

# Half Circle



Number 46 - October 2010

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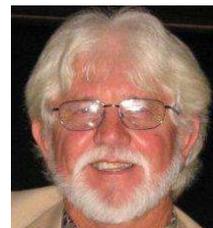
This informal publication is for the members of C Coy 5 RAR (2<sup>nd</sup> tour), South Vietnam, 1969/70, and for the families of those who are no longer with us. It is non-political, and is designed for us to have a laugh at ourselves, re-live our memories, and maintain camaraderie. Formal advice, when needed, should be sourced from Veterans' Organisations.

**A GREAT HONOUR:** As you may be aware, 5RAR, and particularly C Company are engaged in overseas service. I am pleased to advise that one of our own has been selected to have an operation named after him. Part of the overseas deployment will involve **OPERATION HERBERT**, named after Wayne Robert Herbert MID, of 7PL, whose efforts on the night of 4<sup>th</sup> July 1969 saved many lives of his comrades. Congratulations Herbie, we're all very proud of you. Ed's note: Please read the citation of the actions of Wayne Herbert on the Battalion website or the new "Year of the Tigers". Was a MID enough?? Another victim of the quota system??

**VALE - 2788133 Pte Maurice David (Maurie) Shiels.** Maurie passed away on 25<sup>th</sup> September, and his funeral was held at Taree NSW on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> September. **John Yabsley** attended Maurie's funeral, and advised that Geoff Pearson, Blue Schafer, Bluey McHugh, Peter and Gail Molloy, Yabs, and other 5RAR Tigers, including Eric Richardson and Max Carroll attended. Andy MacDougal delivered a very moving and sincere Eulogy. David Mead sent a message that he was in France, and had a "quiet spot" at which he would remember Maurie. Those who were with C Coy on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1969 will remember the horrific mine incident that took three of our finest soldiers and left seventeen wounded. Maurie was a gunner, and physically survived the incident. What happened psychologically was privy to Maurie, and he carried those wounds with him. Our sincere condolences to Jennifer. Please also note the great efforts of Geoff Pearson in notifying all of Maurie's mates, and the work he did behind the scenes.



Shots of Maurie in  
1969 and 2010



**Below is the Eulogy, delivered by Andy MacDougal, at Maurie's funeral:**

Maurice David Shiels "MOZZA"

## 7Platoon C Company 5 RAR

6<sup>th</sup> December 1946 - 25 September 2010

Dear Jennifer, Shane and Guy, members of Maurie's family, and his many friends.

What a sad day for us all. What an opportunity for all of us to share happy memories, and events of long ago that shaped the character of your husband, father, and friend.

Maurie entered the Army with the 10<sup>th</sup> intake of National Servicemen in September 1967. What a time the 1960's were - the Beatles were in full swing, hippies were high, and Vietnam was in the papers every day. To have a marble pulled out of a barrel with your birth date on it meant you would get "called up" into the Army, and potentially, to go to war for your country. December 6 came out of the barrel and into the Army Maurie went.

It was a rude awakening for some, and a boys own adventure for others. Maurie went to Singleton to do his Basic Training. He was thrown together with a group of total strangers, not knowing what was going to happen or what to do next. A short back and sides haircut, a set of jungle greens, boots and a rifle were issued on the first day. No privacy in the barracks, even less hot water. Getting yelled at, tentative conversations with your fellow recruits.

Recruit Training finished after 13 weeks. Everyone was fit, could march, could sort of shoot, sort of map read. Now everyone talked all the time (except on parade). At the March out Parade, Mums and Dads, brothers, sisters and girlfriends marvelled at the transformation of their young men. They would never be the same again.

Then for Corps training selection. Were told that if you didn't want to go to Vietnam, don't volunteer for infantry. But there were more volunteers for infantry than there were places. Only the best got the nod. Maurie put up his hand - as all his old mates here today did.

