

Half Circle



Number 75 - March 2013

(If this is hard to read, try increasing the picture size to 150%!!)

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.

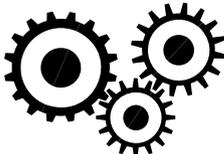


AT THE RAP:

Eddie Moon - ongoing treatment.

Andy MacDougal - shoulder and elbow surgery following a confrontation with one of his cattle.

Colin Summerfield - medical and dental.



"COGS IN THE WHEEL" - THE DIGGER AND HIS DIARY



FROM DENNIS "DIGGER" NEVINS:

I refer to the last Half Circle where the incidents of early February 1970 were mentioned. These were quite complex. The chopper did in fact land, as there was a clearing to the front of my gun. The chopper had a kangaroo on the door, but it was an American crew. I spoke with the doorman, who was an American Negro.

The last entry in my diary of 2nd February refers to the death of Pte Barry Thompson in our Nui Dat base. We were all very sad on hearing this; he was so close to going home, and for such an accident to occur is hard to believe. We all feel for his family.

Today (3rd Feb) a resupply came in at 1000 but before that our section did a standing patrol for an hour at one end of the clearing. At the same time, 8 and 9PLs moved in for resupply. 8PI then took over our position. We were provided with three days rations, water, mail, etc. Koppen, MacDougal, Vis and Ross all went out, and 7PL now has two sections. 3 Section was split – 4 to us, and 3 to Bowie. We have taken Marshall, George, Feenstra and Masowita. We left our harbour at 1330, with our section leading. We followed a track to 8PL. About 200 metres away we came across an old nog camp, but it was clear. We moved on, still following tracks, but the

boss then told us to get off and scrub bash. The country wasn't too bad but we were soon bugged, it must have been the sun. After 1000 metres we came across a clearing where the grass had been burnt, and a track was running through the centre of the clearing. From memory, this track was well defined, but there were no fresh footprints.

We then set up an ambush, and should be here for three days, but knowing the OC, we'll be moving again (sorry Dave!). We think that this operation will go until 15th Feb.

4th Feb – Nothing occurred last night. Normal picquets were carried out today, and we had a good rest. Jack Bradd wrote a lot of his stupid poems about me. 8PL found a cache of rice and fish, and have set an ambush on it. At 1700, Jack, John and George moved to the right hand killer group, while Bowie, Mick Browne and Vince Pica took their positions.

5th Feb – at about 0005 the platoon was woken up to gunfire. There were tracers above my face. I scrambled to the gun and put it into my shoulder, then I realised that there was no picquet (the sentries were changing but I wasn't aware). Something was not right, and there was another burst of gun and rifle fire. The tracers are on my left and coming from the rear of the platoon. How Bowie, Brownie and Pica weren't hit was just luck. Then there was just silence. Confusion. I knew that this was not a contact. A couple of seconds passed and Vince Feenstra yelled out "I've been hit!" A medic was called for, but Max Hedley (the PL medic) had been shot when changing picquet with Vince. ***I remember at this point that my greatest fear was being shot by our own, and yet here it was.*** Lance Reeves - our sig, came around to my gun with a torch, and we cut down two stretcher poles. Mick Browne cut down two more. I then went to assist Max and Vince. Both had numerous wounds. As I squatted down at the head of Max, the boss stated "I think we've got all the entry and exit wounds". Max, a medic to the end, even explained how to put the stretcher under him. I won't detail the full extent of the wounds here, but they were very serious. We all helped to get Max out to the LZ. Brownie and Masowita stayed with Max, and the rest of us returned for Vince – he was a heavy bugger. He also made a rude comment about my penpal in Australia – I hadn't even met her! We took Vince out a different way, but it was no easier. Bowie took over the last 15 feet. The dustoff chopper arrived, but refused to land. It is very difficult for pilots, with scrub being flattened everywhere by the rotor blades. I placed my chest over Vince's face so he didn't get ringbarked. The skipper raced out under the chopper's spotlight and waved him down. He finally landed. When Max was placed on board, the big American Negro said "We'll have him there in 20 minutes". I replied that we had one more casualty to load. The chopper lifted, and I returned to my gun position. As the noise of the chopper faded it seemed so quiet, and I asked myself if this had really happened to 7PL – it's just so hard to believe the unbelievable. We then carried out normal picquets till 0400. At 0500 Bowie and Brownie went around to the right hand killer group, while Jack, John and George moved back to our section.

At about 0900, D Coy were involved in a contact – I don't know the results. 9PL found a cache of rice, tea, coffee, sugar, condensed milk, plus a M1 and AK47 rounds

A 24 hour cease fire starts tonight, but we must defend ourselves! I don't know what the incident report said about the above events. I understand that the gunner could have been having a nightmare, and awoke from his dream just as the picquets were changing, and swung the gun around to engage. The rifleman saw where the gunner was shooting, and said that he thought the enemy had broken in, and he engaged to back up the gunner. I put it down to mental fatigue. Nobody has ever held any bitterness to my knowledge. Vince told me in recent years that he has no anger, and is fully forgiving. I know I feel the same. I have never seen Max since he was dusted off, but if we ever meet again, I'm going to tell him what a tough head he had.

Ed's notes:

- 1. Thanks Dennis, a brilliant effort in relating your story.***
- 2. Some of the very descriptive details of these incidents have been deleted by your editor. Digger's diaries explain every detail, but in the interests of the families and friends of the soldiers involved, editorial privilege has been exercised. Don***

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:

In my previous Dave's Diary I referred to an incident in the first week of February 1970 when two members of 7 Platoon, Privates Vince Feenstra and Max Hedley were severely wounded by friendly gunfire in a night ambush position. When preparing Dave's Diary I made an error when checking the Battalion and Task Force logs and said that the Dustoff chopper couldn't land, but the very detailed diary of Dennis Nevins corrects this- the chopper did in fact finally land to recover the two wounded soldiers on litters. Thanks for pointing that out Digger. I was interested to read that, like me, Dennis thought mental fatigue may have been the cause for this dreadful incident.

