

Half Circle



Number 69 - September 2012

(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:

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:

18 Jan 70

We discovered some more caves, but this time they were booby trapped- well spotted by our ever-alert diggers. After our engineer splinter team deloused them we found four ANPRC 10 VHF radio sets and two HF sets. (VHF = very high frequency, the same frequency band we mainly used in the battalion- I wonder if they were being used to intercept our transmissions.)

19 Jan

CHQ, moving with 8 Pl, located a small, unoccupied bunker system complete with cookhouse and 20 foot flue. In the early evening 7 Pl engaged a group of 4 VC to my east and higher up Nui Mây Tào. The results of the contact were uncertain, as there were no enemy bodies or blood trails.

22 Jan

Still only minor activity in this area (but we are now well away from the SAS reported contact), although some of the tracks are well worn and obviously constantly used.

23 Jan

We are now in ambush on a good track running along the valley between Nui Mây Tào and Nui Tà Lóc. In fact, this track showed sign of having been used by many hundreds of enemy. It was at least a metre wide compared with the usual small 20 cm wide bush pad meandering through the scrub. Here, the undergrowth and soil had been flattened and worn down until it was soft, white powdery dust. The thought of such a large enemy force waltzing down this thoroughfare was a bit unnerving as we were not a large force ourselves.

I split the ambush into two small groups, the first consisting of 8 Platoon less one section and the second consisting of that section plus CHQ and Support Section. The two groups had about 150 metres of the track between them (in the method described earlier in Dave's Diary- see Half Circle Number 65). My group's particular ambush position was located on and around a small rocky outcrop overlooking the track, so that machine guns and claymores were able to pour fire, not only straight into the killing zone but also in each direction along the track. The other group was in denser jungle overlooking the track from slightly higher ground.

Murray Blake's D Company was just to our south and south-east while Ray Harring's B Company was further south than that.

It is hoped that a large allied armoured push from the north-east might flush some VC through the valleys down our way, and also towards D Company located in the eastern pass of the Nui Tà Lóc.

(To be continued)

9 PLATOON REUNION: The men of 9PL have just held another successful reunion, this time in Mandurah, WA. The host, Terry Major, sent this report:

Lorraine and I met the first group of arrivals on the "Indian Pacific" at East Perth railway station on Saturday August 11th. This group included, Ben & Pat Oram, Eric & Pam Hamlin, Fred & Wendy Dwyer, Max & Lorraine Postle, Phil & Marion Greenhalgh, Paul & Maureen McQueen, and Dennis Manhood. They boarded the Indian Pacific at Adelaide and put their cars on the train. It was quite noticeable from their bleary eyes that they had had a good session the previous night in the Lounge car.

I led the convoy to Mandurah with only a couple of minor incidents. We were all booked into "Mandurah Ocean Marina Villas". Ben & Eric had very nervous hands not having had a bet for 3 days, so Manny, Max and I joined them at the nearest TAB Pub with Paul & Phil, whereupon they bet on everything that moved, leaving there broke as usual.

As the week went on Blue & Arlene Schafer, Jock & Jessie Phillips, Phil & Julie Winney, Geoff & Liz Storm and finally Owen & Lisa Schmidt arrived.

Early in the week we spent our time enjoying the excellent weather and some sight seeing round Mandurah including 9 holes of golf at Mandurah Country Club.

Dennis Manhood had been allocated a family room which became the happening Hooch most evenings till late.

Wednesday 15th we caught the train to Perth and enjoyed a 3 hour cruise from Perth to Fremantle and return including lunch. This was followed by a trip around Perth.

Thursday saw us all up early to be picked up by a bus to start a winery and brewery tour of The Margaret River area. We visited 5 wineries and a brewery, returning to Mandurah at 8.00 pm.

Friday the 17th was our reunion dinner at the Mandurah Country Club where we were joined by Terry & Margaret Fitzgerald, Dave & Margaret Stone, Bill & Lyn Sturgess

Mike & Janine Radwell, Doc & Maureen Halliday, Alan & Marion McNulty, Martin and Sean Major. We enjoyed a magnificent meal matched only by the company present, we soldiered

on well into the night. Manny and Owen managed to see the sun come up on Saturday morning.

Saturday saw the Vietnam Veterans Day march in Mandurah, 5RAR were present in numbers with 50 members marching behind our banner.

Dennis Manhood received a special citation for presenting himself for the march; we hid him in the middle of the ranks and all assisted in keeping him upright during the march and then providing him with a chair during the service. Owen Schmidt, Manny's drinking partner failed to get out of the fart sack for the day and was demoted. After the march we adjourned to the Mandurah RSL for drink or two, catching up with many old colleagues.

Sunday saw us have a BBQ at our Villas and was a day of immense humour as some of the old tales started to leak out.

Monday saw the group start to return to their homes, however Tuesday we had a group of 4 to play golf, Fred Dwyer regained the \$10 I ripped off him at the Echuca reunion.

Tuesday saw the bulk of the group head off to Our South West Area and steadily make their way home via Albany, Esperance, Kalgoorlie then the Eyre Highway back East.

