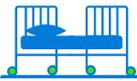


Half Circle



Number 162 - June 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: Alan Geernaert, Barrie Taylor. We send our best wishes to our mates who are not as well as they would like to be. Al's son Bill has sent the following message: "Hello, it's Bill Geernaert here Al's son. I'm just passing onto to you guys that dads not doing too well. He has been fighting cancer for the last year he's getting fairly weak these days but wanted me to pass on that he's saying hi and is checking in".

Vale Peter Commerford

At 12.15 PM on Sunday 3 May 2020, Peter Commerford died peacefully in Sydney with his wife Carolyn and daughter Bridie at his bedside.

Greatly respected and popular with his platoon, 8 Platoon C Company 5RAR, Peter was a National Service graduate from the Officer Training Unit (OTU) at Scheyville outside Sydney. 2nd Lieutenant Commerford arrived in Vietnam on 5 November 1969 and was initially placed with the 1st Australian Reinforcement Company at the Task Force base in Nui Dat before being posted to 5RAR a month later on 3 December. His arrival in 8 Platoon was described as "a breath of fresh air" by his platoon sergeant, Russell 'Kiwi' Hill, and when on operations Peter quickly established himself as a courageous leader in combat and was involved in many battles against Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army units until 5RAR completed its tour of duty in late February 1970. It was his 8 Platoon that was involved in the battalion's last major enemy bunker conflict on 11 February when they performed superbly under Pete's leadership.

After 5RAR departed for Australia, Peter remained in Vietnam to complete his 12 months' tour of duty, initially returning to 1 ARU and then transferring to serve with 7RAR from 11 July until 29 October 1970.

Peter will be remembered most fondly by his former comrades-in-arms.

Your duty is done Pete. Rest in peace old soldier.

On behalf of the 5th Battalion, our deepest sympathies and condolences are extended to Carolyn, Bridie and Steve.



2791171 2LT Peter Commerford

Ed's note: For those wishing to pay tribute to Peter, Carolyn may be contacted at:
carolyncommerford@hotmail.com

VALE – 2790202 PRIVATE COLIN ROY SUMMERFIELD – 14-08-1946 TO 15-05-2020

It is with regret that we advise of the passing of Colin Summerfield. Col died in Tamworth NSW following a long period of illness. Colin was laid to rest in Tamworth on a rainy 21st May 2020. Our group came from as far afield as Melbourne and Hervey Bay Qld. One of Col's closest friends, Phillip Greenhalgh has paid tribute to him on our behalf with the following message:

“Col Summerfield: (Summers, mate, brother, curmudgeon)

For numerous reasons I will not go into here, I missed a lot of pre departure training, I missed Canungra training (twice) and I missed the supposedly wonderful sailing trip on the HMAS Sydney over to Vietnam. I flew (definitely economy) to Ton San Nuit airport, Saigon and then flew up to the Dat by troop plane. Landed at the Dat, just on dusk to discover the rest of the company out on patrol, so was welcomed by the LOB officer with the news I was on piquet duty that night.

When I arrived in Vietnam, I was a startling svelte 60 kilos and I had no idea what I was in for.

When the rest of the company returned to base I found I was hoochied up with Summers.

Two fantastic guys took pity on this underdeveloped excuse of a soldier, arriving unprepared in country, they were Col and Hansie Muller.

When we went out on our (my) first operation we were loaded up with buku ration packs, spare belts for the machine gun, claymore mines and an assortment of other crap that ended up weighing almost as much as I did. So Col and Hans offloaded a lot of the weight from my back and absolutely helped me get through that first operation. With no previous jungle training I took a long time to acclimatize to the heat, the oppressive humidity and the jungle environment.

We three could not decide what was most oppressive about our surroundings, the heat, the humidity or our section leader.

The "Dairymaker" seemed to take inordinate pleasure in seeking out the supposed weak links in the section and toughening those links up with extra attention. I guess we all know the outcome of that managerial style.

Summers, being that couple of years older, far more educated than the normal grunt, had a unique way with words and a sincere disdain of "management", who were very quickly named in Summerfield style. We had Dog Dog, Yap Yap, and then The Winged Warrior (he's everywhere he's everywhere) I cannot remember if the Skipper ever accrued a nickname.

After one operation that scared the bejesus out of us Col and I decided we needed to become blood brothers, in order to have that extra reason to look out for each other.

