

Half Circle



Number 163 - July 2020

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: John Hellyer, Bryan Schafer. We send our best wishes to our mates who are not as well as they would like to be. Barrie Taylor is finally off this list! See Barrie's story below.

3794053 LCPL BARRIE TAYLOR – MY STORY

As you know I have been on the sick list for around 6 years. I have some great news of being informed I was totally clear of Cancer. So, let me tell you the story of my 8-year trip.

I was diagnosed in 2008 with a Blood cancer which had no cure. So between 2008 and 2013 I was under wait and see what might take place as it started to encroach my body.

Come 2013 I was in all sorts of trouble had no strength and could not climb stairs at home. When I told my Neurologist/ Oncologist, he s**t himself as he had applied all his know how to keep me going. At that time I was told "There is a new test out for blood cancer but I know it will not be that , although we will do it" Well it proved I had this incurable cancer called NHL Waldrenstoms which was originally found by a Swedish doctor call Waldrenstoms. Very little was known about this cancer by the health community. Once diagnosed I thought OK DVA will cover me. We then found out DVA would not cover the cancer, the only cancer they would not support treatment. So, the DVA case of proving the cancer, was a long and demanding case although eventually after finding various Cancer experts the cancer was accepted by DVA.

So during this2008-2013 period I had no DVA treatment which was wasting my body away. So once DVA accepted treatment I immediately went on a course of Intravenous Immunoglobulin (IVIg) Treatment of approximately 70 treatments to keep me alive. During this period I had some very good periods of highs and then some real downers including deep depression none of this was nice being a on a 3 weekly infusion program. After time I

just accepted this was my life for the future. My oncologist, Professor Miles Prince encouraged me with "stay with us, modern science is moving fast".

Come last March 2019 I was starting to slip again health wise. During the period of 2008 thru to current I suffered severe Neuropathy of Legs up to knees, hands, face and at times incontinent. I suffered some severe falls smashing myself up hitting bitumen at Elanora Golf Club, same trip I fell into a lake on the 17th hole at "the Lakes" where my buggy took off heading for water where I was looking for a golf ball. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the buggy heading my way, so I laid a tackle on the bag & Buggy, all three of us ended up in the lake, buggy on top of me and my head just above the water line. My strength so bad I could not climb out of the water. Fortunately, my wife and her friend pulled me from the lake. As a true trooper I finished the last 2 holes drenched, and cold.

On my return to Melbourne I visited my GP, who looked after all the wounds. I visited my Neurologist to show him my condition. He again s**t himself with a note to my Oncologist with a time to visit him. Miles took one look at me, smashed up face and knees. He asked me to come back in 1 week as he had just returned from USA and wanted to review my condition. I visited the following week where he looked me in the eye and said "I am going to kill it" slightly shocked, I said will there be any collateral damage, his reply "Your hair will not fall out" well that all fell out sitting on a fire trail combing my hair in Vietnam in 1969..

Miles Prince being a AFL supporter of Geelong, I asked him will I see a St Kilda grand-final, his reply "Yes, they will make a Grand Final although I cannot see Saints winning a grand final", There you go a real trooper who told me as it is. I am now cured of my cancer, it's an amazing feeling and recently confirmed with Bone Marrow testing.

The 2008 -2020 period has been a hard, long haul, modern science saved me. I am the lucky one, so there is hope if you can hang around long enough. I feel like a 50-year-old, but the body must rebuild. My neuropathy has improved.

I look back the times I should have been dead thru this 12-year period. I also recall as a Reo the 2 times I was standing in the 4th July mine field on the phone organising extraction by choppers and giving orders to the platoon for extraction and on both occasions not being hit by mine shrapnel. I am most grateful for the 2 men who not realising it both times provided my cover from a shrapnel hit. Firstly Lt Mead standing beside me took the first mine hit the second time was our medic Wayne Herbert standing beside me when I gave orders to the platoon for extraction and exit the mine field to safe ground, Wayne was struck in the head and lost his eye. Taking control after finding the radio set & organising the process of extraction and helping with clearing tracks for members to be dragged out was a task frankly being difficult in the dark although training on mine field technique was a winner in the end. Both times I am standing and walked out unscathed. I often think of our 3 lost men that night and many who have suffered thru mental trauma and physical trauma losing legs eyes etc. They are all very brave men who put their lives on the line. I miss my mate John Faint who lost both legs in the first mine explosion, then returning to Australia to die early not being able to cope with his injuries.

Only those who have been to war can understand war and returning home holding in the trauma of placing their life on the line, your story should be told. This media is the place to tell your story to be with other likeminded to ease the trauma of their trip.

So I encourage all those in 7 Platoon to expose yourself in some small way, you have some good listeners ready to take on board your story.

