

365 and a Wakey



As told by Sergeant Larry D'Arcy

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365 AND A WAKEY

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First Edition

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If for any reason a mistake has been made or a name has been forgotten, I sincerely apologise as it was not intentional.

Book Number

Soldier

I was that which others did not want to be.

*I went where others feared to go
and did what others failed to do.*

*I asked nothing from those who gave nothing,
and reluctantly accepted the thought of eternal loneliness...
should I fail.*

*I have seen the face of terror; felt the stinging cold of
fear;
and enjoyed the sweet taste of a moment's love.*

*I have cried, pained, and hoped... but most of all,
I have lived times others would say were best forgotten.*

*At Least someday I will be able to say
that I was proud of what I was... a Soldier.¹*

¹ George .L Skypeck, 'Soldier', <http://www.iwvpa.net/index.php> (accessed 11 February 2012).

Dedication

I, Larry D'Arcy would like to dedicate this book to my two daughters Lauren and Cherie, and to my grandchildren and great grandchildren.

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Foreword

We all feel that we have a story to tell but few of us ever manage to find the time or the help to make aspirations reality. Larry D'Arcy has done just that ably abetted by Mark Jamieson. Larry's story is told warts and all and provides the reader with a good understanding of life in the Army in general and in the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery in particular.

Larry also shows that there is life after the Army by sharing with us the ups and downs of multiple careers. Throughout his story Larry remains the same capable, confident larrikin that I first met in 1967. I found Larry a bloody good professional soldier who came through some grueling times with the same smile on his face that he has today.

I know that his story will be treasured by his family; I have hope that he may share it with a wider audience.

Ian Ahearn

Colonel (Retired)

Gun Position Officer 102 (Coral) Battery Royal Australian Artillery 1967-1969.

Author's Note

First, I would like to thank Larry for the tireless assistance he has put into making this book a reality. The majority of this book comes from Larry's own recollections, and was told to me through countless hours of conversation. This book is a dedication to 102 'CORAL' Battery and 'A' Battery of the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery.

Secondly, I would like to thank those who were able to offer me some assistance in researching and writing this book. To all those who I contacted and were able to offer even the smallest piece of information, it is greatly appreciated. Without your help I would not have got this far.

I first met Larry while working for the same building company and over time became good mates. I have always had an interest in military history, in particular the personal stories of soldiers and especially Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. I would often ask Larry about his time in the Army and his two tours in Vietnam which he happily answered.

For me the soldier's story is by far the most important source of history and I hope that those who read this book will be afforded an insight into the life of an Artillery Gunner in the Australian Army and learn a bit more about soldiering and life in general.

I know Larry will tell you that, 'he was just doing his job', but soldiering is not just 'a job' and the respect bestowed on these individuals should never waver or diminish.

To all those who stepped out through the wire, I thank you for your contribution, your selflessness and your steadfastness in battle.

Mark Jamieson

Bachelor of Arts, History (Honours), University of Wollongong, NSW Australia.

Preface



Left, Larry after being promoted to Lance Bombardier, Malaya 1965-67.

Laurence Gilbert D'Arcy (Larry) served in the Citizen Military Forces (CMF) from 20 June 1962 to the 12 February 1964 and the Australian Army from the 18 February 1964 to the 17 February 1973. The Army took Larry on a journey that encompassed a two year tour in Malaya, two combat tours in Vietnam and to his final posting as a gunnery instructor with 123 Training Battery. This book is a personal account of a soldier, it is a collection of memories from an artillery gunner in the Royal Australian Artillery (RAA) and the events contained within this book are entirely how Larry viewed and now remembers the past, this is his perspective.

His journey from the suburban streets of the Illawarra and South Yarra to the dusty and often muddy 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF) at Nui Dat is told throughout this book. Larry was born to be a soldier in the Australian Army and from an early age this desire was clearly evident. From passing out at Kapooka as the second top recruit (only beaten by a returning recruit) to topping the class at the Royal Australian Artillery (RAA) School at North Head, Manly NSW, the career path that Larry chose was to be eventful in more ways than one.

During this time, Larry saw active service in Malaya 1965-1967 with 'A' Battery ('A' Bty) and Vietnam 1968-1969 with 102 Field Battery (102 Fd Bty) and 1971 with 'A' Bty. The battle for Fire Support Patrol Base (FSPB) Coral during Larry's first tour with 102 Fd Bty is well remembered by himself and all those who served with him at that time. The one thing that stands out for Larry is by far the mate ship that developed during his Army career. The men he served with are remembered with a smile, especially those from 102 Fd Bty.

Prologue



Above, Tomo, Larry, Tom Carmody and Cossie (obscured), Vietnam 1968.

Hearing the yell from the troops heading home, ‘365 and a wakey’, Larry was thinking what is all that about as the men of 102 Fd Bty were stationed at a holding area before boarding the US aircraft that would fly them straight to the 1st Australian Task force (1ATF) at Nui Dat. Larry was soon to find out that 356 and a wakey was army talk for telling the new guys that they still had 356 days to go in Vietnam. As the days went by the number decreased so you would soon have 285 and a wakey, 155 and a wakey, 35 and a wakey until finally you woke up dressed in your polyesters and left Nui Dat bound for Tan Son Nhut airport (Saigon) and boarded and QANTAS freedom bird back to Australia.



The Early Years to Kapooka: Making the Soldier



Left, Larry aged 2-3 years old with wooden gun on shoulder, a sign of things to come.

Larry was born 13 December, 1945 and began life in the seaside town of Thirroul, NSW. At age 2 years Larry's parents moved to Victoria and lived at South Yarra, not far from Melbourne Boys Grammar School. Little did Larry know this was to shape his life.

In the early 1950's the Melbourne Boys Grammar School Cadets would march through the streets in full regalia. Larry clearly remembers marching next to these cadets as a young boy no older than six and knowing then that this is what he wanted to be.

Larry was on the path to becoming a soldier in the Australian Army and recalls his time spent in South Yarra as memorable and carefree, a world free of adult worries, a world full of fun and laughter. While living in South Yarra, Larry remembers going with his parents to the Shrine of Remembrance and regarded the returned soldiers with great admiration. Although the ANZAC tradition was never fully understood as a young child, but as the years progressed he looked upon these men as special and Larry could see himself one day as a soldier. Like so many people then and still today soldiering is regarded as a proud profession and a career path that could lead to anywhere.

