

# Half Circle



Number 65 - May 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.

## A WAY OF THINKING

Initially I had always envied those of you that did your training with the Battalion before leaving Australia for Vietnam. I couldn't help thinking that you would have forged deeper ties and relationships with each other this way. Everything was common to you all. The training in Australia, exercises, the travelling to Vietnam together on HMAS Sydney and the Vietnam experience starting at the same time.

For the reinforcement this can never happen. He turns up later in the tour and maybe does not even come home with 5RAR at the end of the tour because he hadn't been in country long enough. For the reinforcement there could not be a common beginning and in some cases, not even a common ending. Because of this the reinforcement can never be part of or share in that original camaraderie.

For the reinforcement this can sometimes make it all the harder to settle in when joining the Battalion. Sure there are those that would make him feel welcome but for the reinforcement he can be painfully aware that he has no shared experience, nor common ground with those he has just joined.

Commonsense dictates that the Battalion personnel had to change a lot over the 12 months. What with the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> intake of Nashos going home during the tour and then those that were killed or wounded needing to be replaced how could one ever think that the Battalion would basically be made up of the same personnel at the end of the tour that started the tour? But there would have been some regulars and some 12<sup>th</sup> intake of Nashos who would have seen the whole tour through with the Battalion. They would have trained together in Australia and served the whole tour with the Battalion in Vietnam and I think if they felt this original camaraderie then I think they maybe have something very special.

Interestingly, my first ANZAC Day march when back in Australia was not behind the 5RAR banner but with the Vietnam Veterans group. A lot of the fellows I did basic and corps training with also marched with me. They had ended up in different battalions but the common factor was that we started in the Army together, did our training together and from those early experiences there was a natural initial bonding. But it was inevitable it would weaken as we all went our separate ways in the Army.

For me though it was the Vietnam experience and not the Army experience that left the deepest impression on me. The camaraderie created from the early Army experiences faded quickly and I was

never in a position to experience the camaraderie that comes from sharing from beginning to end the preparation and full tour of duty of a Battalion, but there is something there still, I know this.

I believe it is the Battalion. We served with 5RAR in Vietnam. There are memories and experiences unique to us only because we were in the Battalion on that tour. So in a way It doesn't really matter when we joined its' ranks nor does it really matter how long we served in them - it is enough that we did and that we did it together - and there for me is the bond. It doesn't matter whether I haven't seen you for forty years it remains, I know this too.

THE REO (Alan Riley)

*Ed's note: this is the third of four articles written by Alan Riley, who joined C Coy as a reinforcement. Those of us who trained and travelled with the Battalion to Vietnam had no idea that a reinforcement could have had those mixed feelings, but I can assure all Reo's that they were very much a part of our team, and have been acknowledged as excellent soldiers.*

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Ross Bourke and some mates stopped at Muswellbrook (NSW) recently, and paused at the Vietnam Veterans' memorial. Ross is shown identifying the inscription honouring the late Ted Suttor.

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**FUNNY STORIES FROM VIETNAM:** we thought that we might have had a better response to the idea of re-counting some of the funnier times during our trip to Vietnam. This space will be available for your stories NEXT MONTH - please contribute! In the meantime, your editor can recall:

- One of our blokes (nameless of course) got hold of a two way radio. On our way to Vung Tau for a two day R&C break, we travelled through some road works, with traffic being monitored by our ever friendly MPs. This bloke caused utter chaos when he got onto their radio channel and did some traffic control of his own. We could never understand why the MPs didn't like us.

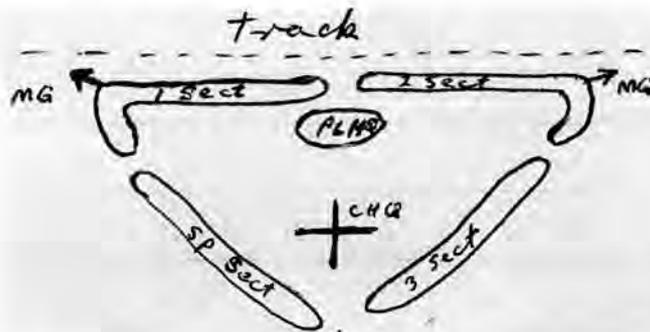
For Half Circle 5/2012 (#65):

**DAVE'S DIARY:**

My diary entries are in *italics* whilst explanatory or descriptive commentary, are in plain text:

There were opportunities between periods of high activity when things slowed down and gave me time to reflect on previous enemy encounters. On these occasions I would sometimes make a note of my thoughts. Earlier in our tour I had recorded some ideas on ambushing techniques:

Ambush



- (1) *Preferable to have radios at left & right flanks of killing group.*
- (2) *1 sect and Sp Sect change for relief. 2 & 3 sects change.*
- (3) *Cooking (unopened tins) at specific times. Sentries posted during cooking.*
- (4) *Maximum claymores.*
- (5) *Camouflage.*

In January 1970 after taking command of Charlie Company I jotted down some revised thinking on the subject.

A few new thoughts on ambushing.

