

Half Circle



Number 59 - November 2011

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

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.

DAVE'S DIARY:

From the diary of David Wilkins, OC C Company Dec '69 to Mar '70

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:

Dec 1969

The first week in December 1969, during the last days of Operation "Kings Cross", saw C Company locating many more enemy bunker systems, some occupied, some not. We destroyed them before moving on.

On 10 December the company was extracted by chopper from grid reference YS275836 (northern part of the Hat Dich in Bien Hoa Province) and returned to LZ Kanga at Nui Dat, drained and weary after a long stint patrolling with prolonged periods in battle against an entrenched enemy.

We were then informed of the proposed agenda for the battalion's operations over the next 2 months. Charlie Company wasn't much different from the other rifle companies in the battalion when, from 1 November 1969 until our last day of operations on 16 February 1970, a period of a bit over 15 weeks, we only had two rest breaks of several days plus a three-day break for Christmas. C Company was also to conduct a short 3-day Company op immediately before Christmas after which its final operation was exceptionally long from 28 December 1969 to 16 February 1970, a period of 7 weeks without let-up.

After Operation "Kings Cross" Major Claude Ducker MC was packing up to return to Australia; he had joined the battalion to command C Company earlier in the year from a position in Saigon. Having arrived in Vietnam before 5 RAR, his 12-month tour of duty was now up and he was about to RTA to attend Staff College.

I was about to take over command of Charlie Company for the remainder of the tour until the battalion returned home in March.

17 December 1969

The diggers were getting tired and worn out after nearly 12 months of constant operations and fighting. The fatigue and frustration (not just for myself- my first op had been with A Company 1RAR on 4 February 1969- but more so for the diggers) were clearly apparent from my diary entry:

Great bloody Xmas break we are getting: spending the entire "break" in the bloody bush! The digs are even chiming: "(So many) killing days to Xmas."

To top it off we are about to embark from this great "rest" onto our last operation of the tour, and it is to be our LONGEST: 7 WEEKS! Man's a bloody robot!

To be continued

"NEW"

"NEW"

"NEW"

"NEW"

David Wilkins has been on the trail, and has been able to get a number of the C Company characters to "volunteer" to put pen to paper and write something in their own words. This article from Peter Commerford is the first. We all join in conveying to Pete our sincere best wishes for his health, and acknowledge Carolyn's magnificent support.



MY PAGE, MY WORDS

2791171 2LT PETER COMMERFORD

After being at 1 ARU I was then posted to (5 RAR) 8 Platoon. Ghengis said they had a few problems so when I arrived I promised not to change anything at that stage as long as they did their jobs. I also ensured I briefed them fully when going on operations. Soon after I arrived I called a Platoon meeting. Thommo, God bless him, took off to a Gun Pit nearby so I asked the sergeant to get him. I guess he was just trying the new Platoon Commander out. I also recall we received the call at short notice to respond and one of the diggers who won't be named had drunk far too much and had to be poured on to the trucks. Being a Platoon Commander was a great honour and privilege. We had lots of contacts, some minor, some heavy, when several were wounded, and the problem platoon performed bravely. I now want to thank them all.

When 5 RAR went home I returned to 1 ARU for several months. The job there was to prepare diggers for local conditions (e.g. take them "outside the wire"). Whilst there we went to Long Son Island for a few weeks to help our engineers who were building a pipeline into the village. Our job was to stop the VC blowing it up. Then all hell broke loose when some of our so called friendly US Airmen radioed us requesting approval to bomb some suspected VC positions on a hill. The first was spot on, the second a few hundred metres closer to us and the last in the middle of us. I think they must have turned their radios off. After lots of swearing by us they apologized. Then a worker told us a lady had been hit nearby so we got back on the radio to the pilot and they refused to help. He said she was only a gook! The diggers threatened to shoot him down. We made a stretcher up to carry her into the village.

After leaving the Army I joined DOCS and ended up staying in that field of work for 35 years. We were living in Kempsey for 4 years where my work was focused on the aboriginal population. Also during this time I kept playing rugby with the Kempsey Cannonballs, and surfing (the Cannonballers became the surf club in summer). We then returned to Sydney.

I continued bushwalking with mates, completing several out of the way treks in Tasmania.

Sadly these things are in the past as I have Huntington's chorea (Disease) and I am greatly limited these days.

I visited Vietnam with an ex 7 RAR Corporal and my sister 5 years ago. We played tourists. I was very pleased we went. We took a ferry to Vung Tau then to Nui Dat and the Long Tan memorial. We had a beer to Thommo in the Nui Dat area then went to Saigon. We also travelled further North to Hanoi.

I am still married and we have a daughter and a son who are both successful in their professions.

NEXT ISSUE - My Page, My Words - an article from Peter Knight.



The Australian War Memorial at Hyde Park Corner in London is worth seeing if you get there.

It shows all the names of all the towns in Australia from where servicemen and women who were KIA come from. In the larger print are the names of the various battles.

This photo also shows David Wilkins keeping an eye on what the Poms are up to.

AT THE RAP: Ian Cooper (ongoing oncology treatment), Colin Summerfield (medical). Best wishes to both of these diggers.



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 1615.

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod - 02 6842 4913, 0418 423 313, donharrod@bigpond.com with help from the Dave Wilkins and Peter Commerford.