

Half Circle



Number 147 - March 2019

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.

1201683 TREVOR HOWARD BURCHELL 19 September 1947 - 5 February 2019

PTE Trevor Burchell died peacefully in the early morning of 5 February, his wife and daughter were with him. He had been admitted to a palliative care facility in the last few weeks.

Trevor served on the Battalion's second tour of South Vietnam from 8 February until 16 July 1969. Trevor's position was as a rifleman in 8 Platoon for his time deployed. He apparently had contracted malaria and was medically returned to Australia.

The Funeral service for Trevor was held on Wednesday 13th February at Laidley Crematorium, Southern Street, Laidley, QLD.

We extend our sympathy to Trevor's family.



AT THE RAP: Peter Commerford, Barrie Taylor, Barry Morgan, Colin Summerfield. Colin has now discharged from hospital and has returned home. We send our best wishes to our mates who are not as well as they would like to be.

50 YEARS AGO: Here is another extract from the diaries of Dennis Nevins. Dennis was a member of Tracker PL when we arrived in Vietnam, transferring to 7PL in July 1969:

15th Feb 1969 - Arrived in country today . I didn't get much sleep last night as I was in anticipation about today's proceedings . This morning everyone was up early ,

after breakfast we assembled in Company lots in "C" hanger on HMAS Sydney . We then filed out down to the LCM's with our big packs, basic webbing on and carrying our duffle bag and weapons, in my case the M60 Machine Gun . The ramp down the side of the Aircraft Carrier was narrow and steep , I found it difficult as the Gun and bag being carried at the front of the body tended to over balance you forward , but once in the LCM it was OK . On the way to the landing site the water was splashing over the front of the craft getting us a bit wet. The LCM pulled right up onto the shore so we didn't get wet feet.

1RAR were waiting to get onto the craft as they had finished their tour and returning home . I could just imagine what they were saying with everything ahead of us . We were so keen , so their comments wouldn't have worried any of us.

Where we landed was part of a very large Navy supply shipping depot . There were truck's awaiting us , we loaded up and they drove us to Vung Tau airstrip which was not far away . From there we embarked onto Chinooks for the flight to Nui Dat , the Australian Task Force base . The Chook's landed at the Kangaroo Pad where our names were checked off , then we loaded onto truck's to travel to the 5RAR lines across the other side of Luscombe Airstrip.

My Platoon , Tracker Platoon took over 1RARs Tracker Platoons lines which was all World War 2 vintage tent's , the area was in pretty good shape . My section leader Corporal Jock Letford snatched a good tent so Peter Macdonald and I got into his tent I guess you could say we were very excited; I had a splitting headache but was more interested in our new home and what was going on.

After lunch Jock Letford received a warning order for our Section to go on a TAOR Patrol tomorrow afternoon . We were then issued Ammo , I collected 800 for the Gun and we then got settled into our tents and area.

There were three blokes from 1RAR continuing their tour with us, also two blokes from our advanced party Pete Mathie and Moose Barter greeted us, Moose has already been involved in one contact.

The weather is pretty hot , we received our O group for our TAOR Patrol tomorrow. George Hitchcock is going to be attached to us for this patrol.



MUG SHOTS – Bill Titley still has his, and the Hervey Bay (Qld) climate allows regular use.

FROM YOUR EDITOR: The following is the second of a two-part article by Dennis (Digger) Nevins, outlining his service in Namibia, Africa. Dennis was the only former 5RAR soldier to undertake service there. This is compelling reading. Dennis Nevins – a brilliant effort, and our sincere admiration for your efforts.



4 May 89.

Despite having no issues at our location there were some bullets fired around the area, there was one shot in the village 150 yards away then at 2300hrs five bullets were fired from down the road about 500 yards from us and the same thing again at 0600hrs this morning. I had no concerns and felt they were young cowboys or louts fooling about.

We sat around for the whole day waiting for more buildings to arrive but they failed to show up, a restful day for us but bloody boring. We spoke to the locals a lot and gave the kids some bread and biscuits. A section of writing is now missing but it must have been something referring to a march by locals as the last three lines says, apparently the march is to remember the blacks who were massacred in a refugee camp in Angola 4 years ago.

I'm now writing this at 2100hrs, I'm back at Engela as I had to make the decision to leave Ohangwena. There were a few instances late this afternoon, it came out of nowhere. Around 1645hrs a black came to me from the market 100 yards away and did his best to explain to me that people were being bashed by South African soldiers, communication with him was difficult but I could tell he wanted UN protection. I explained, I could not help him as it was a Police problem and he should contact them, he then returned to the others.

This section is missing so will do my best from memory, a crowd of blacks were gathered around a few South African Armoured Vehicles I could not tell what was happening and quite frankly wasn't alarmed about anything but there was a commotion going on between the blacks and the soldiers, there was no love between the local blacks and South African troops and I just assumed the South Africans were laying down the law. At 1745hrs the blacks moved in mass towards us, they were around 50 in number, there was only Sapper Ray Casten and myself as I had sent the rest of the blokes back to Engela to shower and return for night piquet.