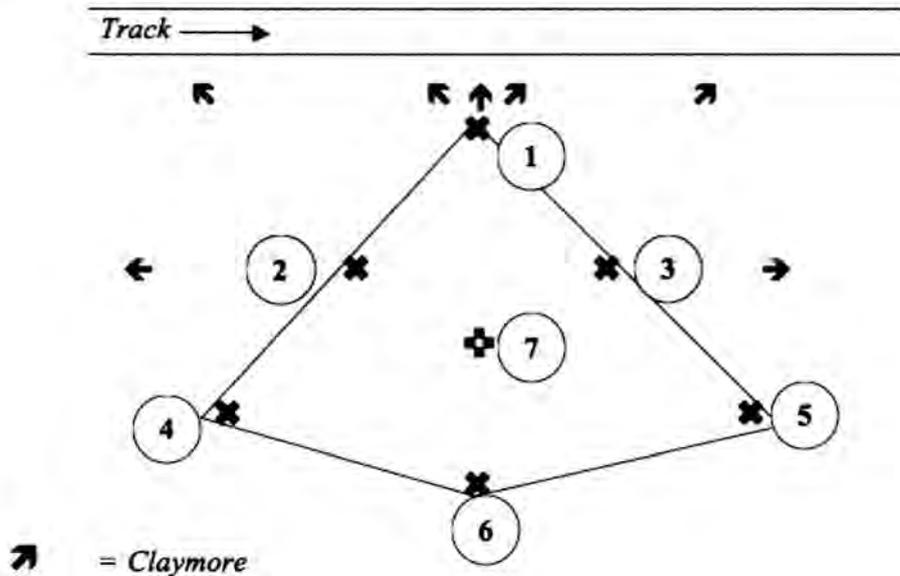
*A revision of our present practices is required because of the following factors:*

1. *Ambushes with a conventional wide-front killing group (50 metres is the maximum for a platoon in close jungle, but normally 40 metres) (see the ambush diagram above) do not always succeed in getting the enemy fully into the killing ground. One reason appears to be that it only takes one person to move or to cough, and the whole thing is blown. The great turnover of soldiers does not generally allow a platoon commander to have all his troops continually well-trained enough to prevent such movement & noise.*
2. *Many ambushes get one or two enemy only. The ambush cannot determine if the enemy is a scout group walking well ahead of the main body, or just a couple of individuals moving along the track.*
3. *The normally-taught method of using sentries for early warning incurs the problem of their own security. To be of any use, such a group would have to be at*

least 100 metres to each flank, and would therefore require radios; and there is a shortage of extra radios. As well, the enemy could out-flank and possibly overrun them.

*New Method:*

The first problem, above, I don't believe can be overcome with the time available for re-training. Accepting this fact, the ambush has to be set so that it is based on one main strongpoint, which is occupied by 4 capable and experienced soldiers. The ambush in fact becomes an inverted triangle with the apex being this strongpoint near the track.



**Pit 1** is the strongpoint consisting of 4 good soldiers (the killer group); machine gun and control of a minimum of 5 claymores:

- one to the immediate front;
- one in enfilade to the track to right;
- one in enfilade to the track to left;
- one in depth along track to right; and
- one in depth along track to left (25-30 metres away)

(Lieutenant Ian Hosie adapted this to use a bank of a dozen Claymores that could be detonated simultaneously. He obtained a specially-made "magic box" device for this.)

*This pit must be well-sited to provide good cover from fire and observation.*

**Pits 2 & 3** each consists of two men and in each pit there must be a grenadier, preferably with a grenade projector, and both W.P. (white phosphorus) and H.E. (high explosive) grenades. Both these pits are sited to be able to give flank protection and also to fire onto the track in depth using small arms and rifle grenades plus M79s. A claymore is in front of each.

**Pits 4 & 5** will rarely be able to fire into the killing ground but give flank and rear protection. If the MG at pit 1 is facing left, then the second MG will be sited in pit 5.

**Pit 6** is at 6 o'clock, providing rear protection.

**Pit 7** is Platoon HQ or CHQ, as the case may be.

Problems 2 and 3 above can be overcome by splitting the ambush into two separate ambushes about 150 metres apart, ambushing the same track of course. Both ambushes should be based upon the "inverted triangle" method.

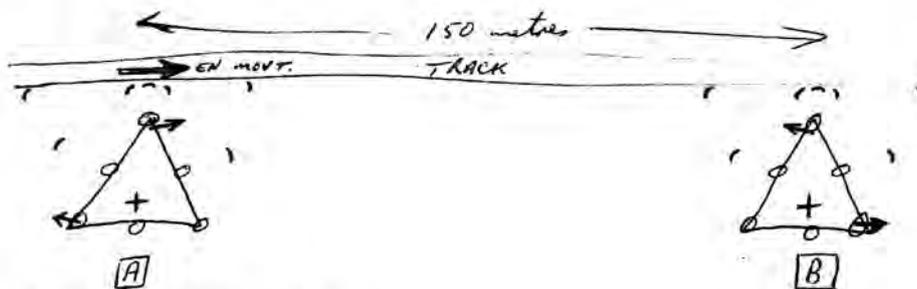
Each ambush thereby becomes the other's early warning, the first ambush position allowing the enemy to go through, and quietly warning the other ambush position on the radio.

The second ambush then springs the ambush. By this time, if there is a main body following behind, it should be in the area of the killing ground of the first ambush. This method has therefore increased the length of the killing ground. If the enemy is only a small group, it is initially hit by the second ambush, and any who withdraw along the track (as is a common reaction) will be hit by the still silent first ambush group.

In summary, the split ambush provides:

- a. early warning;
- b. an area ambush;
- c. a cut-off;
- d. a means to hit both enemy scouts and the main body, even if the main body is a hundred metres behind.

In addition, 150 metres is a sufficient distance between groups to allow helicopter gunships to fire between the two ambushes against any persons caught in the centre. Maximising multiple claymores, detonated instantaneously would also increase the chances of greater enemy casualties.



- Note:
1. Claymore symbol
  2. MG symbol
  3. En approach from left and Ambush [A] allows en to go thru.  
[A] informs [B] of an approach on radio.
  4. [B] springs ambush when en reach him.
  5. [A] fires after ambush is sprung only if he has en in front of him.

Diagram in my notebook.

**IN THE NEXT HALF CIRCLE – A summary of ANZAC Day in cities and towns throughout Australia, where C Company 5RAR was represented.**

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