

Half Circle

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TRAVELLING ABOUT:

Jack and Sue Lake – back from yet another trip to their chalet in the Snowy Mountains.

Phil and Marion Greenhalgh – somewhere in Queensland. Last heard of in Eastern NSW.

Ian and Glenys Leis – last heard of in Bungle Bungle Ranges (Purnilulu National Park), north east of Halls Creek in northern WA. Pictured below are Ian and Glenys with helicopter pilot Hamish MacDougal, son of our mate Andy MacDougal.



AT THE RAP:

Barrie Taylor – ongoing oncology treatment

Bryan (Blue) Schafer – a stroke. Blue is in good spirits, and is now home from hospital. Blue seems to be recovering well and is looking forward to Canberra next March.

Kevin (Doc) Mulligan – Lynette, Kevin's wife reports: Kevin has just undergone open-heart surgery (6th August). All had gone really well for him until day of discharge. We were heading out the door and they told us not to go...Kevin had to go back to bed. He had a bug in his blood and they wanted to give him IV antibiotics. Oh dear...he was an absolutely shattered man – the look on his face absolutely broke my heart. He is still in hospital but will be coming home on Tuesday 18th. He is feeling very well in himself except for having to have the antibiotics.

Don Frohmuller – pneumonia and subsequent complications. Don is now slowly recovering following a serious fall due to this illness.

FROM JACK LAKE This is the first part of a speech by Dr Tien Nguyen, outlining what happened to Vietnamese troops after the Vietnam War. Jack has recently retired from his role as the President of the Blue Mountains Vietnam Veterans Association, and has accepted a newly created position as the Vietnamese Liaison Officer. Dr Nguyen's speech:-

:As promised, I'm sending you my speech in May, at the 1st Battalion Battle Group, attended by about 300 people, half of them ex-soldiers and the rest their families. I think it'd be good for you guys, our comrade-in-arms, to understand what happened to us after the end of the war, and what we'd been through, as this would help strengthening our soldier- to- soldier bonds. I hope you enjoy reading it, and would appreciate any feedback you may have.

Dr Tien Nguyen
Chief Medical Officer
32nd Ranger Regiment, ARVN

Speech as guest speaker in the 47th annual reunion of the 1st Battalion Battle Group (Coral-Balmoral Base - Bien Hoa) on Saturday 16th May 2015 in Newcastle - NSW,

Members of the 1st Battalion Battle Group. Other Vietnam Veterans on Parade, their families and friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Firstly, I'd like to thank the organisers for inviting me to speak at the 1st Battalion Battle Group 47th anniversary Reunion this year.

I'd also like to thank my mate Bob Gibson, who I met and befriended in the Sydney Welcome Home Parade for Vietnam Veterans in 1987, and who introduced me to the organisers of this function.

The battle of Coral-Balmoral, together with the battle of Long Tan, are the two most well known combat events in the history of the Australian army's involvement in the VN War. Those two battles epitomise the valiance and combat skills of the Australian troops, publicly recognised and respected by the enemy in its own military history accounts. Some military historians considered the Coral Balmoral battle even more significant than Long Tan, because it was the biggest unit level battle in the VN war for the Australians, it lasted longer (26 days compared to 3), and it cost more Aussie lives (26 compared to 18).

The combat skills and courage of the Aussie Diggers are well known and admired among South Vietnamese soldiers and people. The Americans relied heavily on their superior fire power and went on patrol in the jungle like going for a picnic. The VCs nicknamed them "elephants" because of the noise they made and their smell of aftershave and Salem cigarettes that could be detected miles away. That alerted the VCs to simply elude and avoid clashes. In contrast, the well camouflaged Aussies quietly went out at night in small groups, sleeping in the bush, braving bites from mosquitoes and other insects, to ambush the unknowing VCs on the move.

Fighting alongside one another during the war, the ARVN forged a special mateship with the Aussie diggers, resulting in a great bond which can only be found amongst comrades-in arms.

The organisers told me to share with you my own bitter experiences in the dying days of the VN War, so today I'll tell you my story and hope that it will help you understand our feelings in those dark hours.

I was a young doctor in charge of the medical section of a Ranger Regiment (an elite combat unit specialised in jungle fighting), and spent 3 years in the hottest frontlines. I had the opportunity to learn first hand about the courage, the sacrifice and the comradeship amongst our troops. I also witnessed the tragedy and waste of war. My last post was in Tay Ninh province near the border of Cambodia, where we fought the VCs in the Ba Den mountain area.

In 1972, the abandonment of South Vietnam was already planned when US President Nixon visited China and cut a deal with MaoTse Tung.

Anti-war movements in the US, supported by the CIA, manipulated and changed public opinion dramatically. In January 1973, under intense pressure and threats from the US, South Vietnam's President Thieu was forced to sign the Paris Accord, which effectively heralded the demise of South Vietnam by allowing the invading communist troops to remain in the South instead of having to withdraw back to North Vietnam.

By the end of 1972, all allied troops including the Australians had pulled out of VN in the so-called "Vietnamisation of the war". The ARVN forces were left to defend South Vietnam all by themselves. But we continued to fight on and achieved brilliant victories such as the retake of An Loc and Quang Tri during the "red hot summer" of 1972. We had proven that we were capable of defending our country ourselves, as long as the US continued to provide ample ammunition and other military supplies to match the enemy's abundant support from the Soviet Union and Red China.

Under public pressure, the US Congress gradually reduced aids to South Vietnam. Military supplies began dwindling in 1973 and rapidly continued to decline. In late 1974, the US Senate voted to cut off all military aids to SVN. That began the rapid disintegration of the Republic of Vietnam and its once valiant and mighty armed forces. There was no real victory for the enemy, as they just took over abandoned cities after abandoned cities without much resistance.

In the final days at the frontline, I witnessed the inevitable demoralisation among my troops. It is absolutely horrifying when you find yourself in battle with scarce rationed ammunition against an enemy with much more destructive weapons, regularly supplied in great amounts by China and the Soviet Union. We had only limited personal ammunition with no new supplies and no support from friendly forces, because planes and tanks did not have enough fuel, and artillery did not have enough rounds. In such a dire situation, the enemy constantly attacked us with ever increasing fire power. How can you keep up your morale in such circumstances?

Ed's note: *The second part of Dr Nguyen's speech will appear in the October edition of Half Circle.*



**Tigers
Everywhere!**

REPRINTED FROM HALF CIRCLE Number 14:

Remember:..... Monsoons, picquet, clean laundry, our boozier, a game of darts, scrubbing mud off webbing, scrim, letters from home, letters to home, Paddy's buns, the practice range, ANPRC 25 sets, paludrine, dapsone, dixies, Jack Bradd's bombs, Jack Lake's roaring, cold (or no water) shaves, mosquito repellent, powdered eggs, plastic potatoes, letters from Mum, letters to Mum, mateship.

STOP PRESS: We have just been notified of the passing of Tony Perriman. Many will remember him as the Operations Officer of 6RAR dsuring our tour of Vietnam. A fine man and a very experienced and capable officer. We offer our sincere condolences to Tony's family. May he rest in peace.

Half Circle was compiled and edited by Don Harrod - donharrod@bigpond.com, 0418 423 313, with help from Jack Lake, Ian Leis, Lynette Mulligan and Roger Lambert.