

Half Circle



Number 45 - September 2010

(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.

An open letter from Robert "Yogi" Earl:

To my C Coy 5RAR mates - I really don't know how to start this letter; that is why it has taken me so long to reply to the emails and phone calls I have received (approx. 3 pages).

First of all, not only was I just doing my job on the night of 4th July 1969, but never ever have I considered myself a hero, and to have received all the phone calls and emails from my old mates, thanking me, etc., has been an experience that I will never forget.

I have tried to reply to all the messages, but still owe some, so please forgive me to the ones I haven't got around to, but I promise I will reply to everyone.

I would like to offer a special thanks to Claude Ducker for the (exaggerated) hero bit in his article in Half Circle Number 43 (the cheque is in the mail Claude!).

Now that we are finally in contact again, I want to especially thank the medics who I believed saved not only me from loss of blood; but many more men, they are the true heroes.

Also if not for the discipline of the soldiers involved in following orders during that bad situation, a lot more men would have been injured, so boys a heart to heart thank you.

From your mate,

Yogi.

(Robert Earl)

Ed's note: Please refer to the article submitted by Claude Ducker, referring to the mine incident in the Long Hai Hills on 4th July 1969, in which David Mead's 7PI was decimated.

CHRISTMAS 1969 – NUI DAT
(or How I learned to love the war and stop worrying – for a day)
From Roger Lambert, Platoon Commander 9 PL

With military precision (well, what else would you expect from the Tigers), plans were put in place for the traditional start to Christmas Day, Thursday 25 December 1969. At the appointed hour (something like zero dark 30 hours as I recall), the officers of C Company assembled at "Yarralumla" for a final briefing before proceeding to the company kitchen. "Yarralumla", for those of us whose memories are fading (like mine), was the name of the Officer Commanding Charlie Company's 'hootchie' (I guess by comparison to our humble sand-bagged abodes, the OC's digs probably did resemble the Governor General's official residence in some ways!)

Aluminium cooking pots containing coffee were decanted for ease of handling (handy things those hot-boxes with their inner containers) and armed with a suitable quantity of rum, we proceeded to our respective lines to serve up the Coffee Royale to our troops. I suspect that our diggers were very pleased to see us on two counts:

1. their officers were serving them instead of vice versa; and
2. we were serving alcohol in the lines.

Now of course we all know that no self-respecting Aussie digger would disobey Standing or Routine Orders and consume alcohol in the lines. Not in such a professional outfit as Charlie Company. Those buried "Trunks, Metal, Troops for the Use Of" were only there to store goffas and to prevent chocolate from melting in the tropical heat. Right? Yeah right!

With the Coffee Royale duly served, the officers retired to "Yarralumla" to finalise plans for the rest of Christmas Day including the Army tradition of serving lunch to our troops. This was the first misjudgement of the day. No, not the planning but rather gathering in the OC's ante room.

One Captain David Wilkins produced a bottle of rum that he'd been sent from Australia. It was white rum. Not to my individual taste but, heck, beggars can't be choosers. David proceeded to extol the virtues of this fine Australian rum as healthy portions were poured into our "Cups, Canteen, Troops for the Use Of".

Cheers, Happy Christmas and all that and down the hatch. Bottoms up.

What the heck is going on here? My lips have gone numb, my eyes are watering and now I can't feel my tongue! There's an acute burning sensation in my throat that's proceeding down my windpipe! There's a gurgling in my stomach that would do a volcano about to erupt proud! I'm now getting concerned about how quickly this rum is going about its business dissolving my intestines and what was going to happen by the time it hit the outlet valve of my bowels (or what was left of them).

"Another?" asked David. By now the initial impact of the first healthy dose of Inner Circle had settled. Either that or I was so severely injured by that first hit, the equivalent of a napalm strike, my body and mind had no idea what was going on and that same foreign voice that seemed to come from me says "Yes, please." Idiot! Who said that?! I'm bloody well possessed!!

I didn't dare light a cigarette while the top was off that bottle for fear that there would be an instant detonation and the entire officer group of Charlie Company would be incinerated. Come to think of it, had we sprayed this stuff over the jungle and lit it up with WP, we could have obliterated the entire Province and have been home by New Year's Day!

Holy Dooley! Now my legs have developed an inability to keep me upright, so it's a case of get into the "Chairs, Canvas, Folding, Troops for the Use Of" lest I end up a heap on the floor and having to leopard crawl my way around! "What the hell is that?" some guttural, almost spectre-like voice that didn't seem to be my own croaked.

David proceeded to extol the virtues of CSR Inner Circle Rum. Man, that stuff was 100 Proof if it was a day.

Fair dinkum, I reckon if a Huey ran out of fuel, you could pour this in the tank and the turbine would happily run as it would on Aviation Turpentine. But I don't think you could put it in the trusty Zippo though as one spark and it would probably blow your head off.

And so started Christmas Day in Nui Dat, 1969.

So how was Christmas Day so far? Well, let's say that the digger's lunch, with us serving, went off very well and things seemed to be going pretty much according to plan. A good feed, good company and perhaps a wee bit too much grog – a great Army tradition. But heck, I wasn't feeling any pain. The CSR anaesthetic was seeing to that. Now there's another thought – the Doc could have used Inner Circle during minor operations and one would not feel any pain.

Did the day get any better? Well, things started to go downhill somewhat when a Half-Ton Trailer appeared in the company lines. Not just any trailer – this one was full of beer. How on earth did that thing get here and where did it come from?

Hang on – that's a US Army jeep (or Mutt as they referred to them). Where the heck did that come from?

"What do you mean you swapped it for a Slouch Hat complete with puggaree and badge?" There's that guttural, foreign voice again but the diggers are looking at me.