Having returned to Berkeley NSW at age 12, Larry continued with his schooling while his Dad now worked at Wongawilli coal mine, West Dapto while his Mum devoting herself to the family home. Moving from Woonona NSW to South Yarra, Victoria and back to Berkeley NSW in his early years, Larry did what most young boys did, ride their bikes and hang out with his friends. Back in the Illawarra, Larry spent his first year at Dapto High School before moving to Berkeley High where he completed his second and third years while enjoying the usual school yard sports of cricket and football.

As with many kids growing up in the 1940s and 50s a career path was needed and that generally meant getting some sort of trade. Leaving school at 15, Larry began his apprenticeship as a fitter and turner with a small engineering firm in Port Kembla NSW. Despite beginning his apprenticeship, there was a burning desire to be a soldier and slowly this enthusiasm would see Larry leave his apprenticeship and enlist in the Australian Regular Army in February 1964, but before all that he began army life with the local Citizen Military Forces.

Citizen Military Forces (CMF)

The CMF Depot was located in Gipps Rd Wollongong which is now the home an Army Reserves unit. Larry was advised by his dad to try the CMF and see if he really wanted to be in the regular army as, at that time, his apprenticeship as a fitter and turner was a good trade to be taking up. Larry joined the CMF in 1962 as a 17 year old and his time spent there gave him a wonderful insight into the rigors of Army life.

The CMF training was conducted on parade nights held every two weeks in the Gipps St Depot as well as a training weekend once a month. Service was voluntary and gave the young recruits a feel of Army life and Army discipline. The CMF was generally staffed by regular soldiers, mainly Sergeants and Warrant Officers (WO), and these men were by and large veterans of the Korean War. These men were the trainers of the young recruits who had a lot of respect for them. Joining the CMF strengthened Larry's desire to be a soldier and he began doing some of his own ironing to get used to what lay ahead at Kapooka, the Regular Army Recruit Training Centre. Larry also began to learn how to polish his boots, a past time that would consume a lot of his time over the years to come in the Army.

Larry found the training and discipline associated with the CMF gave him a solid base and understanding about Army life. What stands out for Larry was the training camp held at Singleton. This was two week indoctrination focused on real training drills as opposed to marching which was generally done at the CMF Depot in Wollongong. Weapon handling courses were also conducted at Singleton and gave the young CMF recruits the opportunity to refine their weapons skills, like loading, clearing and cleaning, firing positions and of course marksmanship. As time progressed, Larry's career choice as a fitter and turner slowly fell away and his desire to join the Australian Regular Army was now his main priority.

When Larry decided to become a full time soldier with the Australian Army, his parents were both full of pride to have their son serve the nation and if Larry was happy well that was good enough for his parents. His parents were proud of his soldiering and particularly proud of his three overseas deployments; firstly to Malaya and two tours of Vietnam.

Kapooka



Above, the Nissen Huts that housed the new recruits at Kapooka. This particular hut was for the Army band members and the rocks around the garden were required to be painted white by the recruits.²

The next stop was Kapooka and the 1st Recruit Training Battalion (1RTB) established 1951 at Wagga Wagga, NSW. Kapooka is better known as the 'Home of the Soldier' and this was where Larry began his military career.

Larry entered Kapooka on 18 February 1964 and was ready for an intensive 15 week course. Kapooka was where the recruit instructors took great pleasure in weeding out the unworthy and testing the recruits in more ways than can be imagined. From the early morning wake up call, half asleep with the instructor screaming obscenities at the young recruits followed by endless hours of marching drills, weapons drills and still more drill until it was lights out, a well-earned sleep and up early again and ready for the next day.

Whatever spare time Larry had it was spent polishing whatever brass was located around the barracks which included the door hinges and brass strips on the floor along with making sure the toilet and shower areas were spotless, this was one of the first chores of the day for the new recruits. Along with all the polishing and cleaning of the barracks, the recruits

² Australian Army, 'Army Band', <http://www.army.gov.au> (accessed 15 February 2012).

also had to tend their own pieces of kit and make sure that it was in order and spotless at all times.

Larry remembers spending many an hour polishing the brass buckles, shining his boots and washing and ironing his greens, all this while sharing the occasional laugh with his mates. This was not to be the last of the polishing as Larry soon found out at the School of Artillery where they were told *'if it moves salute it, if it stands still then polish it'* in direct reference to saluting an officer and polishing the brass'.



Above, the early layout of accommodation at Kapooka before the construction of the transport yard in 1965.³

No paved areas and no flashy accommodation as the new recruits marched and paraded up and down the dusty roads at 1RTB before finally retiring to the huts ready for the next day of training. Accommodation was pretty basic with recruits being housed in Nissen Huts which were their responsibility and required to be kept impeccably clean to satisfy the instructors, which at times was very hard to do. The corporals who looked after the recruits came from the 1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR) and were predominately veterans of the Malaya Emergency (1948-1960).

Kapooka was a challenge that Larry relished and finishing one of the top three recruits gave added privileges as they were able to pick their chosen career path. Larry had earmarked the Infantry as his pick, but after several discussions with his recruit instructor, Larry was steered towards the Royal Australian Artillery (RAA). The instructors had seen the potential

³Australian Army, 'Nissen Hut', <http://www.army.gov.au> (accessed 13 February 2012).

in Larry and they viewed the RAA would better suit his soldiering style. Not one to argue, Larry took their advice and chose the RAA, a path that would take him on three overseas deployments the opportunity to work with 123 Training Battery and provide a lifetime of good mates and even better memories.

The passing out parade was held on the 1RTB parade ground on Thursday, unfortunately Larry's parents were unable to attend, as unlike today transport and the ease of taking a 'sickie' was not common place. At the completion of the parade Larry was provided with a rail pass to Sydney's Central Station, before a connecting train back to Wollongong. Afforded a few days leave, Larry was welcomed home by his family before heading to the School of Artillery on Monday morning to begin Corps training at North Head, Manly.



School of Artillery to Malaya 1965–1967



Left, Artillery Barracks at North Head, Manly NSW.⁴

Upon passing out of Kapooka, Larry was posted to the School of Artillery at North Head, Manly NSW. Having to wait for

the next allotment of recruits to make up the numbers, Larry spent his time ‘dixie bashing’, doing general duties around the barracks, although tedious Larry knew this was all part of being a soldier. Soon enough the dixie bashing was over as he was joined by the next recruit allotment and together a new mate ship was forged and the training to become a gunner began. This was another challenge that Larry excelled at and realised that his chosen path was well and truly the right one.