But rather than stay at the School of Infantry at Singleton Maurie was posted directly to 5RAR at Holsworthy. It was a lot harder than Recruit Training ..... they thought they were fit, but discovered they could go a lot further and a lot faster for longer than they could ever have imagined. They got to fire all sorts of new weapons, learnt how not to get lost with map and compass, how to walk quietly, how to gobble down food quickly, and, they got to know a wonderful new bunch of soldiers who came from all over Australia.

By this time, individual differences between soldiers brought about by different upbringings, family circumstances and education are almost completely blurred out. National servicemen and regulars together were melted down and reconstructed into a great Battalion. They were now all trained soldiers. All keen as mustard and ready to fight. But whilst the common mould was there, in the true spirit of the Australian digger, individualism, own unique character, a great sense of humour and an innate larrikinisms were all retained and indeed enhanced.

It was here that Maurie discovered his potential as a machine gunner. The M60 machine gun is not an easy weapon to shoot accurately. As Terry Bates recounts: "Maurie astounded all with his expertise his shooting 3 and 5 round bursts hitting the target all

the time. He had far more hits than anyone else. Maurie had that trademark grin on his face, until the soldier on the mound next to him realised he was also firing at Maurie's target!" So Maurie was destined to become a machine gunner.

After gruelling weeks in Queensland doing jungle training, Maurie and the rest of his mates boarded the HMAS Sydney for the trip to South Vietnam. This is what they had been training for.

In the following months, 7Plt worked and developed as a unit in battle. In an infantry platoon, you get to know the men in your own section and platoon really, really well. Battle enhances this close relationship - it is born out of total dependency and total trust. The sense of comradeship and mateship reaches new levels, and it never ever leaves you.

On a pitch black night of July 4 1969, 7pl hit mines. Very soon there were three men dead and 17 wounded - most with serious and grotesque wounds. This wonderful band of brothers was totally decimated. There are a number of survivors from that night here today. And Maurie was one of them.

I first met Maurie a few days later. The platoon had to be reformed - and reinforcements were rushed in. Maurie was then 22 years old. I was 20. We really didn't know a lot about life as we all understand it here today - we were just too young. But Maurie already knew more about life, about death, about fear and about utter despair than most of us would experience in a lifetime.

As a reinforcement coming into 7PL, I felt like a primary school kid at his first day at school. What do I do now? What do I say? Where do I go? Maurie gave me a strange look as if he wasn't quite sure how to treat me. Within a few months, I too knew exactly how he felt. It's as though you have been a soldier for 100 years, and a new green bright eyed reinforcement comes along to replace departed comrades. How could they possibly do that? It would have been very easy for him to be indifferent to me after all that had gone on.

But not Maurie .... he said to me: "what do you want to do?" I had no idea what to say, so I said: "what do you do?" I'm a machine gunner said Maurie. So I said: "that's what I want to be".

So this wonderful soldier became my mentor and my great friend. He was back in Australia a month later having completed his National Service. Cast into an indifferent and empty society.

In 1977 I was given the job of managing the Wormald International operations in Newcastle. On my first day, I was looking through the list of staff, and saw the name Maurie Shiels. I thought ... it couldn't be! At precisely that time, Maurie stuck his head around the corner of my office and said ... Andy, it really is you!! The years melted away. We hugged each other and went straight to the pub where he introduced me to all the boys. He was such an inclusive friend. I saw Maurie almost every day for the next 4 years. And how good was that.

Like many, Maurie preferred to get on with his own life - to build some sort of normality out of the chaos of Vietnam. In 2009 he attended a reunion of 7Plt members in Perth. A wonderful occasion, where these men reformed as a group for the first time since 1969.

The Platoon commander David Mead came out from Italy. It was like a coming out for Maurie. He had turned a big corner. I was to meet Maurie again at our 5RAR reunion in Tweed Heads earlier this year.

A month ago Terry Bates and Wayne Herbert visited Maurie here in Tweed heads. He was asleep when they came into his room. But when Terry said in a sharp voice "are you asleep on piquet again Private Shields?" Maurie was awake in a flash, and immediately grinned from ear to ear!