Thank you-Barrie Taylor
3794053

A COURT MARTIAL IN MENDI (Part 3)

By Dave Wilkins

When the court martial began, different languages, associated with local customs, created some issues. Four languages were spoken at the trial: English, Pidgin, Kiwabe and Imbongu. Not only was it necessary to obtain interpreters who were sufficiently fluent in English and the other language, but also the interpreter could not have any tribal conflict of interests. It was this latter requirement that created a major headache. As the Kiwabe and Imbongu languages were the local tongues spoken by the Yamiyami people, it was difficult to locate an interpreter who was not subject to pressure and influence from this 'line'. Once located, he had to be instructed on the techniques of interpreting for a court of law.

As mentioned in Part 2, compensation had become the main issue as far as the Yamiyami people were concerned and they believed, erroneously, that unless there was a conviction, there could be no compensation. Wisely, it was decided to try to defuse this potentially explosive issue prior to the Court Martial, by having a representative from the Papua New Guinea Public Solicitor's Office confer with them about it. This was done by Major John Reeve, an Army Reserve member of the Australian Army Legal Corps, then working in the PNG Department of Justice. The resultant meeting was one of the factors which enabled the Court Martial to proceed without disruption.

There was just one witness, Koroma Lopeka, who had a different story from other occupants of the Kombi mini-bus. He was from a different village and his version supported Sergeant Pinnow's defence. Unsurprisingly, Lopeka was considered a threat to any compensation payment and he consequently received death threats from the Yamiyami people. He was provided with a police guard.

Digressing slightly on the subject of compensation, I found it interesting to note that, for a primitive people, the highlanders had developed a very keen understanding of finance and property values. One of Major Reeve's cases provided an example of this. By legislation it was necessary for the PNG Government to purchase land intended for road construction at the current improved value. A piece of land was thought to have been purchased for road construction, but in fact had not. As the road was built the landowner said nothing; but as soon as the construction was finished he demanded that the land be purchased at the improved value which included the price of the road. The government had been caught napping and was therefore required to pay for the road twice: once to the road builder and once to the land owner.

Returning to the Court Martial: the trial began with an explanation to the members of the public in the court room that this was a criminal trial to decide whether or not the accused had broken the law. It was not a tribunal to determine whether compensation should be paid, or how much compensation, if any, should be paid to Rambu's relatives. The Judge Advocate then warned the public that they were entitled to listen to the proceedings, but not to say anything or do anything to interrupt the trial. This warning was repeated by each of the interpreters to ensure that all understood fully the implications of interfering with the course of justice. Added impact was obtained by the presence of the shotgun-bearing PNG police.

As it eventuated, the trial was relatively free from incident, but the novelty of a military court, together with the nationals' unfamiliarity with the situation, led to some quaint happenings. I began calling the prosecution witnesses, and one witness, for example, was clearly becoming upset at the line of cross examination by Jim McIntyre and refused to answer any further questions, stating that he had already told his story to the police, to the Coroner, and to the military prosecutor, and that he did not intend to go over it again. McIntyre's questions were met with stony silence. Again, through interpretation, the Judge Advocate explained to the witness the inadvisability of the course he was adopting, and after several minutes of silence the witness finally responded. By this time of course, he had been able to regain his composure.

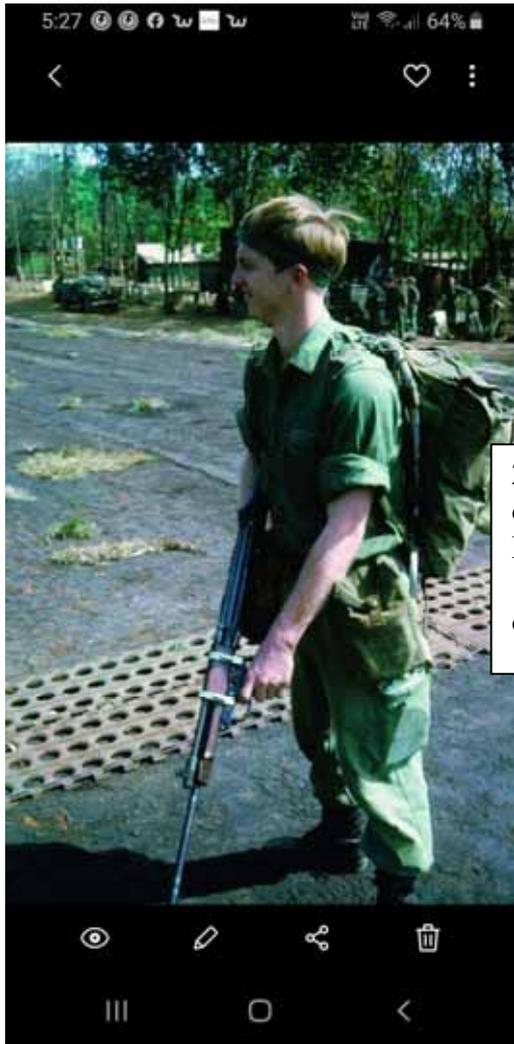
I finally reached the witness with the different version, Koroma Lopeka, the witness with police protection. The engineers had constructed a 3-sided witness box and when Lopeka entered it, his nose barely reached the top - a bit like Mr McGoo really. I had interviewed him earlier and while I have never been known for being excessively tall, I had found Lopeka to be of equal height and certainly taller than the witness box. Judge O'Meally was seated at an elevated bench with the sun streaming through a long window behind his shock of white hair, giving him an almost mystical appearance. This very primitive native, dressed in just a few leaves front and back strung from a waist vine, was totally overwhelmed by the occasion and in particular by this celestial-like apparition above him. The Judge Advocate was the first to realise the reason for this diminished stature, informing the witness: *'You needn't kneel before me.'* It seemed this terrified man, being under constant threat and fearful for his life, was of the impression he might receive some divine assistance from this powerful figure towering before him.