All in all it was wonderful to catch up with the guys and girls everyone had a great time and look forward to our next reunion in Victoria in 2014. I was proud to have been able to host this reunion, and to see so many old mates enjoying themselves so much was a great reward.



The 9PI group reunion at Mandurah, WA, August 2012.

AT THE RAP:

Colin Summerfield - broken leg. Col is slowly improving.

George Szczurko. Quadruple heart by-pass. George is doing well and is at home.

A NEW RETREAT FOR VETERANS:

An old cattle station in Western Australia's Pilbara region has been transformed into a camping getaway for war veterans and servicemen and women from all around the country. Along the banks of the Nullagine River, near Marble Bar, is the new Meentheena Veterans Retreat.

The idea was to develop a retreat where veterans could unwind and share their stories. Veterans' Retreats WA is a non-profit organisation which helps veterans cope with their experiences in past conflicts.

Details: <http://veteransretreatsofwesternaustralia.org.au/>



FLASHBACK: Greg (Hickory) Dick, Greg (Reverend) Parish and Peter (Fang) Guyatt in their luxury 5 Star tent accommodation in Ap An Phu, Nui Dat, 1969.

IAN LEIS REMEMBERS HIS MATES: 2788138 LCpl NEIL "BARNEY" SIMPSON

During our time in SVN both Barney and Paddy Walker from trackers spent a fair bit of time attached to Charlie Company and they were both adopted as part of the company. Sadly Paddy Walker's death was a great loss to all who knew him. Many friendships made then are still enjoyed today and this is why I am writing this little story on L/CPL Neil Simpson **"Barney"**.

Schooling was minimal for Barney, his working life started at 13 years of age. He was very fortunate to be adopted into the Stephens family. Kenny Stephens (Rouster's father) took Barney under control. Barney and Rouster shared employment in the shearing industry as Kenny was a shearing contractor, a job that Rouster continued in life - passed on from his father. Barney and Rouster were like brothers and would have been more than a handful for Kenny to keep out of trouble.

Barney's nickname came from a close resemblance to "Barney Rubble" who was in the Flintstones television show.

Rouster and Barney were called up for National Service in the 10th intake in 1967. This was a great adventure for both. Being able to shoot, drink, smoke and swear they fitted into the military life easily. However discipline was a problem for both. Their time in the military was also one of life's shared experiences.

Recruit training was completed at Kapooka then on to Singleton for an infantry course. On arrival at 5RAR, Barney was placed in Support Company. He again completed many courses then finally he became part of "Trackers" in all aspects. Barney was able to complete an education course in the early part of the military service, gaining a school leaving certificate, something he was very grateful of later in life.

Barney's lifelong friendship with Paddy Walker started in "Trackers". Together they walked with tracker dogs, Caesar, Tiber and Justin. Also Road Runner Patrol became their specialty. Using Land Rovers, mounted with M60 or 50CAL machine guns or the 100 recoilless rifle they escorted convoys and machinery to and from Nui Dat, Saigon, Vung Tau and American bases. On duty and off duty times this pair spent together doesn't need reporting on as there are too many stories to put on paper.

Whilst in the military Barney added another skill to drinking and smoking - "Gambling". These three skills have caused huge problems in his life i.e. a failed marriage, financial insecurity and severe health problems. On leaving the military he returned to the bush. The Stephens family became his family once again. He worked in the shearing sheds and also on the local shire council, truck driving (road making) and as a powder monkey (within quarry extraction). Employment was also gained in the farming industries of cotton, grain, sheep and cattle. He was a general roustabout and performed many different tasks to gain income.

Semi retired at 55 years of age, Barney reckons life was good until he had to give up smoking. Then it all fell apart. He has survived an episode of cancer (bowel and intestine) plus other ageing health problems. He continued working part time for quite a while until finally being granted a TPI pension.

Today Barney is looked after by his wife Carole otherwise known as Wonder Woman.

(Everyone *wonders* why she puts up with him). He still enjoys a game of lawn bowls and is an active member of the local swimming club. He is involved with the RSL club (Warren) and does some charity work for local organisations.

Carole and Barney enjoy a close family, 12 grandchildren and one great grandchild keep them busy. They also enjoy some caravanning, travel overseas and being part of the local community.

Barney's ties to the military family are valued. He is in constant contact with most that he served with, just to check all is well and say g'day.

Barney your walk through life hasn't been easy. You have handled it and moved on without complaint. Your care and friendship is acknowledged and appreciated by all who know you.



Ian Leis (I) has a drink and reminisces with his lifelong mate, Barney Simpson.

IN THE NEXT EDITION OF HALF CIRCLE:

1. Our diggers ask why did 5RAR (then known as 5/7RAR) decide to go mechanised in 1984, when in 1969 we had to walk everywhere.
2. Barry Baker explains why he has chosen to move to Hervey Bay, in close proximity to Jack Bradd. Brave man, Barry!
3. **Overheard:** a politician complaining about the sub-standard accommodation to be provided to people in Nauru. Apparently living in tents is harsh and unjust. Whilst this publication is strictly non-political, one wonders how diggers in WWI, WWII, Korea, Malaya, Borneo, Vietnam, the Gulf and so many other deployments possibly managed?

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