

Half Circle



Number 81 - September 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 (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.



AT THE RAP: **Bob (Tex) Cunningham** - oncology treatment. Tex is doing it a bit tough at the moment, with a new type of chemo commenced, hopefully with better results this time.

Lynette Sturgess - wife of Bill. Lynette has been facing some serious health challenges, with more treatment required. We convey our best wishes to Lynette and Bill.

My Diary - Ambushes of February 1970



© Dennis 'Digger' Nevins
7 PI C Coy 2nd Tour

Foreword:

The author, Dennis (Digger) Nevins was a machine gunner in 7 Platoon, C Company, 5th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment. The Battalion served in Vietnam from February 1969 to March 1970.

"Digger" kept very comprehensive diaries of his Vietnam service, and was known by all as the gunner in the bashed up slouch hat. Digger chose this form of headwear over the Army issue Bush

Hat, in respect of those who fought so bravely on the Kokoda Trail, New Guinea, in the Second World War.

Some diary entries have been sanitised to protect the sensitivities of those who haven't experienced combat.

Here is Digger's story of the ambush of 9th - 11th February 1970. Don Harrod, 18 July 2013

9th February

We saddled up and moved out of the ambush we had set on the 7th. We moved to a LZ (landing zone) about 500 yards away. The going was fair, but a lot of the country was covered with prickly bush. We harboured next to a running creek and the LZ at 1100 hours. The resupply didn't arrive until 1400, so in that time, we had a Dobie (wash) and a shave. On the way to this LZ, we crossed a good track about 100 metres from where we harboured. Dave Nicholls came out on the resupply and Marine, Masowita, Pica and Mulready returned. I placed my gun in the killer group which comprised Lt Ian Hosie, Jack Bradd and Andy MacDougal.

10th February

Nothing yet, but Hosie is very confident with this track, but I believe that if there is no result today, the VC know we're around.

1 Platoon with CHQ made contact on 8th Feb – they hit a platoon. The result was 2 enemy KIA, 2 suspected KIA, and 4 suspected WIA. On contact, 1 Platoon pulled back 100 yards and engaged with M79. Normal picquets were carried out. 8 Platoon found a cache – a rice pit 8ft x 3ft x 3ft containing 200lb of rice, but if full, it would hold 1600lb. 9 Platoon also found a cache. Both were mined with instantaneous grenades. One track was mined with a M16. 8 Platoon spotted 2 VC, but they shot through. D Company hit 6 VC, and claimed 2 KIA, 2 possible WIA, and captured 2 AK47's. Call sign 6-2 hit 5 enemy dressed in greens, with 2 packs and papers captured. D Company has 12 KIAs on this Op so far.

Normal picquets were carried out today. It is now 1800, and 8 Platoon have been in contact since 1630. They are in bunkers, and the VC are fighting. These bunkers are very close to where we engaged 84 Rear Services in September. 8 Platoon have employed gunships, but the VC aren't moving, so now the tanks are coming in. I think that 5 of 8 Platoon have been wounded, but none seriously. The CO is overhead with the gunships. During this contact we were hearing whispers that the enemy from the 8 Platoon contact may withdraw out onto our track.

At 1900, our group were lying on our backs after having tucker. I heard the shuffling of leaves. It was a light shuffle and sounded like a pig moving, but the senses said "No way". We turned onto our bellies – Jack, Andy and I were behind a fallen log. My gun was on top of the log, which at that moment was a bugger. The three of us had to keep down below the top of the log, but Hosie was at the end of it. I looked to see what the boss was doing, and he was there with his magic box of tricks waiting for the right moment. When we set this ambush up, the skipper was debating about a trip flare, as the area had thick trees but no scrub. My killer group was 30 yards from the track, as that was the nearest cover. Because of that the boss thought that a small group of VC in darkness could make their way through unnoticed, so he decided to put in a trip flare. The lead VC stopped five feet from the trip flare. In the boss' words he was wondering "Had he seen the trip in the fading light, or was he waiting for his cobbles to catch up."

Hosie didn't wait, and engaged the magic box. In a flash, off went 12 claymores with white phosphorous (my sketch shows 11, but my diary shows 12). I describe it as ugly, powerful and beautiful, and at the same time there was fire and a sheet of white. Bill Hartley and his mob were hooking in well to our left – Smithy's gun was firing on our right – but we were the lucky buggers as they were directly in front of our group and we knew we had them knackered. The boss was firing M79 plus M26 and W.P. (White Phosphorus) from the launcher. I didn't record Jack's or Andy's weapons, but I remember them having SLRs, and Jack throwing grenades. When firing ceased, I'd fired 440 rounds at a rapid rate.

