

Half Circle

Number 55 - July 2011



(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.

*Capt David Wilkins,
OC C Coy 5RAR
December 1969 to
March 1970*



DAVE'S DIARY

My diary entries are in *italics* whilst additional explanatory or descriptive commentary is in plain text:

Last ANZAC Day we were spinning a few yarns, when the blokes suggested I include this story against myself for Half Circle even though it is not about C Coy. It involved D Coy and the tracker dog, Caesar.

Following the Battle of Binh Ba and the mine incidents in Dat Do, D Coy was a bit short of officers and senior NCOs so Genghis sent me to help them out for the operation in the Nui Dinh. I was temporarily put in command of 11 Platoon while 2Lt John Russell was recovering from his wounds received at Binh Ba.

9 July 1969

D company has had six contacts over the past few days and now seems to be in a definite enemy concentration area. Two enemy base camps were found and attacked today by 11 and 12 Platoons. We completely caught the enemy by surprise. The camps were situated in a large system of caves in a re-entrant on the side of the mountain.

10 July

... our platoon was moving towards a suspect enemy camp area through thick scrub when contact was made with an enemy patrol. Two of the enemy were wounded in the initial contact and fled, the remaining enemy also scattering to the four winds. I found the blood trail and immediately followed up, leading with a tracker team, consisting of a tracking dog, "Caesar", and two visual trackers including the handler Paddy Walker.

We followed the trail for approximately 400 metres through the jungle when Caesar suddenly stopped and pointed. This was obvious when he abruptly lifted his nose from the sniffing position close to the ground, stopped and strained his head forward towards the enemy waiting some 50 metres ahead (although they could not be seen). It was a beautifully-executed piece of silent tracking which gave us all the advantage of knowing the enemy's position and presumably the enemy not knowing of our presence. Receiving the silent field signal for the platoon commander to come forward, I moved silently to Paddy and Caesar's side to assess the situation. Everything was eerily quiet under the forest canopy. The next moment the silence of the bush was shattered by the piercing yelp of the dog. I had clumsily trodden on its foot! Now, not only did this reveal our presence and lose the element of surprise, but it also did nothing to boost the diggers' confidence in their new platoon commander, an officer they had little close knowledge of. You can imagine the men rolling their eyes and thinking, "What sort of doozy do we have here?"

Although the enemy had holed up in a camp-cave system it was a good platoon-attack location with a small spur-line providing a good fire position for one section, which could observe and provide covering fire for the assaulting sections and platoon HQ right up to the objective. This would enable them to keep the enemy heads down right up until the assault group reached the rocks and caves.

The attack was a big success and 11 Platoon was outstanding; we killed the VC, captured the position and had no own casualties.

13 July

This whole area seems full of enemy camps; thank God they aren't ALL occupied. The camp where we followed the enemy to, turned out to be at least a company-size system, and the more one searches, the more systems one finds.



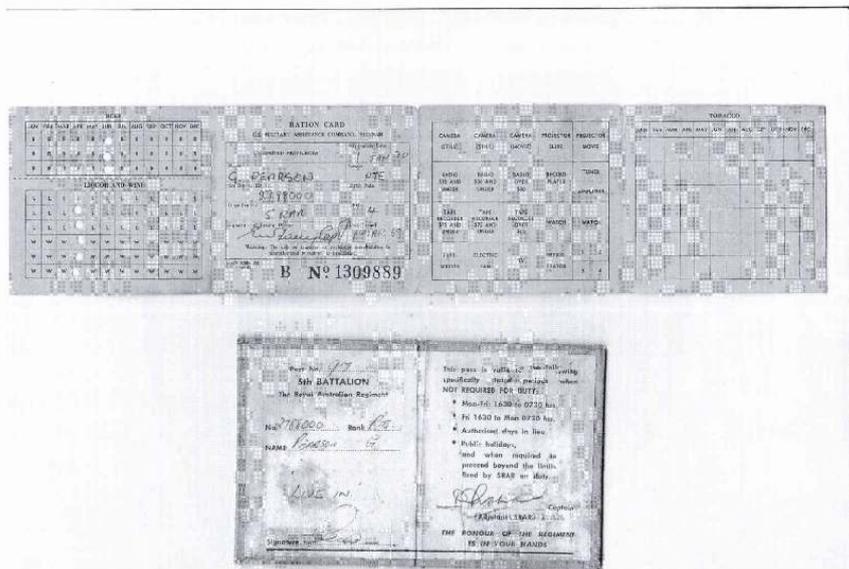
Roger Lambert, PL COMD 9PL,
ready for a patrol, 1969



Captured Flag – held by 9PL's
David Stone, Bryan Macdonald,
Stan Arnold and Roger
Lambert. 9PL's first war prize!