1 - 10 Feb 1970

The beginning of February saw C Company reach the area of particular interest- to the Task Force commander and also to Genghis who was keeping an eye on things above the deep J in his "Possum" (Bell Sioux) chopper. We had crossed from Duc Thanh District into Dat Do District (near the 3-way junction of those two and Xuyen Moc District) and were about 12 clicks due east of our Nui Dat "home" in the rubber trees of Ấp An Phú. That also placed us just 7 clicks slightly north of east (known as east-by-north) from the famous Long Tan battle site. As a consequence we slowed our pace considerably and began searching in earnest. This was fruitful and led to several discoveries and contacts over the next two weeks. After we took a resupply we split up and searched. Enemy "sign" was soon found (some not fresh) and ambushes were set so that:

- 7 Platoon ambushed three locations within an area of a click for periods of 4 nights, 2 nights and 3 nights (from 3-11 Feb);
- 8 Platoon ambushed 3 locations just 200 metres apart for 1 night, 3 nights and 4 nights (from 3-10 Feb); and
- 9 Platoon with CHQ ambushed 4 locations for 1 night, 3 nights, 3 nights and 2 nights (from 3-11 Feb). The last 3 positions were each a click apart, heading south each time.

8 Feb (diary entries covering the few days before)

Tet is showing a step-up in enemy activity after a very quiet couple of weeks.

The battalion's kills by body count have now reached 340. Top Tiger probably now wants to achieve 365 for the obvious reason, but things will have to improve in the next week to achieve this.

I personally found an interesting cache a couple of days ago (on 5 Feb) when on a recce patrol with Support Section. The old curiosity caused me to scrape at some ground which appeared "unnaturally natural", and sure enough it revealed a cache wrapped in plastic in a hole 4' x 2' x 3' deep. After checking for booby traps, we searched the hole's contents. Forty metres away we found another cache on a 4 foot high platform in very dense scrub. The two caches were about 100 metres from a demolished bunker system and contained 3 bags of about 100 lbs of rice, 7 tins of condensed milk, 10 lbs of sugar, 1½ lbs of tea, 1 lb of coffee, 7 lbs of tobacco, 5 dozen torch batteries, some fishing line, a small quantity of unknown medical crystals and tablets, 2 poncho shelters, 1 knife, some AK 47 and M1 rounds, books, documents, 14 reams of foolscap typing paper and a couple of dozen typewriter ribbons. Both caches were waterproofed by being completely covered with plastic and were in good condition.

The day before (4 Feb) in another area a click further north near the creek Suói Lò Ò Nhõ, 8 Pl had found, buried 12" underground, 10 x 4 gallon drums containing about 500 lbs of polished rice. The drums looked about two weeks old. A good haul. I kept 8 Platoon in ambush close to there for the next three nights whilst CHQ and 9 Platoon took up an ambush position 800 metres to the south-east on a track near the same stream during the same three nights. Meanwhile 7 Platoon occupied a three-night ambush about 1500 metres further east near a bend in the Sông Rai river. As it would eventuate over the next few days, and unbeknown to us at the time, 7 Platoon was just five hundred metres to the north-west of the

heavily defended bunker system in dense scrub that would become 8 Platoon's intense battle site on 11 February.

On 7 February 8 Platoon heard some ground fire at a passing Iroquois chopper which returned fire. The chopper had come from the east, circled over 7 Platoon and then over 8 Platoon. 7 Platoon had a recce patrol (c/s 31A) some distance out which then came under fire from the chopper before it flew off to the north east. Fortunately there were no casualties from this strange incident.

A little over an hour later we found some very good "sign" (ie, of enemy activity) so stayed there to ambush the area, CHQ remaining with 9 Platoon.

(To be continued)

Letter delivered to 7Plt digger after 43 years

Andy MacDougal opened a folder containing letters he received whilst in Vietnam. The folder had not been opened since 1970. Among the many wonderful letters from his family, there was one addressed to **Pte Brian Herrmann, 7PL, C Coy**. The letter was covered in red dirt, and smelt of wet season mould. Andy had only a mild recollection of Brian, and on checking the nominal roll, Brian was listed as being in Bn HQ. Andy decided to try and track him down and eventually found Brian in Deception Bay, just north of Brisbane.

It turned out that Brian was a member of the "original" 7PL who were basically wiped out by mines in July 1969. Brian's letter was sent out on a resupply, and was given to Andy. Back in Nui Dat a month or so later, Brian had been reassigned and the letter stayed in Andy's folder for the next 43 years.

Brian was delighted to get the letter - and a photograph of his then young nieces.

A FEW THOUGHTS:

1. She was only a whiskey maker, but he loved her still.
 2. Don't join dangerous cults. Practice safe sects.
 3. A clear conscience is usually a sign of a bad memory.
 4. Change is inevitable - except from vending machines.
-



In Sydney and want to hit the little white ball? Then head for the Georges River Golf Course, Henry Lawson Drive Georges Hall. Geoff Grimish and his team will make you most welcome. Geoff is a Vietnam vet (RAA), and is a great supporter of this newsletter. Phone (02) 9724 615.

IN THE NEXT EDITION OF HALF CIRCLE:

1. A tribute to one of C Company 5RAR 2nd tour of Vietnam. No clues - just have a look at next month's issue.

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod - donharrod@bigpond.com
(02) 6842 4913, 0418 423 313, with help from Andy MacDougal, Dennis "Digger" Nevins, Dave Wilkins and Barry Morgan.