The artillery course began with a basic gunnery course which involved fire mission orders and gun drills. The Fire Mission Orders were very detailed and the artillery recruits were required to have a comprehensive understanding of all the orders and set sequence that had to be carried out. Orders pertaining to, fire control, call for ammunition, preparation of ammunition, bearing and elevation, fuse setting and air bursts are just a few important facts that the gunner had to know instinctively and was to prove incredibly valuable while in

⁴ Dawbin Architects Pty Ltd, ‘North Head School of Artillery’, <http://www.dawbinarchitects.com.au/index.htm> (accessed 28 May 2012).

Vietnam. With all the theory behind them the Artillery recruits conducted their one and only live fire drill at Holsworthy to put the theory into practice before they were posted to their allotted Regiment and Battery.

Larry finished his training as the top gunner of his course and was posted to 'A' Battery, RAA and advised of the possible overseas deployment to Malaya. 'A' Bty was based at Holsworthy NSW, and this is where the fine tuning began with countless hours spent looking over the sights of the Italian made 105mm L5 pack howitzer guns and firing round after round until the gun detachment and gun became one entire unit. Live firing drills honed the skills of the gunners and created a competitive atmosphere and great camaraderie between the gun detachments at Holsworthy.

Jungle Training Center (JTC) Canungra



Left, Jungle Training Centre emblem.⁵

The Jungle Training Center (JTC), located in South East Queensland in the town of Canungra was established in 1942 to meet the new and growing demands of jungle warfare training needed in Papua New Guinea.⁶ This type of training was to become extremely useful over the years to all Australian soldiers' who entered Canungra as it provided them with a unique jungle style atmosphere to live and operate in. The early instructors at Canungra were men who had recent combat experience in the

Middle East and the South West Pacific region. In later years the instructors were drawn from soldiers with combat experience from the Malayan Emergency and the Vietnam War.⁷

Canungra was closed in 1946 at the end of the Second World War, but would not stay closed for long. Reopened in 1954 to meet the growing problems arising in the South East Asian region, mainly the Malayan Emergency and the Indonesian Confrontation, the Australian Army reopened the training facility to meet the growing demand for skilled soldiers who were able to operate in the new theatre of war.⁸ With the escalation of the Vietnam War, Canungra became the major training facility as the Australian Army prepared its soldiers for the rigors of combat in Vietnam. The training focused on the individual soldiers through to companies and finally full battalions were assessed on their combat readiness for active service. At the height of the Vietnam War, Canungra accommodated over 10,000 soldiers

⁵ Mark Addinall, 'Jungle Training Centre', <http://addinall.net> (accessed 10 March 2011).

⁶ Peter Dennis, Jeffrey Grey, Ewan Morris, Robin Prior (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 122.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

and with the end of the Vietnam War, the Jungle Training Centre was renamed the Land Warfare Centre in June 1975.⁹

Canungra was the next stop for Larry and a six week course instructed by the hard heads of the infantry. The sleeping arrangement was certainly not five star and they slept four men to a tent sleeping on not so comfortable Army issue stretchers. Over the coming years, Larry would come to spend three separate training stints at Canungra. Firstly before his first tour of Malaya then each time before his two tours of Vietnam, one of those times as an instructor.

For Larry's tour of Malaya, the course was instructed by veterans of the Malayan campaign as these men had the ground knowledge and understood the tactics that were being employed by the Communist guerillas operating in that theatre. The training was intensive and very efficient and JTC was a must for anyone who was heading on an overseas deployment regardless of their job or Corps. The men were trained in minor infantry tactics with Self Loading Rifle (SLR), General Purpose Machine Gun (M60) and grenades being the main choice of weapons used. The training at Canungra was physically taxing, but in the same breath extremely rewarding and well remembered.

They had lanes cut into the jungle with pop up targets and two men at a time would head along and as the targets popped you were to engage these targets with a short burst. Another interesting training method was where they would have you advancing into an area with a Vickers machine gun firing over our heads to get you accustomed to rounds flying about and the noise of live ammo.¹⁰

This along with countless hours spent running in full packs, obstacle courses and the confidence course were all part of JTC. Another hurdle over, very soon Larry would be landing in Malaya for the first of his three overseas deployments with the RAA.

The three separate training courses that Larry attended at Canungra all varied to some degree. The training that was conducted during the Malayan phase was based around a lot of patrolling skills where the training for Vietnam was quiet different as it centered more on mine and booby trap awareness and ambushing techniques. This tactical information was passed on from the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) which had been in country since 1962 and the training and instruction was carried out by soldiers returning from Vietnam.

Although Larry was in the RAA, the tactics employed at Canungra were vital skills aimed at keeping the soldier sharp and alert while in country. The training conducted was the Army's way of desensitising the soldiers to combat situations. The instructors made sure that the young men at JTC knew they were entering a war zone and if they stuffed up in any way

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 122. Note: The Land Warfare Centre moved away from jungle warfare training to training designed around the defence of Australia.

¹⁰ Laurence (Larry) D'Arcy, 13 February 2011.

then the end result could be the death of a mate or themselves, something none of the soldiers wanted to experience. The training was never questioned as Larry was not interested in the politics surrounding the war in Malaya or Vietnam, he was a soldier in the Australian Army and he was given a job to do, no questions.

Larry's third time at Canungra was a six month posting as an instructor before his second tour of Vietnam, a requirement for all field regiments. The training program at JTC was set and the instructors were there to carry out the drills and training according to the syllabus given to them and were told in no uncertain terms not to deviate from the plan. Having served a two year tour in Malaya and already having completed one tour in Vietnam, Larry was in a good position to be an instructor at JTC and it was a posting that was looked upon as a bit prestigious. This showed that Larry was considered by his peers as a good soldier and a soldier who would not tarnish the proud tradition of the entire RAA.

Malaya 1965-1967



Left, 'A' Battery plaque.

In January 1965, 'A' Bty began preparations for its second tour of Malaya where it would replace 102 Fd Bty and join up with the 28th Commonwealth Infantry Brigade (28th Commonwealth Bde) at Terendak Garrison, near Malacca. The battery was deployed from October 1965 to September 1967 and provided Larry with a perfect opportunity to become accustomed to the operational rigors of overseas operations with the Australian Army. The Malaya that that 'A' Bty returned to was very different to

what they had experienced eight years earlier. With the end on the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960), Singapore and North Borneo joined Malaya to form what is now known as Malaysia, with Singapore later becoming independent and going it alone.¹¹ The two years in Malaya was spent conducting regular beach patrols along the Malacca Straits as tensions' were still reasonably high with a hostile Indonesia after the Emergency. This period of hostilities between Indonesia and the countries like Australia and Britain who were supporting Malaysia become known as the Indonesian Confrontation (1963-1966).