PEARSO'S PAGE: Here are two items contributed by Geoff Pearson. The first is the PX Ration Card, issued whilst in Vietnam. It entitled the soldier to purchase quantities of beer and spirits at the American PX, periodically over the time on active service. At each purchase the card was punched. Pearso was able to expend his full entitlement on beer and spirits. Some cruel observers would say that he either drank it all or it may have found its way to the odd bar or two, sold for a roaring profit, but then the soldier would buy it back a glass at a time. The end result was that it cost the soldier about 20 times its purchase price when consumed! Hardly good economics, considering that Pearso was a banker in civvie street. We suspect that Bill Evans may have had something to do with this failed enterprise.

The second item was the 5RAR Leave Pass, issued at Holsworthy in 1968. This gold, hard-covered card indicated hours of work, and whether or not the soldier lived in or out of the Barracks. It was signed by both the soldier and the Company Commander (in this case Major D.D. [Dog Dog] Graham).



11

Sky news report. The Irish have joined in the attack on Libya. They sent in 3 ships - 2 full of sand and one full of cement. It was for a mortar attack. *(Don't blame me for this - Kiwi Hill sent it)*

A policeman radioed his station, and said "I'm out patrolling and there's this great big black African dancing on top of a Ford Sierra - he's going to wreck it". The station

back "You have to use politically correct radio procedure. Please resubmit". The policeman radioed back "ZULU...TANGO...SIERRA" (*You can blame Bob Hooper for this one*)

Vet Assist. Veteran Assist is a private local company that is contracted to the Department of Veteran Affairs.

We conduct HomeFront assessments on all Gold, White & War Widows that have a gold card regardless of health status, age & accommodation.

We make an appointment to see the veteran in their own home. We show the veteran the products on offer this calendar year up to the value of \$196. The veteran chooses the products and we order these for them. The items are used for the home and come under the 'falls prevention program'. Items chosen are to prevent falls such as retractable hose reels, [sensor light](#), [night light](#), non slip mats, [cordless telephones](#) just to name a few.

The assessment takes approx 30 minutes. It is at no cost to the veteran. The items are posted to the veteran and takes approx 4 weeks to arrive from Melbourne at no cost to the veteran.

The uptake rate of HomeFront is only 4%. Our mission is to increase awareness of HomeFront and to service the veteran community Australia Wide!. So, to do this, we need your help in spreading the word. So please forward this email on to all of your veteran friends.

We have a 1800 telephone number which is free for all veterans calling from Australia. Please advise all your veteran friends about HomeFront and to call us to arrange for a local assessor to see them ASAP. Remember it's every Calendar Year, and the year is coming to an end, so remind everybody to call before it's too late.

PLEASE CONTACT VETERAN ASSIST ON 1800 257788

I went to a restaurant the other day and asked the waiter if he had frog's legs. He replied "No, I have always walked this way".

I told my doctor I felt like a bridge. When he asked me what had come over me, I replied two trucks, eight cars and a motorbike

STATISTIC: Six out of seven dwarves are not happy. (Blame Ben Oram for this)

Ian Leis remembers his mates



2788160
Pte Wayne Kenneth Stephens
"Rouster"
18th National Service Intake
Passed away 18th August 2009

Although "Rouster" has departed our lives, he still lives on in many of our memories. Leaving behind his wife Ngarie who supported "Rouster" in all ways during their dance through life. Ngarie being especially supportive of the military family that Rouster was so proud of. To me it seems fitting to write my little story regarding "Rouster" as if he was still around. He often passes through my mind, remembering times we spent together.

Growing up in Warren, NSW he joined his father in the sheep shearing industry, working as a shed hand - thus his nickname Rouster - (Roustabout of the shearing shed) - a nickname that he was very proud of. Rouster was a bushie. He loved Australia and everything it stood for. His call to represent his country's military forces was one he wanted to excel in. He completed rookie training at Kapooka and Infantry corps training at Singleton, before joining 5RAR at Holsworthy. He had already proven he was an excellent shot with a rifle and was soon sent to complete a forward scout's course. Rouster fitted into his military role with his self presentation, discipline and mateship. Also the lifestyle from the shearing sheds all helped him to become a good reliable soldier. (The discipline was questionable at times) Rouster completed his tour of SVN as a forward scout a position no one could take from him. His reputation in 8 Platoon Charlie company 1969 was of a scout whom you were at ease to follow through the "J". He was a very reliable and capable digger. His easy going attitude and also his sense of humour ensured Rouster the respect he deserved. He was and still is held in high regard by those he served with.

On completion of his two year military commitment Rouster returned to the shearing sheds. His father had written advising Rouster that he had found a young lady working as a jillaroo in the district who would make a suitable wife. A blind date was set up and the rest is history. Ngarie and Rouster enjoyed approximately 40 years of marriage, having three boys, sadly losing the middle son in a drowning accident at a young age.