I sensed an angered mob, Ray was inside the Donga so I fronted up to the mob, I had my M16 in hand but I wasn't sure what was about to confront me, I was confronted with a frightening sight, there was anger talking, a couple had blood and bark missing on their faces I could tell that they had been punched, every man had the most terrifying daggers you would want to see, roughly 12 to 18 inches of flattened corrugated iron with razor sharp points, the blade edges had been shaped down by file, the handles made from bush timber, I felt very much alone and threatened, I was in fear of my life by being hacked to death. I drew on all my mental strength, I knew that the first thing to do was to calm the mob down, at this stage they were 4 feet from me, it was uncomfortable, I then asked the leader who was the same bloke who spoke

to me earlier what had happened to the two injured men, he explained the SA soldiers had worked them over, I then had a close look at their faces and then asked did they need a medical kit as the donga's had them, they chose not to. This act of concern was a front to give me time to get my thoughts together and in a way it worked because now I had communication. I remember looking over to the SA soldiers who were on their mounted vehicles, they were looking over our way and laughing, I was sure they laughing at me thinking "What's this Aussie soldier going to do".

The anger talk continued, I was still in fear of my life, I still felt I could be hacked to death as I couldn't give UN protection, what was needed were Police. At Engela we had two Austrian Police who did nothing but they were good blokes, I told the leader I would call my HQ and get the Austrian Police on site. I grabbed the radio from the Donga and slipped it over my shoulders, I then told Ray to watch my back and started calling my HQ "Call Sign 1", there was no response, I spoke loudly so that the blacks could see I was trying to assist them, meanwhile the SA soldiers were still laughing, this made me angry as we are meant to be Allies.

I repeated my call to "Call Sign 1" many times, there was no reply. I told leader I had to go down to the other end of the donga, for two reasons. One, to get away from the threat and two, to get some breathing space. I looked into the donga and saw Ray still sitting on the floor, I told him that no one was answering me. At the other end of the donga I continued to radio "Call Sign 1", I remember at one stage thinking of my two girls and my pregnant wife Margie, there was that sinking feeling of not seeing them again. It took 10 minutes to get an answer from Headquarters, I told the operator that I had a threatening situation and that I needed UN Police and some Troops.

The blacks could see that I had got though, I told them Police would arrive soon and would make a report, I now had their confidence and felt the threat to my life had eased. The mob then moved away and I felt a sense of relief as I had calmed an angry mob on my own. The mob to my surprise moved back over to the Armoured Vehicles, I had no idea why, maybe it was to tell the SA Troops that I had radioed for Police, I observed from the Donga, I told Ray that I didn't like what was happening. Then it happened again there was movement amongst the blacks and they started to return to me, I sensed danger again, I had to make a quick decision about my Rifle, do I hold it or do I put it down, as we were a Peace Keeping mission I thought by not having it on me may calm the mob down as I wasn't a threat, I placed the weapon inside the donga door, I then gave Ray an order that if I was attacked he was to engage the blacks using both my rifle and his, I told him to withdraw to the highway and try and flag down a vehicle and get to Engela. Ray turned white, I couldn't blame him as he had never been in action, he asked about me and I told him I would have to face what was coming. I fronted the blacks again it was just as frightening as before. I explained to the mob just to wait and that UN Police were on their way, in reality I had no idea, I was trying to keep things under control.

The Austrian Police took forever to arrive but finally they pulled up in the white UN Jeep. I told the black leader and the others to follow me, I told the Austrians that the mob wished to make a report on their confrontation with the SA soldiers. I now had a break and I knew what I had done facing an armed mob of 50 people unarmed, was an act of courage. I stuck my head in the donga door and Ray said I deserved the Victoria Cross and he wasn't joking.

The Austrians spent some time taking notes, then to my surprise they took off, they didn't even come over to get my statement, maybe they wanted out of there. A little while later when I felt it was all over as the mob had dispersed a group of five men and one black woman came to me saying they had been attacked by SA soldiers, this

time I had my M16 as it was a small group. This next section is missing six lines then continues. I was now getting fed up with things and got on the radio saying I desperately needed UN Police again and needed some of our soldiers on site. "Call Sign 1" asked me to get details of the groups incident which I did, I also told HQ if they didn't get Police down here then I will have to return back to Engela with Ray Casten along with the soldiers who were being sent down.

The truck with a number of Diggers arrived, the first thing they asked was "What seems the problem" as the whole confrontation had been solved. I told the group of five men and one woman that I would report their attack by SA soldiers to my Commander. Ray and I then packed our clobber then jumped onto the truck with the soldiers of 8 Troop and returned to Engela camp. I reported the events to the "Boss" Lt Burchall, Ray told me again I deserved the Victoria Cross.



TRAVELLING ABOUT:

Bryan and Arleen Schafer recently travelled from Sydney to Melbourne for a family reunion.



Well, not quite travelling, but Ross and Liz Bourke are enjoying life as caravanners whilst their new home is being built in Harrington, NSW.

A bloke answers his door, to find two policemen standing there. "It looks like your wife has been hit by a bus", they tell him. He replies "I know, but she's got a great personality".

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