where the helicopter was to land. When a second mine was stepped on an hour later it became an even more horrific situation for 7 Platoon and Yogi was severely wounded in both legs. It is not my purpose here to detail all this difficult time. Sadly the platoon lost Les Pettit and Paul Smith that night and Hans Muller died of his wounds in hospital the next day. There were also 16 wounded, mostly very severely.

There were many heroes that night but sadly under our inadequate "rationed" award system not all could be recognised by being properly rewarded. Yogi was awarded an m.i.d. for his heroic efforts; as was Wayne Herbert who as the platoon stretcher bearer treated many of the wounded, being himself severely wounded, losing an eye.

I felt very grateful for CSM Jack Lake that night. I knew he had experience of a mine incident in Borneo and I sent him in with one of the "dust off" helicopters to take charge, along with a small party including the company medic, Kevin Mulligan, and some combat engineers. (I am not risking naming the others with Jack in case I inadvertently leave somebody out). The engineers found a third mine the next day. As in Borneo, the enemy tended to lay their mines in threes. Yogi tells me some VC used to try to cover the three prongs with a large snail which a soldier might be tempted to crush. He also recalled that during the artillery fire that we put around the position to deter the VC from taking advantage of the situation he could hear what sounded like enemy screams.

When Yogi came home he went through hard times. It was a long time before he was accepted as a TPI despite his horrific wounds. Sadly, as he could only pull slippers over his badly wounded legs he could at first only get a school janitors job on very low pay where he had to empty garbage bins etc. Hardly appropriate for a wounded hero. Like

many returning Vietnam vets, he tells me he was not made welcome in RSL clubs let alone get help with making a pension claim. Fortunately the situation has improved over recent years for him and other vets.

Well done, Yogi. I must say I never had your experience of finding a bowl full of punch in an officer's mess in my twelve months in Vietnam!

Yogi would welcome contact with C Coy members on (02) 4990 3601 or grizzley2788@bigpond.com *Ed's note: I have contacted Yogi, and urge others to do the same.*

From Roger Lambert - HELP WANTED: Does anyone have a photograph of the tail fin that was recovered from the Long Hai Mountains when we recovered the bodies of the pilot and his observer from their crashed O-2 FAC aircraft? I seem to recall that the tail fin was held for a time in the C Coy boozier - the serial on the tail should read USAF 68-6869.

I have a very serious reason for asking as I've identified the USAF pilot and his USMC observer who died that day and whom we contributed to returning their mortal remains to their NOK in the USA. I have no ulterior motive except to try and give some 'closure' to the NOK if I'm allowed to do so after all this time.

Any personal observations from the troops would also be greatly appreciated. No names, no pack drill but from what I've read on the recorded deaths of the pilot and his observer, the write-up leaves a lot to be desired. Any discrete images taken on that fateful day in June 1969 would also be appreciated.

Ed's note: Please send any information to me (address at end of newsletter) for on forwarding to Roger)

STOP PRESS: Roger has just sent the following information:

I have finally made contact with the FAC (Jade 3) flying an O-2 that directed Magpie 31's bombs in an air strike for me in September 1969. The air strike features in my work-in-progress article with the working title "Blondes, Bombs and Bunkers" and it was my putting together of the article that prompted me to try to ID and contact the FAC and the crew of Canberra Magpie 31. A colleague is currently working through the 2 Sqn Association in an endeavour to ID the Canberra crew for me.

'My' FAC was a Jim Farris (Jade 3) and we're now exchanging memories via email. Jim flew his entire tour with 1 ATF as Jade 3 and has very fond memories of we Aussies.



How much does a digger have to carry? Here is a shot of Mike Radwell carrying some heavy duty "Don't Argue"

**MEMBER'S PROFILE: Ian Leis (Leisy) reports: Pte Matthew Kevin Smith -
Nickname: "MK"**

MK joined the army as a three year regular soldier. He came from Black Rock, a farming community of South Australia. MK was a few years older than many of us. We did Kapooka, Ingleburn and were posted to 5RAR at Holsworthy. By this time MK and I were great mates. Neither of us really knew why we had joined the army but had decided to make the best of it. MK did like a drink; he was a happy drinker although his quiet nature changed with the quantity of alcohol consumed.

Whilst at Holsworthy MK was known for his extra fire fighting training. On a number of occasions after a session at the boozier MK, whilst manning the active end of the main barracks fire hose would wash the outside of the barracks and indeed some rooms would also receive a pressure clean.