"Take the bloody thing back" say the voice. "Ah, but Skipper" rings out the chorus.

"Don't argue. Just take the thing back where you got it or you're all on a fizzer!" That voice – who's saying these words and why are they looking at me?

"And where did that trailer come from?" I am possessed; that trailer is full of cold beer and this voice keeps telling them to get rid of it. Pull yourself together man. There's sure to be a logical explanation and after all, it is more beer.

"We brought it up from "X" Company, boss" says the chorus. Smart cookies these diggers. Don't let one bloke be the spokesman and take the wrap, but all speak up together and it's most unlikely everyone will be placed on an A4 - one for all and all for one.

"X" Company, you say" says the foreign voice seemingly coming from me. "That's OK then. Just stash the beer and get rid of the evidence ...er ... trailer." Did I say that?

And so Christmas Day 1969 in Nui Dat passed without further incident. Well, almost.

The trailer with the beer had been missed, reported stolen and the "Sheriff" and his trusty band of RP's were on the trail. The OC hauled we platoon commanders in and demanded to know what we knew of the missing trailer.

I swore blind that my boys didn't do it and would never do such a thing. In hindsight, how good was it that I was still affected by that dreaded CSR Inner Circle? I could have used the defence that I was possessed by the 'spirit' and that it was not me doing the talking.

To the best of my knowledge, at the end of the day, the US Army inventory had the correct tally of jeeps and the missing trailer mysteriously turned up with its rightful owners – albeit empty. I swear that I have no idea what happened to the contents although Southwark is not to my taste either ...

Some years later, as I thought back on my introduction to CSR Inner Circle Rum and Christmas Day 1969, a chill ran down my spine when I hypothesised what might have happened if D445 and whomever else was in the Province at the time had decided to launch an attack on Nui Dat that day. Nah! Had they even contemplated an assault and had they got through the wire and perimeter defences, the alcohol fumes and the frequent belching and

farting would have completely disoriented them if not repelled them. 'Chemical warfare' would have saved the day!

Then of course we had our secret weapon to employ – CSR Inner Circle Rum. Thanks, David. To this day I still reckon that, among other things such as soldiering, the Army taught me how to drink and smoke – well, I've got to blame somebody.

PS. "X" Company is designed to protect the innocent after all these years. Let's just say it was one of ours 'down the hill'.

Ian Leis remembers his mates – 44553 Pte Robert J (Bob) Wyatt – nickname: Water Rat

Bob was another member of the group in 8 Platoon who completed Rookie Corps and Battalion training together. I believe he was from South Australia, married, and had a family. He had already completed an engagement in the regular army. His military knowledge that he already had was shared with his fellow trainers and this assisted many of us to understand and perform what was required of us.

Bob was another quiet achiever, completed his duties, sometimes more than requested. He enjoyed a smoke and his share of alcohol. He had some medical knowledge maybe from his previous military engagement. He went to Vietnam as a rifleman - 5 section 8 Platoon. My memory tells me he performed a number of jobs, stand in medic, batman, scout. He was transferred to 7 Platoon 2 section as a rifleman after the 4th July (mines). Bob was of great assistance to me and platoon headquarters on the 31st July (Bunker attack). He performed over and above, regarding the extraction of Jimmy McMillan's body.

At the opening of the Vietnam Memorial in Canberra 1992 Ian Hosie told me that he held Bob Wyatt in high regard as a digger and a friend. These comments reinforced what I already knew of Bob.

With regard to his nickname "Water Rat". He earned this at Shoalwater Bay whilst on a training exercise. Bob was sitting in his shell scrape, about a foot deep, four inches of water, pouring rain and totally saturated. He was quietly enjoying a smoke and a brew. John Yabsley "Skippy" made the remark "Look at the bloody water rat" It stuck. Bob was known as the water rat from then on.

Like the rest of us the part that he played in that period of time, assisted the platoon/company/battalion to achieve the results that we can be proud of. Thank you Bob - I am proud to have served with you.

From Roger Lambert's archives:



Reg Smith and Ben Oram



Terry Fitzgerald

WANTED: Does anyone have any photos of Roger Lambert in a war like (operational) situation? If so, please forward them to either Roger or me. They are needed for Roger's project regarding the tail fin incident, and he wants to make a good presentation of the incident and 9PL's efforts to the families concerned. Don

AS THIS EDITION OF HALF CIRCLE is being written, a number of 9PL blokes are in the Philippines, for a reunion hosted by Jock Phillips and his wife Jessie. 9PL can give us all a lesson in how to keep close contact with each other after 41 years. Congratulations to you all!



Vietnam Veterans' Day, Melbourne 2010. Don Teichelman is in centre of picture, with Wally Magalas immediately behind him (wearing green beret).

From Alan McNulty (5RARs WA Representative): It is with much regret I inform you of the passing of Peter Stone on 1st September 2010. Peter was a valued member of D Coy 5RAR , and passed away after a valiant fight with cancer. *Ed's note: Peter was the twin brother of David Stone of 9PI. We all offer our condolences Dave.*



Mick went over to his mate Paddy's farm one afternoon, and found him dancing around in front of the John Deere, stripping off his clothes, and acting in a seductive manner. "Mick said "Paddy, what the bloody hell's going on, what are you doing?" Paddy replied "Well Mick, the wife and I have been having a few problems lately, and I went to get some advice. The bloke told me that the best way to get the wife interested again was to do something to a tractor"

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod - 02 6842 4913, 0418 423 313, donharrod@bigpond.com , with help from Yogi Earl, Roger Lambert, David Wilkins, Ian Leis, 9 Platoon, Wally Magalas, Alan McNulty, and a VERY crook joke.