

# Half Circle



Number 63 - March 2012

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

This informal publication is for the members of C Coy 5 RAR (2<sup>nd</sup> 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.

**VALE - 16378 Cpl Ian David COOPER - 1943-2012.** Ian (Coops) was a member of the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps, and was our C Company Medic both during our training, and for the first half of our Vietnam service. Coops was an excellent medic, and was well regarded by all. In recent times, he had been battling inoperable cancer, but his attitude could teach us all a lesson. He was brave until the end. Only ten days before his death on 22<sup>nd</sup> February, he telephoned your editor, and was his usual happy self. Ian was 68 years old. Farewell Coops, rest in peace old friend. Condolences to Margaret and Alison.

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**VALE - 2789635 Pte Richard PRATER - 1946-2012.** Richard (Dick) joined C Company as a reinforcement in June 1969. He was a typical good, solid digger - a National Service rifleman who undertook all tasks asked of him in the service of his country. Richard had been living in Yeppoon before becoming ill and being admitted to the Greenslopes Private Hospital, where he had been for some time. Richard was 65 years old. Rest in peace old digger - you have attended your final parade.

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## **FUNNY STORIES FROM VIETNAM #1**

When we (the boat people) arrived in Vietnam, the Advance Party including our CSM, WO2 Lake were already in Nui Dat. During the voyage we had our full marching order of gear with us, and other items stowed "below". After the introduction we were asked if there were any questions. I asked when will we get our trunks, I was advised by Jack, "Don't worry about that Pte Dix (as was and still is) you can go swimming in your shorts". That is one I will never forget and I hope Jack doesn't either. *Contributed by Greg "Hickory" Dick*

## **FROM THE MEMOIRS OF "THE REO" - FIRST AMBUSH**

My National Service experience I remember well in some parts and not so well in others. Strange how some things stick so well and yet not others - and the things I do remember were not always driven by some momentous event but often were very much more trivial in nature.

I always had problems recalling dates and operations and maybe that is because from my perspective it just wasn't really relevant to me as a digger - life in Vietnam was just an ongoing series of operations, scrub bashing, mountains, jungle, contacts and short spells in camp. But I get ahead of myself.

The first time I was outside the wire was while with the Australian Reinforcement Unit at Nui Dat. This was the place reinforcements were put on arrival in Vietnam before being allocated to a Battalion. One late afternoon we went out in Platoon strength to ambush overnight and we ended up on the edge of a banana plantation with maybe 50 yards of clear ground before the track/road we were ambushing. Don't ask me which road or where it was I haven't a clue. Just a minute or two before curfew lifted in the morning a small motorbike started up and sped down the road. Nobody fired at the transgressor given it was practically at curfew end. Later, the general consensus was that it was someone either getting an early start off to work or an enemy courier who thought he was past the ambush point and was safe to get on the motorbike.

We had gone through the usual stuff of reconnoitring the ambush point and also another area a little further down the road to mislead anyone who was watching as to exactly where we would be in ambush so maybe the enemy courier thing could have been true.

Now here is the silly thing. When we went into position on the edge of the banana plantation it was pretty well dusk but I noticed that there was a little track just the other side of the edge of the banana plantation. It would have been about 5 feet from our position and only a foot or so wide. At the time of going into position I did not see the track we were ambushing that was about 50 yards away and I thought it was this very small and very close track that we were ambushing. I couldn't believe it! I thought what the hell were we doing so close to the track? I didn't ask anyone as I didn't want to appear stupid for asking so I just kept quiet. That night I did not sleep a wink. All I could think of was the enemy coming down that track (I could almost touch it from my position) and prayed if the ambush was sprung it was done at the other end of the ambush and not anywhere near me.

Of course in the morning it all became clear to me - what with the motorbike starting up and all - and I then realised that the actual track we ambushed was 50 yards away. I did not tell anyone of course but I did feel sheepish afterwards.

How does this relate to Charlie Company? Well it was this very naïve and green digger that a couple of weeks later ended up being transferred to C Company 5RAR. Must be comforting for you to know the Battalion was being reinforced with the very finest. THE REO (Also known as Alan Riley - 8PI)

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**HERE IS A LETTER FROM Andy MacDougal,**  
written in to his parents in May 1969, when he  
arrived in Vietnam. Andy was posted from 1ARU  
to 5 RAR in July.

*Many thanks Andy, for sharing your thoughts. Ed.*

Nui Dat

May 1969

Dear Mum and Dad,

Well by now I hope you have received the post card I sent in Singapore. The flight from there to Saigon was very smooth, as were the first two legs.

Our first sight of Vietnam was as we expected – very flat expansive area, with a tremendous number of rivers and waterways. You wouldn't know there was a war on except for a few planes flying around and scattered bomb craters. However, Saigon airport soon changed that – it was one of the greatest shambles I have ever seen. There were wrecked planes and assorted junk lining the runway; American soldiers wandering about like zombies (with their six guns on their hips of course); a great variety of planes ranging from WWII fighters, Cessna's with rockets under their wings, and supersonic fighters making a terrific racket.