It is my belief that MK was responsible for giving one of our respected leaders the nickname of "Yap Yap". Whilst on morning parade MK stated "Bloody" Dog Dog" is in there barking and chasing his tail and here comes (his pup)"Yap Yap" spruiking his orders". "It stuck". Sorry Jack!

MK and I were the M60 gunners for 5 section/8platoon. This combination continued in SVN until my transfer into 7 Platoon. MK was a quiet digger, did his job and supported his platoon/company mates. Most of his efforts and kindness went unnoticed. He was very successful at remaining in the background. Today he continues with the quiet life. On discharge from the army MK worked for the SA railways until his self funded retirement. Today he lives in SA.

Matt Smith, thank you for your personal support and friendship. You made my time in the military much easier. The military family that you are part of acknowledges your input into the success we achieved.



Photo: Matthew Smith and Ian Leis

Then there was a prisoner in a Dublin jail, found hanging by his feet. He told the warder that he was trying to hang himself. When the warder told him that he was supposed to tie the rope around his neck, he replied "I tried that, but I couldn't bloody breathe".

David Mead writes:

I am sure the Company will recall our first op outside Phouc Tuy. It was into Long Khanh Province supposedly protecting the approaches to the big US air base at Bien Hoa. Remember how we searched for what seemed a mythical enemy who kept appearing on a US Radar surveillance system! There were heaps of them apparently! There was an extended line farce where we tripped over D Coy I think, who was trying to do the same and no one found anything.

Anyway the end result was to bring in the B52s one night to drop their 500 lb bombs in a mission which I recall was called an ARC LIGHT.

We move to what was an apparently a safe 3000 metres away.

The poem then speaks for itself but wow they were some holes!

The moon and the small steps probably has something to do with the fact that man first stepped on the moon around the same time - well in 1969; I believe it was the 20th Jul.

Anyway I hope it brings back memories for those who were there.

B52 - ARC LIGHT

*Hugging the earth, we felt it shudder,
Though it were hills away.
A rolling, awesome, awful thunder drowned our senses.
From our burrows we could see nothing.
I thought I heard our mammoth friends high, droning off into the darkness,
Then our senses, and the silence, and the jungle, returned.*

*In the morning we marched into an alien land,
Huge red pockmarks, nothing living,
Perhaps it was like the moon,
We took small steps*



How far back can we go? Roger Lambert sent in this photo of **Ted Suttor** (1) and **John Faint** (2nd from right), having a spell whilst undertaking the 20 mile march at Kapooka, January 1968. Even though Ted and John are no longer with us, their memories remain.

This photo is also displayed at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

AN UPDATE FROM BARRY WILLIAMS:

Ed's note: as we all know, Barry is very ill, and has been working on his "Bucket List". He recently sent Dave Wilkins an email, and has agreed to have it published to let his mates know how he is doing. Here it is - talk about going out with right attitude and dignity - it makes us all very proud to have been Barry's mates:.....

"Thanks for your thoughts Sir. The job is just about done and the bucket list finished. We managed to do all we set out to do in the States.

Got the wedding vows done, went to the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, saw the Indy 500, Niagara falls from Canada, also got to Arlington and the Wall in Washington DC. Do yourself a favour- go to Arlington and visit the Wall. It has a hallowed feeling.

Got back on the 14th of June and drove to Sydney for the grand daughter's 18th and managed to get one back on the NSW police. They stitched me up for 117ks per hour and I was doing a dead set on cruise control: Fine of \$193.00 and after 30 odd years as a long distance driver and paying a zillion dollars in fines it gave me great pleasure to inform him to send the warrant to the Jungle Training Center to be spread under my tree with my ashes as I would be long gone before it turned into a warrant. Never even got a smile from him.

I am still trying to hang on to take the bride on the Ghan from Adelaide to Darwin. Not sure if I will make it.

I had a scan on Friday and the result is not flash- all 3 cancers have grown and now there are 4 new ones and the pain is getting worse but we are going to give it a shake.

Did I tell you that the DVA accepted that my cancer was caused by my service in Vietnam to allow me to get travel insurance to get me or my body back to Australia to save my losing the house. Got to go to the dentist for a fitting. DVA are sending me out as a good looking corpse whether they like it or not.

Thank you again Dave. Keep the powder dry."

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod - donharrod@bigpond.com - (02)6842 4913, 0418 423 313, with help from Claude Ducker, Roger Lambert, Mike Radwell, Ian Leis, David Mead, Barry Williams, Dave Wilkins and a stupid joke.