We had two enemy still alive, and they were talking to each other and doing a lot of moaning. We got our Bushman Scout Phuong to come around and tell us what the two were yapping

about. One was saying he was 'buku' (mortally) hit. They had crawled out of the killing area (not true as we found out next morning) and both were had it. Phuong couldn't speak English so in the dark he was hard to follow. Andy and Hosie fired M79s into the area to try and put them out of their misery. I said to the boss "Leave the buggers alone because while they're yapping we know where they are". The skipper replied that you wouldn't do that to a kangaroo. Then Jack and the skipper started throwing grenades, but they couldn't get them far enough. It did however stop the two yapping a little – but the boss wanted to make sure these two were out of pain. I can tell you I wasn't bothered.

Hosie went away to our left and fired a M79 round directly onto the track. The blast came back and Hosie dropped – he had received shrapnel in the upper leg. Jack and Andy got him and laid him down in my gun position. Jack applied three field dressings – the boss was in a lot of pain but refused to take morphine. During this period the boss was still trying to give some orders, but Jack cut in, saying "I'm sorry Sir, but you are unable to command. I'm taking over". The boss, to his credit, let Jack take over and kept quiet. Ian Hosie was one of the finest commanders a digger could have been with for two years.

A DUSTOFF arrives at 2215 hours. It hovered above the trees throwing scrub everywhere. A Jungle Penetrator was lowered and our skipper was taken away.

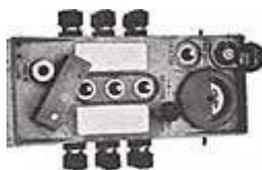
11th February 1970

The next morning, we carried out a sweep, and I fired another 110 rounds as this occurred. The end result was five bodies and one heavy blood trail, which was counted as a kill. There were two drag marks into the scrub on the far side of the ambush, which could have been WIAs, but we will never know as we didn't follow up. One VC attracted our attention – he had taken off his webbing and placed it with his money neatly beside him. He died with his hands behind his head and a slight grin on his face, as if to say "If I'm going to die, I'm going to die happy".

2 Section moved out of the LZ with 3 AK47s, documents and captured gear, and brought back a resupply of ammo. We then carried out admin tasks. We moved out at 1100 hours with 2 Section leading to a LZ, 2000 yards away. We got there in good time as the going was OK. 8 Platoon were already there, with 'tracks' (APCs). 9 Platoon, CHQ and tanks came in after us.

They were all pleased with our effort. I was proud of 7 Platoon (Yep, that's what I wrote!). Our platoon is being split up, with our section going to 9 Platoon, and we're not happy, but the OC told us that this had to occur as we were so severely under strength. 9 Platoon has a SGT in charge. 2Lt Lambert is back in Nui Dat with hand or finger trouble.

Below is a photo of Hosie's Magic Box, and my sketch of the ambush.



Electrical detonating device, designed by Lt Ian Hosie which allows for the detonation of up to 12 [M18A1 Claymore Anti-Personal Mines](#) with one activation.

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:

14 Feb 1970 (continued)

The company tally now is 55 enemy KIA by body count, which is the lowest of the battalion's rifle companies, but still it is creditable. The battalion total is 353.

The compensating factor for C Company's lowest count is its highest score for captured enemy and Hoi Chanh's, a number approaching 70-80 persons.

In comparison 5RAR has sadly lost a total of 25 KIA.

C Coy suffered 7 killed in action or died of wounds and another 38 wounded in action (2 soldiers twice).

16 Feb

Last day in the scrub before being transported back to Nui Dat by APC. Towards the end of the day I concentrated the company into one location at the south-east corner of the "cauliflower ear".



Sunray Call Sign 3

17 Feb

Finally, a quiet night! No contacts. In the morning we moved about 800 metres to our south to the Nui Nhon feature where we were collected by tracks (APCs) and returned safely to the Dat.