Just a few weeks ago Geoff Pearson Blue Schafer and I visited Maurie. What a privilege it was for us to share a few moments with him, and how generous of Jennifer and the family to allow us such precious time.

To Shane and Guy, your Dad was a wonderful soldier, and comments from his many mates give testimony to this. He was always the gentleman, you could always rely totally on Maurie, he was unassuming, he brought people together; he always had a ready impish smile.

To Jennifer, the look on Maurie's face when you walked into the room last week said it all - he just radiated happiness and love.

Dave Mead sent me an email last night, and I quote "I will be thinking of you all tomorrow. I will visit an old restored monastery just near here which is perched on the lake and has a beautifully restored chapel - there I will spend some quiet time and light a candle for our man"

For all of us in this room and for all his mates from long ago, Maurie's candle will never go out.

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

Claude Ducker has just undergone major spinal surgery - 6.5 hours on the table, and some problems during his recovery. Claude's wife Judith advised Jack Lake that he is now 2 inches taller and can now stand up straight for the first time in years. Ed's note: Claude has asked me to thank all those C Coy Tigers who have offered their good wishes. Don

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**From Dave Wilkins:** Here is a photo of Lt Ian Hosie and 2Lt Roger Lambert, outside the C Coy Q Store, sometime late 1969\_

**AN OLDIE BUT A GOODIE:** a young bloke joined the Army. On Monday they issued him with a toothbrush. On Tuesday they pulled seven of his teeth out. On Wednesday they issued him with a comb. On Thursday they cut all his hair off. On Friday they issued him with a jock strap. He has been AWOL now for the past 26 years.

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David Wilkins writes: My Jungle Shadow

One of the highlights of researching and compiling the recent 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of "The Year of the Tigers" was to meet up with some former comrades-in-arms, many of whom I hadn't seen since we returned from active service and marched through Sydney on 10 March 1970. One such meeting occurred in Wyoming near Gosford, NSW, where I visited my former jungle shadow from 1969-70, Don Frohmuller, and his wife Caroline. Almost everywhere I went during operations with C Company in Vietnam, Don was either with me or nearby. He really was my jungle shadow. So having spent hundreds of hours together in close company while in the Vietnam scrub it was great to catch up after all these years. I enclose a photo from that very pleasant reunion.

During my visit to Don and Caroline I obtained a wealth of photographs that have contributed to C Company's coverage in the new book, so a lot of you Half Circle readers can thank Don for having your ugly mugs included in the rogues' gallery.



Dave Wilkins with Don Frohmuller

A mate of mine lives in a very high-risk crime area. He thought his house was secure, so he splashed out and bought a new HD, 3D, super hifi surround-sound TV - with all the bells and whistles. One night he was sitting there watching a crime show, and nodded off to sleep. When he woke up, his watch, wallet and the TV were missing.

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**A NEW TASK FOR US ALL:** Half Circle is produced each month in order that we can all keep in touch. Some blokes contribute, others do not, but we all know that it is our method of communicating with each other. **HERE IS A CHALLENGE:** Blue Schafer has come up with the concept that we should all find photos of ourselves - one when in Vietnam, and one recently taken. At the 2010 5RAR reunion, some sub-units had boards of similar photos - C Company **MUST** now do the same. Please **DO NOT SEND** photos at this time - wait until they are called for. Your photos could look like these:



Colin Summerfield then and now - still has that smile!!



Geoff Ford then and now - slightly rounder!!



Jack Lake then and now - no change!!



Barry Morgan then - followed by a picture as a Lt Col, just before retirement



**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.

**9PL Reunion 2010 - The Philippines, 17th to 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2010.** Blue Schafer reports: Jock Phillips has been coming to Australia for the last 12 years to attend 9 Platoon reunions, and after numerous talks he finally convinced us that he could look after us all if we went to the Philippines and he and his wife Jessie did not let us down. 9 Platoon has had a lot of great reunions with family and friends over the years but the trip to Jock's place has outshone the lot of them.