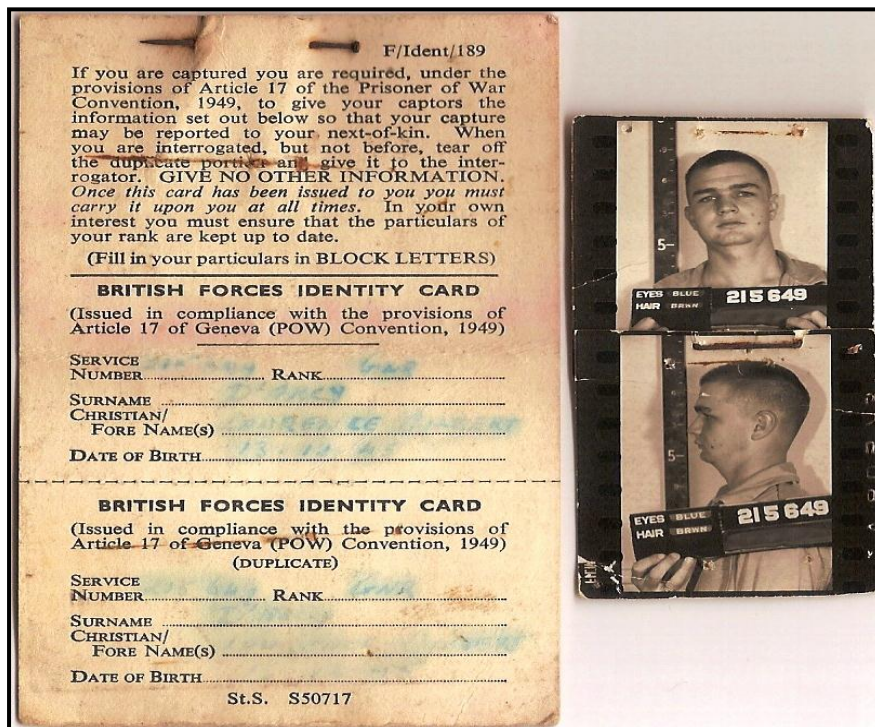
¹¹ Richmond Cubis, A History of 'A' Battery: New South Wales Artillery (1871-1899) Royal Australian Artillery (1899-1971), (Sydney: Elizebethan Press, 1978), p. 278.



Left, 28th Commonwealth Brigade shoulder patch.

The patrols and maneuvers were conducted openly with live ammunition and 'A' Bty would often find themselves out in a designated live fire zone firing their Italian L5 105mm howitzers. 'A' Bty conducted frequent exercises on both the east and west coast and assisted with security and patrolling to guard against possible Indonesian infiltration of West Malaysia. The patrolling, live firing and tropical heat was all part and parcel of operating overseas and something that would prepare Larry well for the future deployments.

While in Malaya, Larry was mentored by Gun Sergeant Stuart 'Ocker' Burnie on the finer art of being a gunner. The Gun Sergeant was responsible for looking after the training of the new gunners posted to their gun. The training was very different from what was taught at the School of Artillery back at North Head, which was basically text book material with some live firing at Holsworthy. Actual training in the field, on operations as in Malaya was a very different ball game altogether and the gunners began to really learn their trade and how to work with other units that may be operating in the near vicinity. Ocker took Larry from a raw artillery recruit in Malaya and mentored him through the stages to the level of Bombardier. Ocker later went on to serve in Vietnam with the AATTV and is a man that Larry both liked, respected and was happy to have had Ocker as his mentor in Malaya.



Left, the British Forces identity card that was issued to all service personel in Malaya and gives advice on what should be said in the event of being captured.

During his tour Larry would also represent the Australian Army in the Platoon Small Arms Weapons competition. This was an annual competition held between all units who made up the 28th Commonwealth Bde. The competition was held in pairs with marksmanship and proficiency with the Bren gun (7.62mm light machine gun), the standard issue SLR and the 'pommy' sten (9mm submachine gun). The competition was carried out over various distances and incorporated different firing drills using all three weapons, made to test the overall skill and marksmanship of the soldier. At end of the tournament, Larry and Ocker finished in a commendable second place, not bad for two artillery gunners, much to the displeasure of the other infantry competitors. For many of the men, 'A' Bty was to be the beginning of some very long and lasting friendships that would see them rely on each other while they engaged and defended FSPB Coral with 102 Fd Bty, South Vietnam 1968.



Above, Larry at left and Vince Dunn in Malaya with 'A' Bty. The two also served together with 102 Fd Bty South Vietnam.



Above, Larry third from right on parade for the Minister of the Army, Malcolm Fraser. The other two soldiers are from the British army and below, Larry driving the land rover pulling the gun carriage for the funeral of an Australian soldier killed in action during the early stages in Vietnam.



An important part of Larry's service in Malaya involved the unfortunate task of having to do ceremonial duty for Australian servicemen killed in Vietnam. In the beginning of the Vietnam War, the Australian soldiers were buried in the Terendak Military Cemetery, Malaya, but as the war in Vietnam escalated so did the numbers of Australian dead and they were repatriated home for burial. Although not the most uplifting of jobs, the Artillery gun carriages were used for these somber ceremonies.



Above, Larry third from left, front row on parade presenting arms at the Terendak Cemetery Malaya for an Australian soldier killed in Vietnam. Also in photo front left is Sgt Robbie Robertson who was the Gun Sgt, Echo gun (no. 5) at FSPB Coral. Sgt Robertson was wounded at Coral when no.5 gun was mortared during the attack, resulting in the loss of one eye and ending Sgt Robertson's tour.

A lot of the work that was being conducted during Larry's tour was called a 'hearts and minds exercise'. This was basically where the diggers would work in the Kampongs to help with sanitation and housing for the locals. This worked assisted both the Australian Army and the locals as it proved that Australia was committed to the improvement and safety of the area and offered many of the locals employment in and around the Terendak barracks. Malaya was a wonderful experience and provided Larry with a good understanding of overseas operations and what to expect in Asia with regards to climate and living conditions. Although the two year tour of Malaya was not hostile in a sense it was still considered a conflict zone and offered all soldiers regardless of Corp the chance to work and live in a diverse operational zone.



Left, Larry repairing a camouflage net at Terendak.



Left, Larry about to head out on a patrol and looking very much the soldier. Note: The watch that Larry will continue to wear throughout his two tours of Vietnam.