I remember after each (seemingly unending) operation, returning to the Dat, most of the platoon unwound by consuming extremely copious amounts of beer at the boozier. Not our hooch- we had our own unique way of unwinding, rolling a toke and relaxing, laughing uproariously and cranking up the Akai reel to reel and listening to Led Zeppelin, the Animals and alike music. Next morning we would awake from a fantastic sleep, clear headed and chuckle at all the other troopies displaying massive hangovers. Sorry NCO's and Officers so just charge us now.

Most of the time in Vietnam has blurred with the passing of time, I didn't return to the Battalion upon RTA, I was posted to Puckapunyal for the last few months of my signed-up period.

My way of coping with the whole experience over there was to mentally block out all that happened, disassociating myself from everything and everyone after leaving the army. For me this worked well.

Many years later I was visited by Bluey Schafer and brought up to speed with what 9 Platoon had done in the way of getting together reunion wise. He also passed on the 9 Platoon member/contact list. From that list I rang Col one Christmas day to chat. It was a cathartic experience, almost forty years fell away and we realized that our bond really had not fractured a lot.

Twelve months or so later, on a road trip north, Marion and I went up to Tamworth for my first face to face meeting with Col in Calala. The experience was a little bit awkward at first, but within moments our old camaraderie returned unabated. We didn't talk much about Vietnam, just throwing the occasional name into the ring to test each other's memory of that person being discussed. We went out to dinner that night with Col and a lady nurse from Manilla, and Marion and I left Tamworth the next day thinking that Col was in an extremely good place. Unfortunately, that nirvana didn't last.

When Reggie Smith lost his final battle, I flew up to Tamworth staying with Col. Euston Swan picked us up and drove the three of us to Bingara for the service and memorial. In effect, we were transported back many years on that journey to Bingara, the conversation and topics flowed as if we were last together the week before.

The phone calls between us continued and as time passed, I could tell Col was deteriorating at a rapid pace. At one stage he was having major gum issues that prevented him eating life sustaining food. He was also at war with DVA to get proper support shoes, this period was called Cols' chompers and clompers issue. He seemed proud of the fact that his weight dropped to 45 kilos. I was pissed off about the tyranny of distance between us as I could hear that Col needed help, I could only verbalise my concern to him, but Col, being Col just shrugged off that concern, "I'll be right mate". Despite efforts it was impossible to get a response for help from the local RSL and there was not an effective Vietnam Veterans Association in Tamworth. He epitomized the legendary forgotten digger.

Cols' proudest words were about his son Evan and Evans' university studies towards a psychology degree. Col was extremely grateful for the assistance from Jack Lake in getting a bursary to help fund Evans' endeavour.

Col is finally pain free and I guess giving St Peter at the Pearly Gates a bloody hard time, I can hear him now, "what do you mean I can't bring my guns in with me", and "where are my sixty four black eyed virgins?"

Your battle is over brother, you have left us with fabulous memories, rest in peace mate."



The young Colin



C Coy representation at Colin's funeral – Phil Greenhalgh, Don Harrod, Colin's son Evan, Ben Oram, Bryan Schafer, Phil Winney and Tony Samuel

The following message is part of an ANZAC Day presentation for her school by Grace Roberts of Coonabarabran NSW:

“ANZAC Day is a time of year where we stop to think about the way we live and to commemorate the soldiers who fought for us in wars (and who are still fighting now). It is held on the 25th April. It is a day where we thank them, because if it wasn’t for them, we might not be living in peace. So we need to think the next time someone is hurt, just help them because the soldiers did so much for us, the least we can do is follow in their footsteps by helping each other.

My Poppy Ern fought in World War Two in Papua New Guinea and I know that a lot of us have relatives that have been to war, sadly, not everyone made it back, in fact, many people passed away. My Poppy Ern made it back from the war and every ANZAC Day is very special to our family. For many people ANZAC Day is a sad time, but just think, the next time you’re marching, that being kind can change the world and making someone smile is a better present than anything else”.

Ed’s note: **Grace Roberts is ten years old. We are in good hands. Thank you, Grace.**

A COURT MARTIAL IN MENDI (Part 2)

By Dave Wilkins

Pay-back killing was, in 1983, and still is, a tradition among the tribal warriors of Papua New Guinea, particularly in the highlands. It is a tradition of exacting revenge in the form of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. There have been instances where the chain reaction of pay-back killings has continued for many years, totally disregarding the more recently imposed judicial system of the white man. This was instanced earlier, in the 1970s, during a murder trial before a former Chief Justice of the National Supreme Court. Deciding that a view of the murder scene was necessary, the court left the security of the court house, and despite the presence of a police escort at the scene of the crime, members of the victim’s village descended upon the accused and executed him with their knives and axes.