Rouster became a shearing contractor taking over his fathers business which covered a wide area of north-west NSW. The Stephens family name was respected and held in high esteem. Rouster continued on where his father left off. Known and respected in many country towns and on sheep properties he also spent a lot of his time on club committees in and around his home town of Warren. He also spent a fair bit of his time sitting in the clubs enjoying cool ale.

Ngarie and Rouster organised a Charlie Company Reunion on Anzac Day in 1997 at the Warren RSL attended by some 20-30 personnel with their wives and partners. It was a memorable weekend. Rouster upset the food requirements during the weekend when he was asked to clean up around the rear of the house by Ngarie. He did, all was taken to the local dump, including the box of frozen chooks left to thaw on the table before cooking.

My personal friendship with Rouster was renewed in 1988. I had put my time in the military behind me. I had a family to care and provide for upon discharge and that was my main goal. Many of us were in the same vote, wanting to go forward and not dwelling on what would remain in our memory for life. However I acknowledge that many of our mates continued on in the military serving our country, forming careers that were a credit to them - careers that we are all proud of.

Whilst travelling Australia by caravan and making contact with John Yabsley "Skippy" in Kempsey, NSW I was coerced by my wife, Yabs and Pearso to attend a C Company reunion at Tamworth. Since discharge I had seen Peter McCarthy "Freddie" and Geoff Pearson

'Jethro for a short visit in 1971. I had also spoken with Robert Newbery "Blue" by phone a few times and I also visited John Faint (Fainter of Phantom) in Tamworth in early 70's. Fainter was looking for assistance as he had huge alcohol and drug problems at the time. I spent time with him but was of little assistance.

I attended that reunion - it was the best decision I ever made. The C Company group who accepted my wife and two young children could not have made us feel more welcome. To make contact with Sandy McKinnon, whom I had not spoken to since assisting Jack Lake to place him on a jungle penetrator for dustoff. Recognition by my voice was very emotional for me - Sandy having severe vision problems by then. Also to make contact with casualties for the 4th July again after so long. I had visited Concord Hospital in August 69 whilst on R&R to Australia and had seen many of these mates at that time.

At this reunion one of those who went out of their way to accept and welcome us was Rouster. A detour for us to Warren was arranged, we were invited to set the caravan up in the front yard and their home was open to us. During this week my wife Glenys and two of our children, Leonie and Joe learnt more about my military service and especially in time in SVN than I had ever shared with them. Photos and picture slides were shown giving my family an insight into Vietnam. Rouster, Ngarie, Ross and Shae made us feel right at home. The country hospitality given to us was tremendous. My feet did not touch the ground during my visit. Assisted by "Barnie" Neil Simpson we were taken to many places. Shearing sheds that were operating at the time, the country around Warren, cotton farms that were being established and always arriving back at the RSL in time for a few drinks before dinner. Also I was entered into the veterans swimming club, being taken from my warm bed around 5am in minus degree temperatures to swim in freezing water for a chance to win of all things a "frozen chook"

Rouster also took me fishing, once again up at 4.30am to go for worms. Off we went in the old Ford wagon belting along at a rate of knots. I asked where the shovel and fork was for digging - "nope don" need one". We eventually arrived at a council depot beside the river. Rouster disappeared behind a huge shed and reappeared driving a noisy 3m end loader - our worm digging instrument. Thus began or rather continued the deep friendship we shared.

Over the next 20 years we spent a lot of time together. We had many laughs at ourselves and others. Valued quality time. In the mid 90's Rouster assisted me through a very low time of my life. His understanding and support was a huge benefit to me. That was the Rouster that many of us knew.

Approximately 18 months before his death, Ngarie and Rouster visited us for a period of time, leaving their caravan with us for a base camp while spending time with others. Rouster was not well at this time. I accepted or knew the severity of his health problems but I didn't realise he was heading towards death as he was always so full of life. However once his illness was correctly diagnosed very little could be done, it was all down hill for him.

I spoke with Rouster by phone a few days before his death in 2009. Both of us were very emotional but it was Rouster who pulled it together and we were able to say our farewell. I would like to thank Geoff Person for his thoughtfulness and the time he spent with Ngarie and their family during the last few days of Rouster's life. A better friend you couldn't find. Rouster is survived by Ngarie, sons Ross and Shae and their partners and four grandchildren who thought the world of "Pop" Stephens. Ngarie's support of Rouster's mates continues and she enjoys contact with them. Rest in peace mate - your walk through life will be remembered by those who shared it with you.

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod - 02 6842 4913, 0418 423 313, (donharrod@bigpond.com), with help from David Wilkins, Roger Lambert, Geoff Pearson, Kiwi Hill , Ian Leis, Ben Oram and Bob Hooper.