With the Larry's first overseas deployment coming to an end, there was a call for volunteers for service in Vietnam with 12 Fd Regt, comprising 102 Fd Bty, 104 Fd Bty and HQ Bty. There was a rigorous selection process and Larry was posted to 102 as a full Bombardier before leaving Malaya and returning home to Kokoda Barracks in September 1967. More changes were on the horizon for 'A' Bty as they now joined the newly formed 12 Fd Regt as opposed to their parent unit which was 1 Fd Regt. Along with that came the mass exodus of its members as they began transferring to other batteries in preparation for service in Vietnam.¹² The two years that Larry spent in Malaya with 'A' Bty was a satisfying experience, he made great mates that he still has to this very day and considers the skills he was taught in Malaya stood him in good ground for Vietnam.



Above, Malaya 1965-67, 'A' Bty firing range practice, Larry sitting on left, Johnny Boxer right and Bdr Peter Prewett standing, (later to become RSM Australian Army) and the only Artillery man to achieve this rank.

¹² *ibid.*,p. 279.



Artillery Traditions, Rank & the Patron Saint



Left, The Artillery badge that is worn on the slouch hat by all RAA gunners.¹³

The badge depicts a 9 pounder RML (rifle muzzle loader) with rammer. It sits above a scroll that carries both the Regimental Battle Honour and motto “UBIQUE” (everywhere) surmounted by

the Crown. The regiment’s second motto “QUO FAS ET GLORIA DUCUNT” (Whither right and glory lead) is inscribed on the scroll beneath the gun.¹⁴

The RAA are the original descended from the early colonial artillery units that were formed well before the federation of Australia. The first guns landed on Australian shores were from HMS Sirius and were located near the present day Macquarie Place, Sydney NSW. The guns were positioned to control and command any possible invasion of Sydney Cove and these guns represent the origins of artillery deployment in Australia.¹⁵ In 1856 the first unit of the Royal Artillery arrived in Australia and this launched a progression of gunner units to Australian shores which ultimately ended the need for the imperial forces which were eventually withdrawn in 1870. The withdrawal of these forces resulted in 'A' Bty being raised in NSW in 1871.¹⁶

¹³ Christopher Jobson, *Looking Forward Looking Back: Customs and Traditions of the Australian Army*, (Wavell Heights Queensland: Big Sky Publishing, 2009), p. 125

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Dennis, Grey, Morris, Prior, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, p. 47.

¹⁶ Australian Artillery Association, *The History of A Field Battery Royal Australian Artillery* (2007), <http://australianartilleryassociation.com/index.htm> (accessed 9 July 2012).

- Battle Honour – "UBIQUE" – Meaning 'Everywhere'.
- Motto – "QUO FAS ET GLORIA DUCUNT" – Meaning 'Whither right and glory lead'. Earlier Australian badges depicted the words 'Consensu Stabilies Australie', meaning "Australia Strong and True".
- The Regimental Colours – The guns, colours serve as rallying points in battle. The rallying point in battle for Gunners is their guns. Thus the guns are the Colours
- Patron Saint – Saint Barbara, Protector from fire and explosion
- Always first in the order of march when on parade as troops on the march are always lead by their highest commander. The Queen holds the highest command rank in the Army and is also the Captain General of the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery.¹⁷

The Rising Sun



Left, The Rising Sun insignia, worn on the shoulder of the left sleeve by all personnel during the Vietnam War.

The slouch hat badge originated in 1902 primarily for the Australian contingents that were sent to fight in the Boer War, South Africa (1899-1902). Over the years, the badge underwent several changes and in 1949, due to the re-introduction of Corp and Regimental

badges, the scroll on the slouch hat badge changed from 'AUSTRALIAN COMMONWEALTH MILITARY FORCES' to 'AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES' then to 'THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY'. Most people refer to the badge as the 'RISING SUN' and is recognised throughout the world as being uniquely Australian.¹⁸

Military Rank in the Royal Australian Artillery (RAA)

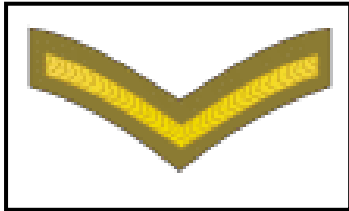
All soldiers in the Australian Military fall under a designated rank regardless of their chosen Corps. A civilian who enlists in the Australian Army as a regular or reservist soldier begins their military career at Kapooka. Depending on their time in the Military some may progress through to become a Warrant Officer (WO) others may be happy with their given rank whatever that may be. A soldier's progression is determined by their ability to successfully complete written and practical testing and also seen by his superiors as a suitable candidate with the ability to hold and command the new rank. With each new rank comes added responsibility so it is imperative that the soldier selected for that rank has shown to be

¹⁷ Australian Artillery Association, *The History of A Field Battery Royal Australian Artillery* (2007), <http://australianartilleryassociation.com/index.htm> (accessed 9 July 2012).

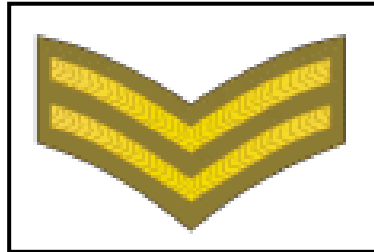
¹⁸ Jobson, *Looking Forward Looking Back*, p. 115.

made of the 'right stuff'. The soldiers rank is only on loan, that meaning if you have reached the rank of Sergeant and happen to cause a few problems to the establishment, then you will find yourself quickly at attention facing a disciplinary board and being demoted to a lower rank, along with punishment and a loss in pay.

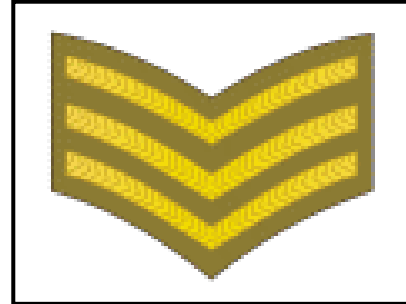
Other Ranks (OR)



Lance Bombardier



Bombardier



Sergeant

Gunner (Gnr), the rank is equivalent to Private and is where a new soldier in the RAA begins. The gunner is there to learn the trade of an artillery man and progress from there if he so desires. The gunner has no rank or insignia and must earn his first stripe. **Lance Bombardier (L/Bdr) and Bombardier (Bdr)** is the most junior of non-commissioned ranks within the RAA. Although the insignia or stripe is identical to other units, the distinguishing features are the RAA badge worn on the cap and a white lanyard looped around the arm. **Sergeant (Sgt)** is used in all forms of the Australian Army, irrelevant of the chosen Corps. At the time of Larry's service, a Sergeant in the RAA commands a gun or was employed in a specialist position such as communications or gunnery computations in the Command Post.¹⁹

