

# Half Circle



Number 106 - October 2015

**(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.

**CORRECTION:** In Half Circle number 105 – September 2015, I reported the sad passing of Major Tony Perriman, Ops Officer of 5RAR in 1969/70. I incorrectly listed Tony as being in 6RAR. My apologies. Don



## **AT THE RAP:**

Barrie Taylor – ongoing oncology treatment

Blue Schafer – recovering from a stroke – all going very well

Vince Feenstra's wife – medical



## **TRAVELLING ABOUT:**

John and Hazel Hellyer – travelling on the north coast of NSW, and about to join 9 First Tour mates for a trip back to Vietnam. More details to follow.

Tony Samuel – heading for Ballina via Tamworth from his home in the Lower Blue Mountains, NSW.

Ian and Glenys Leis – now back in Narangba (Qld) after their around Australia trip. Glenys and Ian would like to thank all their old mates for their hospitality along the way!



**FROM JACK LAKE:** This is the second part of a speech by Dr Tien Nguyen (see Half Circle number 105), outlining what happened to Vietnamese troops after the Vietnam War

“During April 1975, we spent almost all the time in foxholes dug into the ground, as enemy artillery continually rained on us. During daytime, because of the noise around, we could not hear much. But in the quiet of the night, in the foxholes, if we pressed our ears to the ground, we could hear the faint rumbling of enemy T54 tanks in the vicinity. It scared the hell out of me and my fellow Rangers, because that meant those tanks could overrun our position any time while we were almost defenceless! But we tried to hold on and waited in vain for orders from our superiors in the 3rd Military Zone Headquarter, which unfortunately never came!

Under huge enemy pressure, on the night of 28 April 1975 our unit decided to flee towards Saigon. In the dark of the night, we were continuously chased and attacked by enemy forces, and finally I was captured by the enemy. Feeling humiliated, angry and despondent, tears streamed down my face, I cried for myself, now a prisoner of war facing a very uncertain future. When would I ever see my family again?

We were temporarily detained in Cha Ray secret zone, and it was there on 30 April 1975 that I learned of the complete collapse of South Vietnam. Again, tears rolled down my cheeks, this time I cried for South Vietnam, my beloved country, now unjustly lost to the communists.

I was later transferred to a concentration camp in Long Khanh province, where I spent 3 years doing hard labour in starving and sub-human conditions as part of what the communists called the “re-education” process. It was there that I learned what "brain-washing" is about. It is chillingly simple: by forcing you to do hard labour in starving conditions, the captors aim to reduce you to animal level, to destroy your wills and eliminate any resistance. After a while, all you could think of would be food or a few minutes of rest, and all your previous beliefs, your ideology, your conviction would become meaningless!

But they did not really succeed, because in most cases, prisoners like myself just laid low, kept our heads down, and waited for the day when we could get out of the camps.

After 3 years in concentration camp, I was released in 1978 and worked in a provincial hospital 30km from Saigon, where I was made in charge of a tuberculosis clinic. My boss was an illiterate man, who was rewarded with the title of doctor because of his long service in the Viet Cong forces as a nurse. He held the title of Doctor Director, but attended year 7 classes at night to improve his literacy. With both his superiority complex as a victor and inferior complex as an illiterate, he did his best to make life miserable for us, qualified doctors from the South!

After a year working in that discriminatory environment, realising that I could not even help patients in such a system, I left the job and went into hiding

because they could have arrested me anytime for “non-compliance with government’s orders”. And from then on all I did was trying to find ways to escape.

In only a few years since they took over the South, by their cruelty and ignorance, the communists had managed to turn a prosperous thriving society into an impoverished and suffocating environment, totally controlled by police. The whole country was under a cloud of fear and repression; the people became suspicious and scared. More than ever, the South Vietnamese people understood the true meaning of freedom, and yearned for it. For many including myself, there was only one choice, and that was to leave. And there started the waves of boat people - more than a million people trying to flee Vietnam using any means available, and at any cost. It was estimated by the UNHCR that close to half a million died unknown at sea. In Vietnam's 4000 year history, never did an exodus of that scale occur.

I tried to flee several times without success until 1980 when, with Ai Minh my fiancée – now my wife – I escaped in a tiny boat, braving rough sea and several attacks by Thai fishermen-turned-pirates during our traumatising 10 day journey and finally reached Malaysian shores. There we were interviewed by delegations from different countries. And luckily, we were accepted for resettlement in Australia.

I sat for an entry exam and was accepted to join 3rd year medicine in the UNSW Medical School, and in early 1984, I graduated and have been practising as a GP ever since. My wife who taught music in the Saigon Conservatoire also went to the Sydney Conservatorium. Since her graduation, she has worked as a music teacher. We have 3 beautiful daughters who were born, raised and educated here. So, I am a very, very lucky man, indeed.

I know that the Australian Vietnam Veterans were treated badly upon returning to Australia. As a result, many had shattered egos and suffered from mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety disorder and post traumatic stress disorder. Some even committed suicides. Quite a few sought refuge in alcohol and even drugs.

