

# Half Circle



Number 83 - November 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 (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.

## DAVE'S DIARY - GOING HOME:

The plan for 5RAR's Return To Australia was:

18 Feb 70 Advance party departs;

27 Feb 70- main body departs;

4 Mar 70- rear party departs.

The numbers involved were as shown in the table below:

	Offrs	WO's/Sgts	OR's	Total
Pre Adv Party	1	-	3	4
Adv Party	6	18	60	84
Main Body	22	23	484	529
Rear Party	2	7	5	14
	31	48	552	631

Of course many of our later-received reinforcements remained to complete their tour of 12 months and were allotted to other units, primarily 7RAR.

## 27 Feb

Our final day. C Coy ready to depart Nui Dat by 0700 hours, then by truck to Vung Tau (30 kms, 45 minutes). Dress was greens, black belts, slouch hats, medal ribbons, lanyards and personal weapons. We had 4 bandoliers of 7.62 mm and 4 bandoliers of 5.56 mm but not loaded into magazines. The bandoliers were left in the trucks at Vung Tau for re-issue to 7RAR who were arriving on HMAS Sydney (the "Vung Tau Ferry"). At about 0900 hours embarkation began by LCM to the HMAS Sydney moored in the harbour. The LCMs carried 90 soldiers and each soldier wore an

embarkation card clearly showing his embarkation number on the front of his slouch hat, tucked into the puggaree. Embarkation was in strict order of the numbers, as was disembarkation at the Aussie ports.



**C Company aboard the LCM on our way to HMAS Sydney in Vung Tau harbour. We each wore a large embarkation number in of our puggaree as a means of accounting for everyone.**

*... and then we were on our way, full steam ahead to the Great South Land.*

*We are due to stop at Fremantle for 4 hours on 5 March (will see Perth), and then onto Sydney on 10 March.*

*Roll on!*

*(To be continued)*

***Ed's note:*** *A soldier who sailed to and from Vietnam with the Main Body spent 391 days away from Australia. Those who travelled with the Advance Party and returned with the Rear Party would have been away for up to 410 days.*

**FROM HALF CIRCLE NUMBER 82**, Dave Wilkins asked if anyone remembered "Night Hawk", one of our final duties in Vietnam, before 7RAR relieved us. **Bluey Austin** has come up with a possible answer:

*I don't know what my TAOR patrol was called, could have been Night Hawk, but it was the last TAOR patrol for the battalion 3-4 days prior to us going home. It comprised my 8PL section, one from Support Company and a corporal from the 7 RAR Advance Party. We were driven to the rubber plantation just short of Binh Ba and, from there we moved through the rubber trees to a track we were supposed to ambush. I moved my men across the track through a small orchard and into the J.*

The corporal from 7RAR pointed out to me that we were supposed to ambush the track we had crossed; I told him he had 12 months to ambush it anytime he wanted, but my boys were going home in a few days. I think we only said a few words to one another after that, he wasn't happy, he was a corporal and I was only a lance corporal, but I reminded him that I was in charge of the patrol and he was an observer. We stayed there for 2 nights, with nothing seen or heard except during the days, when we had a local villager working in the orchard. We returned to the pick up point on the 3<sup>rd</sup> morning and returned to base. That was the very last patrol we sent out. Nothing was said about what we did, not even by the 7RAR corporal. I bumped into the ginger beer from Support Company at Soldiers Point Bowling Club 2 years ago, when he was bowling in a Tournament for the RSL. He remembered our last patrol together.

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#### **AT THE RAP:**

**Barrie Taylor** - medical

**Bob (Tex) Cunningham** - oncology treatment. Bob's wife, Janice, tells us that he is very ill.

**Bill Hartley** - knee reconstruction.

**Andy MacDougal** - still feeling the effects of an injury on his property, inflicted by a cow.

**Rowdy Hindmarsh** (C Coy Sgt 1<sup>st</sup> tour, CSM B Coy 2<sup>nd</sup> tour). Rowdy is currently in Grafton Hospital and is slowly recovering from serious illness.

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#### **TRAVELLING ABOUT:**

Susan and Jack Lake called in to see Col Summerfield at Tamworth in late September, on their way home from Qld.