Dangers of being a Bombardier

The first time that artillery is known to have been used occurred in 1346 at the Battle of Crecy, Northern France and from this simple design, the bombard was born and with it came the Bombardier. The early life of the Bombardier could be and was often short lived as they were tasked with one of the most hazardous jobs in the Artillery, igniting the charge to fire the gun. As with all new technology, it is often very unstable and technical problems were very prevalent, often resulting in the bombards exploding when the charge was ignited.²⁰

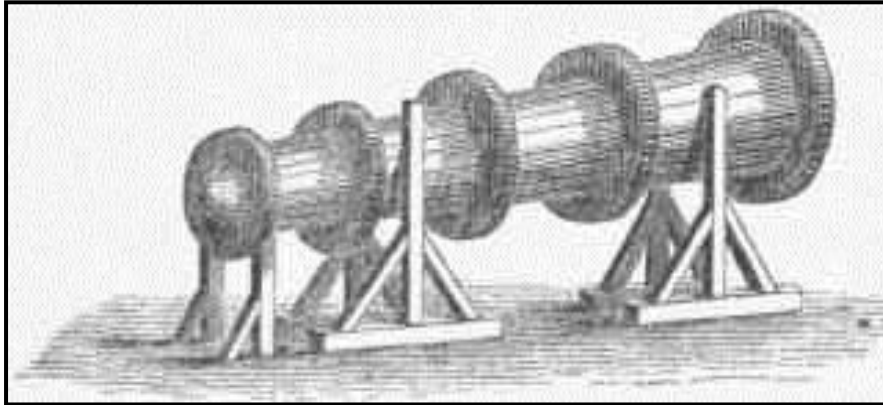
The bombard was as deadly to those who fired them as they were to the enemy, the unfortunate role was given to the most junior non-commissioned officer, that being the Bombardier. Luckily for the Bombardier the technology soon caught up and their life expectancy increased dramatically.²¹ The progression of Artillery guns has seen some monumental transformations since their inception in 1346. The dangers are still there as the

¹⁹ Jobson, *Looking Forward Looking Back*, p. 12.

²⁰ Christopher Jobson, *Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery: Customs and Traditions* (Manly: Directorate of Artillery, Artillery Centre, 1997), p. 59.

²¹ *ibid.*

gunners are working with live rounds, but the advancement of technology has lessened the chance of a premature detonation. Artillery has gone through some monumental transformations since its early inception in 1346 and the RAA has echoed this change. Today the RAA is equipped with some of the most advanced weaponry and their gunners continue to uphold the proud traditions of those who ventured before them.



Left, A very early bombard used in the Battle of Crecy. It is little wonder that so many Bombardiers fell victim to this crude weapon.²²



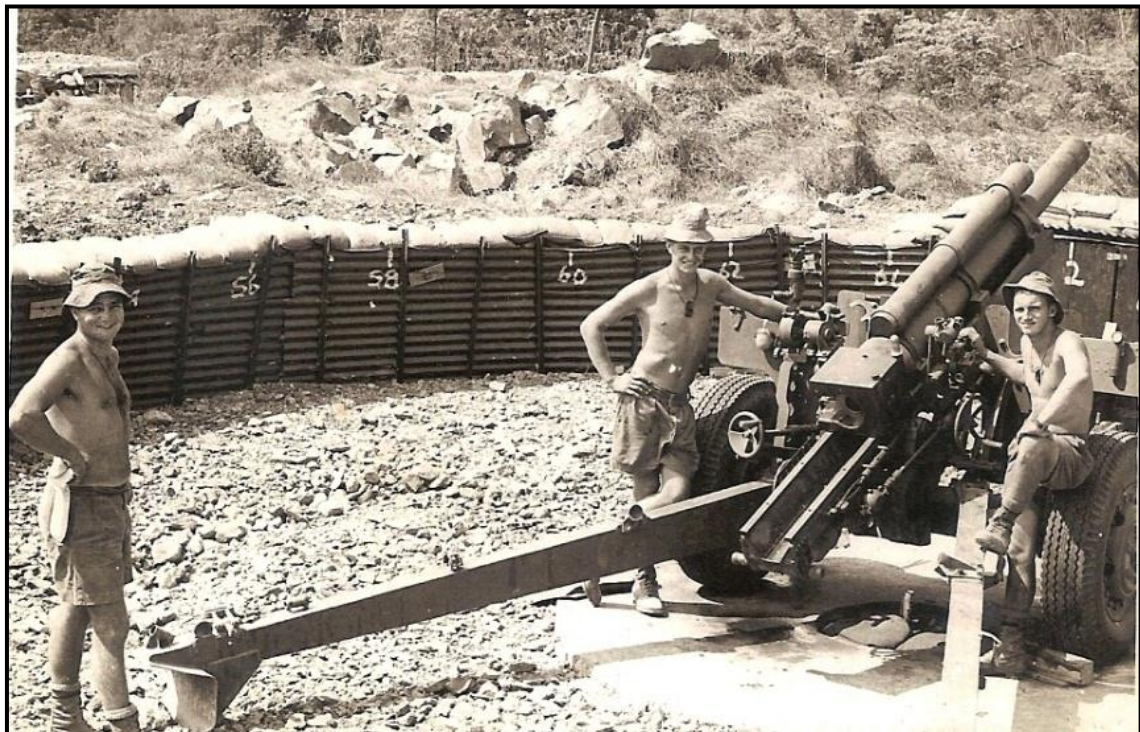
Above, Australian artillery gunners hard at work during an artillery bombardment near Zonnebeke, October 1917 (WW1).²³

²² Chest of Books, 'Battle of Crecy Bombard' (2007 2013), <http://www.chestofbooks.com> (accessed 15 July 2012).

²³ Australians on the Western Front 1914-1918, 'Battle of Broodseinde 4 October 1917', (2010), <http://www.ww1westernfront.gov.au/tyne-cot/images/awm-e01209.jpg> (accessed 14 April 2011).



Above, the Gunners of 2/8th Australian Field Regiment firing a 25-pounder, El-Alamein, 1942 during battle (WW2) and below, Larry standing at rear of gun with charge bag in hand, Tomo left and Tony Townsend right at Nui Dat, 1968.



Saint Barbara: Patron Saint of Artillery



Left, The Patron Saint, Barbara.