I ask you to spare a minute to think of your comrades-in-arms, the ARVN veterans, think of their bitterness, anger and frustration for losing the war, not due to our faults but due to the betrayal of our most important ally, the United States of America. Years of incarceration and humiliation following the defeat left deep and unhealable scars in our souls. A good number of ex-ARVN members including many invalids, called "the forgotten people", remained in Vietnam without any support, living in abject poverty and continued to be discriminated by the communist regime.

It took you guys 15 years to be officially recognised and honoured in the Sydney Welcome Home Parade in 1987, which allowed you to be proud of your services to the country. For us ARVN veterans, at present we do not even have a home to go to, let alone a welcome parade!

On this very special day, I would like to make one particular point. The Australian soldiers were sent to VN in the 60's and 70's as part of the international allies to carry out a noble mission, which was to help protect South Vietnam's young democracy and stop the spread of communism in South East Asia. And that is also the main duty of the Armed Forces of the Republic of VN.

Sadly, 40 years after the war ended, today VN is still a country under communist dictatorship, where there is no freedom, no democracy and no human rights. Thousands of religious leaders, writers, journalists, students... who dared to raise their voices to demand freedom and fairness have been put in prison. The ARVN's mission as well as yours - our common mission, has been left unfinished. We freedom loving Vietnamese living in Australia have been doing whatever we can, using peaceful means to contribute to the ongoing struggle to bring about freedom and democracy to Vietnam. We do hope that the Australian Vietnam Veterans will continue to stand by our side and support our campaign until the day when Vietnam is free from communism. I firmly believe that day will come soon, so we can have our own Welcome Home Parade. And surely we will invite you to Saigon to march with us on that glorious day.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the Vietnam Veterans who are here today, and in particular I'd like to pay tribute to the 521 soldiers who lost their lives in the Vietnam War, including 26 in the Coral – Balmoral battle. I would also like to thank the diggers' families, who went through tremendous anguish while their loved ones were in Vietnam. The South Vietnamese people are forever grateful for all those sacrifices".

---

### **BRIGADIER GEORGE MANSFORD, AM (Retd)**

Many of us have heard the name George Mansford, but who is he? Your editor has tracked him down and asked him exactly that. Here is George's story:

George enlisted in 1951. He served forty years; most of that time in The Royal Australian Regiment, (RAR). His military service included Korea, Japan, Malaya, Malaysia, Vietnam, New Guinea and Singapore.

George tested the waters in a number of ranks, some twice, before he was commissioned in 1964. He raised and commanded the Army's Battle School at Tully. His final appointment was as Commander of 11th Infantry Brigade. He was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 1976 for service during Cyclones '**Althea**' and '**Tracey**', the Brisbane Floods of 1974 and commanding the Locust Force in Central Queensland.

In retirement George has actively pursued his interests within the community and further afield.

Although not a member of Rotary, he was awarded the prestigious '**Paul Harris Medal for Service to Youth**' in 1989. Other interests included:  
Member of the World Heritage Board 1996 - 2001

Honorary Colonel, 51st Battalion The Far North Queensland Regiment  
Founded and Chaired the Cassowary Advisory Group  
Cairns Citizen of the Year 1996  
1998 Recipient of the North Queensland Cassowary Award  
Founded and chaired the Australian Rainforest Foundation.  
Author of 'The Mad Galahs,' 'Junior Leadership on the Battlefield' Edition 1, 2 and 3 and 'Training for War.' and 'The Australian Spirit'

Twice widowed, he continues to address each class prior to its graduation at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, Canberra, and is regularly invited to speak at schools and ANZAC Day services.

George is proud of his children's achievements in life and his fourteen grandchildren, including a Rhodes Scholar, a mathematician, school teachers, builders, business managers and some still to climb another mountain to see what is on the other side and, finally, is prone to going into convulsions when there is a suggestion to change our National flag and only too happy to challenge Governments at any level and regardless of their political flavour.

*Ed's note, George was the first platoon sergeant of LT David Wilkins, when he joined 2RAR after graduating from the Royal Military College, Duntroon. Congratulations George, you made a fine officer of our leader and mate, "The Angry Ant!"*

---

**From Dennis Nevins:** Today I retired from my job at Blue Care Beaudesert, after 20 years and 4 months. Does that mean I have to become a boring golfer?

**Ed's advice** "No Digger, there are enough of us hackers out there already".

---

A recent study found that the average golfer walks about 900 miles per year.

Another study found that golfers drink, on average, about 22 gallons of alcohol per year.

That means, on average, that golfers get around 41 miles to the gallon. Kind of makes you proud, doesn't it? *Barry Morgan*

---



A photo of the base of the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial at 80 Mile Beach, WA. (Courtesy Ian Leis)



Dennis (Digger) Nevins and Vince Feenstra met for lunch recently in Beaudesert, Qld. Many old photos were dragged out, and even more yarns were spun. Was this a warm-up for Canberra 2016?

---

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod – [donharrod@bigpond.com](mailto:donharrod@bigpond.com), 0418 423 313, with help from Jack Lake, John Hellyer, Dennis Nevins, Vince Feenstra, Barry Morgan and Ian Leis.