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Wally Magalas was spotted in Sawtell (NSW) for the reunion of the 10<sup>th</sup> National Service intake. Wally visited Tex Cunningham on his way back to Melbourne, and also spent some time with Peter Commerford. Thanks Wal, and thanks to Janice Cunningham and Carolyn Commerford for their hospitality.

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Further to our earlier advice that Bob (Tex) Cunningham is very ill, here is a picture of Wally Magalas with Tex, where Wally presented him with a print of the Tiger. Thanks, Wally, and our very best wishes to Tex and Janice.

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**From Dennis Nevins:** Here is a picture of my youngest daughter Samantha (nicknamed Kookaburra), who marched out of Kapooka on 4<sup>th</sup> October. The parade was fantastic, and the crowd support exceptional. I've never heard such cheering and clapping. The platoon marched on to the tune of Waltzing Matilda - arms shoulder high - slouch hats - weapons, etc. It was enough to turn a bloke into a sook. The Kookaburra has now moved to Watsonia to commence signals training.

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#### **AL GEERNAERT - A BIT MORE OF HIS STORY.**

C Coy and 8PL particularly will remember Al - the Canadian bloke with the wild red moustache. Al came to us from 1RAR when we relieved them in Vietnam, and remained as a forward scout until his return to Australia in November 1969. Not wanting anything to go wrong with his trip home, Al showered and dressed in his polyesters the evening before he left. He looked good. Unfortunately, Al sniffed out some grog, and decided to give himself a farewell. He got through bucketfuls! More unfortunately, Al didn't quite make it back to his tent, stumbled, and spent the night in an open table drain. Al's condition, coupled with the dust and mud provided in the drain didn't do a lot for his clean, pressed polyesters. In fact, he looked like he was dressed in discarded cleaning rags. We tried to clean him up first thing next morning, but whatever we did failed to achieve its goal. We shook hands, wished him well, and hoped that the MPs at Sydney or Perth airports would be kind to him.

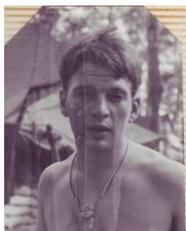
Al's story, however, is very different. He says that it was all CSM Jack Lake's fault. Al tells us that there were six diggers due to go home together, and the evening before, Jack lined them up, produced a 40 ounce bottle of whisky, and told them that it had better be finished by the time it got to the end of that line. Poor old Al was the last bloke, and he claims that the other five didn't do much of a job on the bottle, so it was up to him to complete the task. Accomplishing this feat, together with the beer that was consumed before and after, made Al a bit more than slightly unsteady on his feet. That's where the problem with the drain occurred. Whilst Al doesn't dispute that his appearance wasn't quite up to parade standard, he is of the opinion that, after 44 years, Jack could at least offer him an apology. Al also tells us that he now only drinks light strength beer.

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**Speaking of Jack Lake** - we have all been following the horrors of the current bushfires in NSW, which have centred on the Blue Mountains and Central Coast areas. We spoke with Jack very recently, and he assures us that all is well with Sue and him, apart from some damage to their property. He did however mention that when the fires were at their worst and evacuations were imminent, he checked with fire-fighters about

his status. As Jack had made sure that his property was as safe as possible, he was told that he could stay. However, later in the day, police called and told him to evacuate. Jack refused, saying that he had permission to stay. Jack was then grabbed and physically removed from his property by these police officers! It is hard to find humour in such serious circumstances, but your editor developed a mental picture of Jack - our CSM - being arrested and removed. Now he might understand how many of his poor innocent, misunderstood diggers felt under his management 44 years ago!

On a more serious note, we offer our sincere best wishes to those in the Blue Mountain who lost their homes, including four members of the Blue Mountains Vietnam Veterans Association. We are thinking of you, and trust that you will all soon be back on your feet.



**WHERE IS COLIN JONES?** Alex (Hippie)\_Koppen is keen to resume contact with Col Jones, a 7PL machine gunner in the latter half of our Vietnam tour. We remember Col as the big, strong Welshman. Any information would be most appreciated. Ed

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***A THOUGHT:*** *There are probably only three things that make a soldier function well - good leadership, the total trust in and from his mates, and receiving his mail.*

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**IN THE NEXT EDITION OF HALF CIRCLE:** Same as last month - not sure!

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