Saint Barbara, the patron saint of artillerymen, armourers, military engineers, gunsmiths, miners and anyone else who works with cannons and explosives, primarily because of her association with lightning, and mathematics. She is invoked against thunder and lightning and all accidents arising from explosions of gunpowder.²⁴ Along with all ancient mythology and traditions there is always a fine line between fact and fiction, but one fact is that Saint Barbara's Day is celebrated on 4 December each year.²⁵

One legend has it that Barbara was the daughter of Dioscorus; a wealthy yet bad tempered Greek who saw his daughter's beauty as a means of increasing his wealth.²⁶ Barbara embraced Christianity, much to her father's displeasure and he finally locked her in the tower to spend her remaining years. His attempts to marry his daughter off at various times failed and Barbara escaped the tower only to be caught in the woods nearby. Refusing to marry the magistrate Marcian she was beaten while she continued to follow the Christian faith. Enraged by all this, her father in an uncontrollable fit of rage struck off her head at it was at that moment the sky sent two lightning strikes, the first struck her father, Dioscorus, the second struck Marcian reducing them both to smoldering ashes and this is how she became the patron saint.²⁷

Those who celebrate this day include the British (Royal Artillery, RAF Armourers), Australian (Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery, RAAF Armourers), Canadian (Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technicians (EOD), Canadian Air Force Armourers, Royal Canadian Artillery, Canadian Military Field Engineers), New Zealand (RNZAF Armourers, RNZA) armed forces to mention just a handful.²⁸

²⁴ Harry F. Williams, 'Old French Lives of Saint Barbara' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol 119, no. 2 (16 April 1975), pp. 159-162.

²⁵ Jobson, *Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery: Customs and Traditions*, p. 3.

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 5-7.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ Williams, 'Old French Lives of Saint Barbara', pp. 160-162.



Australia enters Vietnam

On 24 May 1962 the South Vietnamese government formally requested assistance for Australian military aid. This was followed by an announcement that the Australian government was willing to commit 30 army instructors. The instructors were regarded as experts in the field of jungle warfare and counter insurgency, something that the men had learnt while serving in the Malayan Emergency.²⁹

Understandably at that time there were fears of a communist takeover in Vietnam which could cause a rippling effect that would eventually reach Australia shores, this was what the then Defence Minister, Athol Townley referred to when he stated,

If the communists were to achieve their aims in Vietnam, this would gravely affect the security of the whole of South-East Asia and ultimately of Australia itself.³⁰

With the 'Australian' flashes on their sleeves making the first group of Australian soldiers easily distinguishable and easily recognisable, this group of soldiers paved the way for future deployments. Their military base in Saigon was also significant as it flew the Australian flag, giving notice that the Australians were on the ground and willing to support the United States (US).³¹ The soldiers, who made up the first 30 advisers eventually led to the establishment of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV), simply known as 'the Team' and were led by Colonel F.P.Serong. By 1964 Australia had over 100 advisers in Vietnam and they would be among the last to leave when Australia eventually withdrew.³²

By 1965 the war in Vietnam had escalated and by the end of the year the US had committed over 200,000 troops to the conflict. The US government once again turned to Australia and requested additional support; with the then Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies committing the 1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR) in June 1965. 1RAR served as part of US 173rd Airborne Brigade in the Bien Hoa province as at that early stage there was no

²⁹ George Odgers, *100 Years of Australians at War* (Sydney: Lansdown Publishing Pty Ltd, 2000), p. 300.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*, p. 301.

Australian operational task force base at Nui Dat.³³ 1RAR was supported by 161 Battery Royal New Zealand Artillery (161 RNZA); ANZAC was reborn.

Australia's 17th Prime Minister Harold Holt (26 January 1966 to 17 December 1967) further increased Australian military support for the war, and by mid-1966 had established the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF) base at Nui Dat. This increase of troops trebled the strength of Australians in Vietnam from 1500 to 4500.³⁴ From the first members of the AATTV to the final withdrawal of Australian troops in June 1973, some 60,000 Australian service personnel served in the Vietnam War, with 521 paying the ultimate price and over 3,000 were wounded in action.³⁵

ONE DEAD, 6 WOUNDED	
<p>CANBERRA, Mon. — Another Australian soldier has been killed and six wounded in the current U.S.-Australian offensive against the Vietcong.</p> <p>The dead man was Private C. Clark, of Langdon Ave, Campbelltown, N.S.W.</p> <p>The wounded are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Second Lieutenant J. R. Bourke, of Canberra St, Ayr, Qld. ● Major J. J. Tattam, of Mosman, N.S.W. ● Private P. J. Israel, of Lorne St, Carnegie, Vic. ● Private R. Raines, of Bowden, S.A. ● Private M. Burgess, of Ashgrove, Qld. 	<h1 style="text-align: center;">List grows in Vietnam</h1> <p>● Gunner A. E. Lloyd, of Newstead, Qld. All were members of the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment.</p> <p>These casualties bring the total for the current operation to four killed and 16 wounded. Australia's total casualties since it began sending troops to South Vietnam is now 15 killed and 98 wounded. American and Australian troops used teargas, today to</p> <p>flush out guerillas from one of the most extensive Vietcong underground fortresses ever uncovered.</p> <p>It was part of an operation, described as the biggest mounted by foreign allied troops in Vietnam, to comb out a Vietcong strong-hold in Hau Nghia Province, 20 miles north-west of Saigon.</p> <p>Military sources said the advancing troops were clearing the tunnels with teargas and then blowing them up.</p> <p>The tunnels presented a labyrinth of arsenals, caverns and concrete lined bunkers</p> <p>described as unusually sophisticated and well prepared. The tunnels uncovered so far were less than 20 mile from the Cambodian border.</p> <p>The caverns were stacked with Vietcong war equipment — weapons, ammunition medical supplies and clothing</p> <p>The allied troops are backed by heavy artillery, tanks and aircraft.</p> <p>Jets have been making round the clock bombing raids strafing the guerillas as they emerged from their tunnels.</p>