There had also been occasions of immediate retribution following the running down of pedestrians by motor vehicles, but in Rambu Melo’s case, this did not happen. On that day in May 1983 on the muddy, pot-holed road near Paguge village, Australian Army Sergeant Siegfried Pinnow, the driver of the Toyota Landcruiser that struck Rambu, was fortunate another passenger, former PNG policeman Fabiani Waga was experienced in the more modern legal procedures. There was no instant attempt to avenge Rambu, and Sergeant Pinnow was allowed to depart, abused but physically unscathed. Of course, the fear of subsequent pay-back remained for months.

As detailed in Part 1, Sergeant Pinnow was to be tried by court martial for dangerous driving causing death.

On arriving in PNG, I turned my watch back a hundred years.

I was reminded of the brutality of local PNG justice on my first night in Mendi. At about 2.30 a.m. I was awoken by an explosion that sounded like a double-barrel shotgun blast. It was explained at breakfast that morning. Across the road from my accommodation was the Mendi prison. An alert had been received by the gaolers that

a serial escapist would attempt another break out during the night and so the constabulary was waiting for him as he climbed over the wall. As he hung from the wall and about to drop to the ground, a shotgun was fired behind his knee and blew half his leg off. He would never attempt another getaway.

Prior to the trial, I arranged to interview each of the witnesses at the scene of the accident which was about an hour's drive from Mendi. I arrived with my driver (a local native) at the accident site near Paguge village to find a hoard of Yamiyami and Paguge people waiting for me, all 'wantoks' (friends and relatives) of the deceased. Some were armed with bows and arrows, some with knives, some with stone axes. They were not happy.

From my earlier three years' infantry posting to the Pacific Islands Regiment in the 1960s, I was able to speak Pidgin, which assisted in the conversations. Now, as prosecutor, I initially didn't feel threatened by Rambu's line (people from Yamiyami and Paguge) but they were insistent on being kept informed of anything related to the trial. Now however, this mob really meant business and the three village leaders were vying for Rambu's position as 'line boss', each with a plethora of questions to ask, all of which could have been answered in 20 minutes. But that was not their way. Encircled by their fellow villagers, together with interested spectators, the three leaders sought maximum political mileage from the situation by prolonging the 'bung' (meeting) for nearly 2 hours. Of course, time was of little concern to people who are mainly subsistence farmers. It didn't take long for them to convert the discussion into a heated harangue interspersed with answers and explanations from myself. It seemed that their aggression had the dual aim of intimidating the other party (me), and at the same time displaying their leadership strength and forcefulness to their followers. It had become a political speech-fest for the three villagers vying to become the new chief.

Many months had passed since Rambu's death and it became apparent that the other main thought in the minds of the Yamiyami leaders, was financial compensation. As this became clearer to me and considerable time was spent answering their repetitive questions about this, I felt more secure about the prospect of personal harm. I felt less secure however, when asked the pointed question, "*Your skin is white like the sergeant's. Whose side are you on? The sergeant's or ours?*" They seemed unimpressed by my answer that, unlike lawyers in a compensation hearing, the prosecutor in a criminal trial represented the Crown and not the deceased's family and friends. They pressed closer. I then asked the highlanders to move away so I could continue with my work. They refused to move and demanded more answers. The semi-naked and fiercely armed crowd pressed even closer all around me. Things were becoming prickly and I noticed with foreboding that my driver had retreated a good 50 yards away with the vehicle. The mob understood better when I explained in Pidgin that the prosecutor's position could be equated to that of the police. I noticed an immediate reduction in their aggression and an increased deference when they thought I had some association with the police. But still they wouldn't move. I decided that bluff might work so I said, "*If you all don't move over to there (pointing) and let me do my work I will have you arrested by the Mendi police for obstructing justice.*" That did the trick and they withdrew (phew!), enabling me to get on with my interviews.

These experiences led me to warn the Officer Commanding of the Army unit in Mendi that Counsel for the defence, Army Reservist barrister Jim McIntyre, might

have trouble when he and the accused Sergeant visited the accident site. An escort of 5 police with shotguns was arranged, but as it turned out even that was insufficient to control the crowd. After viewing the site and hearing the accused's account, McIntyre realised that their presence had indeed created an unstable situation, and he was obliged to return to Mendi without speaking to any of the witnesses. He was forced to rely on later interviews and the transcript from the Coroner's hearing.

(to be continued)



A Mendi widow mourns her loss for 9 months painted with grey mud and adorned with a huge necklace of Job's Tears beads. She has a constant escort of female friends.



FOR THOSE THAT HAVE
NEVER SEEN A
CATFISH !!



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