Finally, most witnesses had considerable difficulty in understanding the offer to have their evidence played back to them by the court recorder. One witness indicated he would like to hear his evidence replayed (a lengthy process), while another declined to hear his evidence replayed in court providing he could obtain a printed copy later on. Confusion was also caused when a witness answered 'Yes' to the question, *'You don't want to hear your evidence played back to you, do you?'* It took a little time to realise that he was in fact meaning *'Yes, I don't want it played back.'* This method of responding to the double negative is in fact the standard grammatical form in the Pidgin language.

Despite these problems, all evidence was received and considered by the court, and a conclusion reached. The sergeant was found not guilty, and Mendi returned to normal. The Australian Army unit constructed a memorial to Rambu Melo in his village, and the Yamiyami people were assisted in their compensation claim against the national government.

Following his death Rambu's widows wore the public symbols of mourning. Their faces and bodies were painted with layers of grey mud, they wore ankle-length grass skirts, and around their necks were looped an enormous weight of Job's Tears necklaces, bundles up to 12 inches thick, covering the neck, shoulders, chest and waist. After nine months in mourning, the widows gradually discarded these symbols of their bereavement.

All that remained was the memory of Rambu Melo and the memorial plaque, the words of which pay respect to 'wanpela bikman', a great man.



218061 Allan (Bluey) Austin, on the day he was promoted to Lance Corporal in Vietnam, 1969. Bluey was 20 years old.

PHOTOS – THEN AND NOW:

Kevin Mulligan has suggested that we start a gallery of photographs of ourselves – two photos per person – the first is a photo of you in Vietnam and the second a photo of you now! As other commitments prevent me from taking on this project, the only one of over eighty C Coy members asked to put their hand up was our Commander, David Wilkins. This response was pretty disappointing, considering that everyone has a computer, and most are now retired. However, if you send your “Before and After” photos to me, I’ll pass them onto Dave. Please send these in Word format. I hope that we get a better response to the call for pictures of diggers than with the C Coy pewter. Of all our number, only twelve bothered to reply. Don



Greg Dick's tiger – can anyone better this symbol of our past? Thanks, Hickory

THE GALLERY - submitted by Dennis (Digger) Nevins:



The Machine Gunner - Dennis Nevins



A day at the office



John Marine on a chopper



Having a tub

"We're looking for a Treasurer for our Social Club", said Paddy.

"Didn't you take on a new one last month?" said Murphy.

"That's the one we're looking for", Paddy replied.

FROM BILL HARTLEY:

I was in the McDonald's drive-through this morning and the young lady behind me leaned on her horn because I was taking too long to place my order.

"Take the high road," I thought to myself. So, when I got to the first window, I paid for her order along with my own.

The cashier must have told her what I'd done, because as we moved up, she leaned out her window and waved to me and mouthed "Thank you.", obviously embarrassed that I had repaid her rudeness with a kindness.

When I got to the second window, I showed them both receipts and took her food too.

Now she has to go back to the end of the line and start all over.

Don't honk your horn at old people.

GOLF. Many of us swap golf stories from time to time. Now it's my turn. On Thursday 4th June, my playing partner did it – a hole in one on the eighth – 190 metres of excellence! Smithy got around the nine holes in 48 (not bad for a very frosty morning with the going a bit slow). My score was close – 59, including one venture into the creek, one behind a tree, hitting up a good dust storm and a beautiful air swing. My next extreme sport will probably be quoits or draughts. Don

Answer to the ordnance question on page 5: L to R: M79 rounds, M26 Grenades, Smoke Grenade, Trip Flare, Claymore Mine and foreground, 66mm LAW.

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod – donharrod@bigpond.com, 0418 423 313, with help from Barrie Taylor, David Wilkins, Bluey Austin, Kevin Mulligan, Dennis Nevins, Roger Lambert, Bill Hartley, behind-the-scenes assistance from Gary Townsend (the Tiger Tales Editor), Ted Harrison (the 5RAR Association Webmaster), ***supported by The RB Co, and powered by the Lambs Valley Wine Company, Hunter Valley, NSW.***