The intelligence reports and assessments indicated that our battalion patrolling and ambushing in its final operation, particularly in the May Tao Mountains (6RAR and C and D Coys of 5RAR) had placed the enemy in a real predicament as their communication routes had been interrupted and their resupply routes almost completely lost. This had caused the VC to alter its immediate objective from offensive operations to self-preservation. A captured letter from a D Coy contact (translated) read:

"The enemy are still here and we are unable to return. On 18 Jan 70 we organized a meeting intending to go and find you but you were not at the old place. I sent someone to THANC NCHIEP to find you to liaise with A1. If you know what is proposed please let us know immediately.

We are starving. I went to BAC BINH but was unable to return. We are now all digging manioc but each day we are finding less and less. NAM MINH asked if you can spare us a few litres of rice temporarily. Yesterday NAM and all the others ground up all the manioc.

K76A and Z301 are both out of food. They came to our base to hunt for meat but were not adequately organized. I don't know the answer. Really, it is very difficult. They are starving but we are unable to assist them because we are also starving.

All the best to you and the other comrades.

Sgd NAM BINH

20 Jan 70"

If this was typical of the enemy in our areas of operations we were definitely succeeding.

(To be continued)

From Jack Bradd: Roger almost had it - "*DUSTOFF - Dedicated Undying Support to Our Fighting Forces*".'

This month's poser - *POGO*. Ideas, please.

WANTED - PHOTOS OR FUNNY STORIES REGARDING JOHN FAINT:

Most of us will remember John Faint, or "Fainter", of 7PL. John came from Tamworth NSW, and travelled with us to Vietnam in February 1969. Fainter was a big bugger, and had a knack of getting into trouble without really trying. Your editor has been contacted by John's nephew Tim, who is trying to piece together not only his life, but also his military service. John didn't have much of a start in life, and his adopted family wants to retain his memory, as he was very much a part of their lives. **PLEASE HELP!** Contact your editor, or John's nephew Tim Curry on tim@currypower.com.au

THE LATE WAYNE VINCENT MANGAN:

I saw on the net that Wayne Mangan had died (see Half Circle number 58, October 2011). It seems a great pity that 'Mangoes' should pass on without some fitting tribute. I served with 5RAR as a medic and after his stint in C Coy, for some reason he was attached to Medical Platoon. He was very proud to have served in C Company, where he talked a lot about his time as a scout.

I had the privilege of his company at 5RAR's last two fire support bases where his ability to scrounge and utilise all available materials to make our lives more comfortable was unsurpassed. Life in a tropical climate was particularly challenging for Mangoes as he had a fervent dislike for all things that were small and multilegged. 'Gazontapedes' was his word for them and there were many times when he would leap skywards fervently cursing those #@%%^& 'Gazonts'! that he had discovered invading his person.

We were mates and returned to Sydney on the Sydney together and were at Holsworthy for a while together when the battalion returned to Oz. Mangoe's ability to acquire life's little luxuries stood us in good stead when re-establishing our RAP.

Mangoes and I knocked about a bit after the army but unfortunately we lost touch.

Tony (Anthony Robert) Homer 2791101)

A recent article in the Kentucky Post reported that a woman, one Anne Maynard, sued St. Luke's hospital, saying that after her husband was treated there, he lost all interest in sex.

A hospital spokesman replied, "Mr Maynard was actually admitted in Ophthalmology - all we did was correct his eyesight."

From John Yabsley: After reading about Greg Dick's discussion with a lady who thanked him for his Vietnam service, I thought that I should relate a similar story. I was recently in Brisbane undergoing some medical treatment, and a youngish woman in the clinic happened to overhear that I was a Vietnam Vet. She also bothered to say "Thank You", and said how ashamed she was of our Country's treatment of Vietnam Vets after their arrival back on home soil. There are some good people out there.



THE TIGER MASCOT OF 5RAR:

Only a very few responses were received regarding Dennis Nevins' idea of considering replacing it with an Australian animal – or the extinct Tasmanian Tiger (Half Circle No 80).

5RAR was given the Tiger as its mascot when it was formed to serve in Vietnam – some of the considerations were its aggressive fighting spirit, jungle stealth, cunning, guile, etc.

Be assured that Quintus shall remain 5RAR's mascot. Need we say any more?

IN THE NEXT EDITION OF HALF CIRCLE:

1. Schmick, or Smick. A soldier's interpretation.
2. CSM Jack Lake will provide a list of all those who were charged with offences during our Vietnam service (only joking - this is impossible - there's not enough space in ANY newsletter!)

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