All up 26 people attended the reunion, arriving over two days. On the Monday night we had a dinner/buffet at the Waterfront Insular Century Hotel Davao City where we were all staying. Jessie outdid herself with the presentation and setup of the room with 9 Platoon placemats and banner. Everyone had a great evening telling white lies and the food was of a very high quality.

Day two saw everyone on a ferry for a trip to the Pearl Farm Hotel and Resort on Samal Island Garden City. This was a great couple of days with 2 hour happy hours, swimming, laying around doing nothing but enjoying the beautiful scenery. The dinners on both nights while on the island were great; they have some excellent cooks in the Philippines. The only problem encountered was when I decided to fall down some slippery steps and

damage my wrist which put a bit of a damper on things for a while. (I only had 4 drinks prior to falling, honestly)

Day four saw us all return to the mainland and the women were taken on a shopping run which they all enjoyed.

Day five everyone was taken on a trip up to Mount Apu, along the way we stopped at a zoo and were shown the largest eagle in the Philippines, just a small bit bigger than a wedge tail eagle, but a great looking bird. Some of the gang had a photo with a large python wrapped around their necks. Spooky don't like snakes.

We continued on and had lunch at the top of Mount Apu and then taken on a tour of the area and were shown some beautiful flowers and garden layouts, showing how they do their planting and growing systems.

After this the boys separated from the girls who went shopping again and Jock took control of the boys and he then took us to the Red Knight Serviced apartments where he used to live and lo and behold it had a great little bar where we enjoyed a few quiet Sam Miguel's. After a couple of hours of talking we decided to go back to the hotel but got waylaid at another bar called HARGARS who had cold beer on tap and also was showing the Panthers and Rabbits game, so naturally we had to stay until the game finished. Another great time was had by all, Bourkey even found a bloke in the bar from 5 RARs first tour.

The next day we all loaded up in the vehicles again to go to Jocks Place on Samal Island, which by the way he calls the farm. After arriving on the island we drove for 45 minutes on roads and tracks that made Holsworthy range look like the Hume highway. The young driver who drove our vehicle as we bounced along the track said this place we are going to is paradise and when we arrived we found it to be true. All of a sudden we came to a concrete drive which we turned into and there was Jock and Jessie farm, we all think it is a resort as he accommodated all of us plus his staff so it turned out to be a big farm. We all had a beautiful two days swimming, eating and having a grand time around a well laid out garden and swimming pool. Anyway all good things must come to an end and everyone returned to Davao City for the last night in country.

On Monday 50% of us left to fly home or spend a few days in Singapore, while the rest stayed for the rest of the week at the farm.

This reunion has been excellent and will be hard to top. Rumor has it that the next reunion could be in Perth on Anzac day 2012 or maybe Cunnamulla, who knows?

Attendance: Fred & Wendy Dwyer, Ross and Liz Bourke, Phil & Marion Greenhalgh, Eric & Pam Hamlin, Eddie & Wanda Moon, Ben & Pat Oram, Jock & Jessie Phillips, Max & Lorraine Postle, Blue & Arleen Schafer, Owen & Lisa Schmidt, Geoff & Liz Storm, Euston & Sharon Swan, Phil & Julie Winney.



**Pictured:** Ron (Fred) Dwyer, Ross Bourke, Phil Greenhalgh, Owen Schmidt, Geoff Storm, Eric Hamlin, Euston Swan, Max Postle, Ben Oram, Bryan Schafer, Eddie Moon, Jock Phillips, Phil Winney.

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**TUNED IN TO THE 5RAR WEBSITE LATELY?** [www.5rar.asn.au](http://www.5rar.asn.au) It's worth a look.

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([donharrod@bigpond.com](mailto:donharrod@bigpond.com)), with help from Ian Leis, David Wilkins, Bryan (Blue) Schafer, Jack Lake,  
John Yabsley, Andy MacDougal, and more crook jokes..