We arrived at the airport at 10.15 and we were all meant to be in Nui Dat by 2.00. We had lunch at the airport at 11.00. As soon as our lunchboxes were produced we were besieged by Vietnamese women wanting our apples! They are carzy about them.

We arrived in Nui Dat at 4.30 – couldn't see much as it is well camouflaged in a big rubber plantation. We live in tents that are heavily sandbagged all around. It is just the beginning of the wet season and it rains every night just after dark – but the temperature remains between 80 – 90 F – pretty warm and humid.

During this first week we act as duty platoon so we can get acclimatised. This includes digging holes, breaking rocks and mess duties. When our duty week has finished we do a two week training course to gradually phase us into operations. From there we move into battalions 5, 9 or 6 (this should be in about 4 weeks time).

Last Sunday (*whilst still in Sydney*) I had a call from Sax which was terrific. Marg and Bunt also rang – Dos was staying with them so I had a few words with her. I think I told you in my last letter that Alex wrote to me and also sent me a Parker biro for my 21<sup>st</sup> (I'm using it now). It was a wonderful surprise.

Well I think that's about all for now

Love to all

Andy

As he sat on the sofa, the husband looked longingly into his wife's eyes and said "When I die, I'm going to leave everything to you, love". She looked back at him and said "You do now, you lazy bugger".

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## DAVE'S DIARY:

Continued from the previous edition of Half Circle.

My diary entries are in *italics* whilst additional data from Battalion and Task Force logs, as well as explanatory or descriptive commentary, are in plain text:

31 Dec 1969

The 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of Operation Bondi saw 5RAR redeploy after the successful cordon and search of Binh Ba and Duc Trung. Bondi 2 was to be a recce in force and ambush operation in AO Rosslyn, the centre of which was close to the old village of Thua Tich about 25 clicks north-east of our Nui Dat base. It was a huge AO which a few weeks later was suddenly extended even further north-east into the Mao Tao Mountains where C and D Coys would then be redeployed.

*We departed Binh Ba and did a hot helicopter insertion into the area to the west of the Nui Mây Tào Mountains, just on the Long Khanh and Phuoc Tuy Provincial border. This northern border corridor was a traditional route used by enemy main forces between the Mao Taos and the Hat Dich Secret Zone.*

[The rapid change in intelligence info about enemy movements and the flexibility of our operational responses are shown by the alteration to our written orders. These orders dated 27 December 1969 had C Coy moving initially by APCs from the Binh Ba area to the east of Xa Binh Gia and then to patrol by shank's pony. A change in plan had us doing a hot helicopter assault into an LZ well to the north-east of the original concept.]

4 Jan 1970

*What appeared would be full of enemy has only provided one contact so far (8 PI) and the rest has been walking and searching (now 4 January 1970). Late this afternoon provided a most unnerving experience when a company of American soldiers from 199 LIB (Light Infantry Battalion) did a hot heli-assault into a clearing 500 metres to the west of our location. The US gunships swooped over us with rockets and mini-guns blazing, not aware of our presence in the trees below. Although the closest rounds landed about 100 metres from us, it was more good luck than good management. The noise above us was deafening during the firing (the Yanks always saturate an area with maximum firepower) and the spent cartridges and link showered over us like hail. I immediately radioed to Zero-Alpha (the Battalion CP) to warn the Yanks of our presence and of the need to take care with their firing and bombing.*

*I can just imagine, during my first main operation as OC, having company headquarters and a platoon shot up by the allies! Lovely! Anyhow, someone on higher headquarters will get a reef in the backside for allowing another unit to swan into our AO (Area of Operations).*

Interestingly, although I radioed this urgent message to zero-alpha (the battalion operational command post) I have been unable to find any mention of this mishap in the battalion log, which now forms part of the war diary. I note however that the Task Force log mentions that Commander 1 ATF (Brig S.P. Weir) visited and spoke with CO 199 LIB early 4 January at its "Blackhorse" base before that unit deployed to our area. It also shows that late afternoon 199 LIB made a request to 1ATF about its common boundary with us. This was refused but 5RAR command post was unable to make radio contact with 199 LIB. That may explain why we almost got brassed up- poor communication and control by Task Force.

(To be continued)

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**A BLAST FROM THE PAST!!**

Here is a photo of Lt Chuck Stamp, taken in Cyprus in 1965, as a Member of the Royal Canadian Guards.

*With thanks to Roger Lambert.*

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**A POST SCRIPT (following advice of the passing of Ian Cooper):**

Please pass on my condolences to Ian's wife Margaret and daughter Alison.

Hoss would have had wonderful words of praise to share with you all about Ian. Bonds of mateship run very deeply.

As Hoss is unable to share his feeling I send my love and blessings as a wife and mother to those who knew Ian as a husband, father and friend.

Thinking of you all.

Pauline Hosie.

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**ON THE MOVE:** David Mead has advised that he is now living in the UK (Oxford). For those who have his email, it is unchanged. For those who need it, please contact your editor .

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