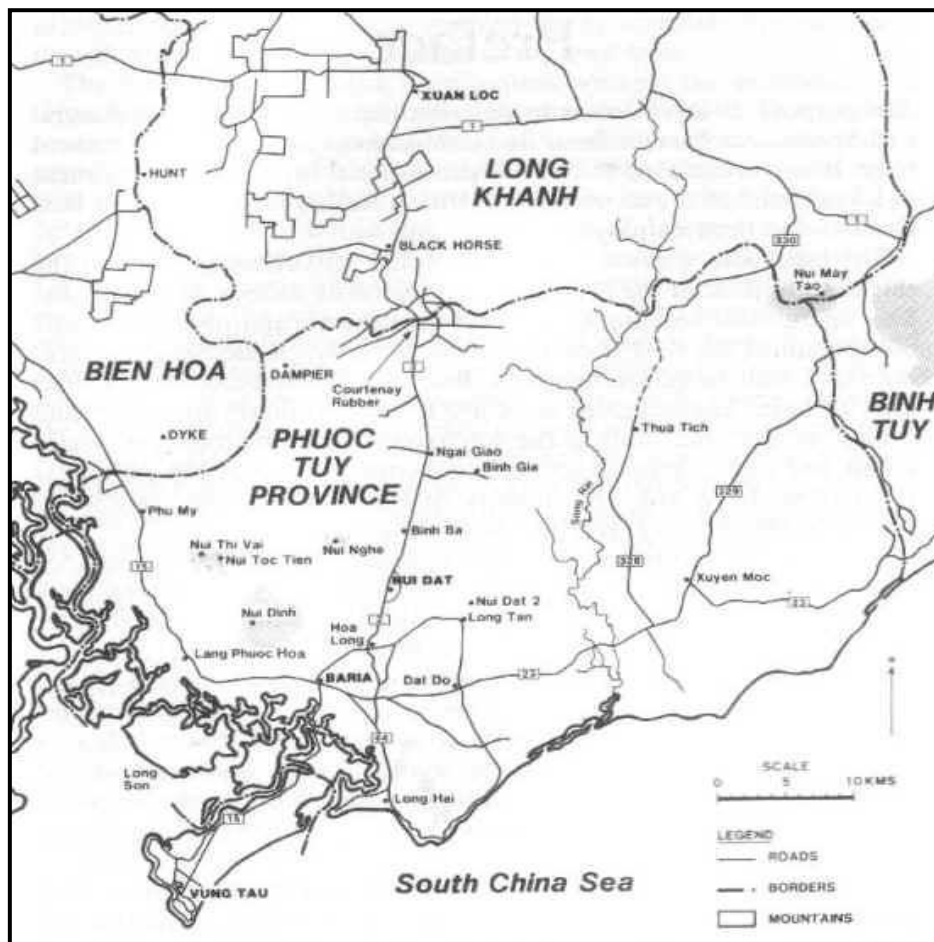
Above, Newspaper clipping from the Illawarra Mercury, 11 January, 1966.

³³ *ibid.*, pp. 310-311.

³⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 316-317.

³⁵ Australian War Memorial, 'Vietnam War 1962-75', <http://www.awm.gov.au> (accessed 22 August 2012).

Vietnam: Phuoc Tuy Province



Above, the Phuoc Tuy Province that was Australia's area of operations (AO).³⁶

The province of Phuoc Tuy had been chosen by the Australian Army as they considered this area the most suitable for their style of counter insurgency warfare. Also 1ATF was far enough away from any possible US interference, something the Australian Army wanted to ensure. With a suitable province chosen, the military set about establishing a location where they could effectively conduct operations aimed at disrupting and creating chaos for the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Viet Cong (VC) forces. The site chosen for 1ATF was called Nui Dat, known as small hill in Vietnamese and was a well-known VC stronghold. For the Australians, it simply became known as 'The Dat' and would be their home away from home for the next 365 days. For every soldier, The Dat will hold memories, some good others bad, but it was their little piece of Australia that they were able to share with their mates in the midst of a war.

³⁶ 9th Royal Australian Regiment, 'Map of Phuoc Tuy Province' (2009), <http://www.freewebs.com/9rar-rvn> (accessed 11 January 2010).

102 Field Battery enters Vietnam



Left, 102 Fd Bty emblem originated from the battery's involvement in the Malayan Emergency and was based on the state emblem of Sarawak.³⁷ Note: The battery is often referred to as 'The Toucans'.

The advance party of 102 Fd Bty deployed to Vietnam in February 1968 followed by the main body in early March 1968. During this tour, 102 Fd Bty was to operate over 30 FSPB's and fire over 60,000 rounds and become involved in the biggest sustained battle that the

Australian's fought in Vietnam; the Battle of Coral/Balmoral.

Larry remembers the enthusiasm that had grown among him and his mates as they were preparing for deployment to Vietnam. They had all been working hard as a Battery and as individual gun crews, the men were fit and well trained and eager for their chance to operate in the theatre of war.

Both the regulars and the Nashos (National Servicemen called up to serve in the Army) who made up the Battery were a team, all there to do a job and, like Larry they did not know what to expect in Vietnam. At least Larry had the experience of overseas service with 'A' Bty when it was deployed to Malaya for a two year tour (1965-67). There were also others in the Battery who had overseas operational experience. One of the main things that Larry was very prepared for was the loss of creature comforts and decent food, which was something that would certainly be missing for the next 365 days.

For many of the new men in 102 Fd Bty this would be an entirely new experience and for all the young men, those Vietnam days would be forever with them one way or another. With the formalities over and family farewells done the Battery boarded the QANTAS flight bound for Vietnam to begin their tour of duty. Very soon they would be replacing 106 Fd Bty, taking over their tent lines and making their home away from home at 1ATF Nui Dat. Boarding the QANTAS plane bound for Tan Son Nhut airport Saigon, South Vietnam, 102 Fd Bty was about to write their own bit of history and Larry was embarking on his second overseas deployment and the first of his two combat tours of Vietnam.

³⁷ Jobson, *Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery: Customs and Traditions*, p. 77.

Hello Nui Dat

Nui Dat was the base for Australian soldiers serving in Vietnam from 1966 to 1971, designed and built as a defensive base with fighting pits and elevated bunkers which were manned 24 hours a day. Nui Dat was approximately three kilometers in length from north to south with units located into certain sectors. 102 Fd Bty was situated between Luscombe airfield which was the main supply airfield and Kangaroo Pad which was mainly used for helicopter movements. The outer perimeter of the base was defended by wire obstacles and belts of anti-personnel mines. To improve the line of sight, an area of approximately 500 metres wide outside the wire was cleared to provide adequate fields of fire and a clear view of any approaching enemy. A common sight not only throughout Vietnam, but also at The Dat was the rubber tree which at times provided some welcome relief from the Asian sun.



Above, an aerial View of Nui Dat and Luscombe airstrip.³⁸

Larry's first tour of Vietnam was from 4 March 1968 to 4 February 1969 and landing at Tan Son Nhut, 102 were placed in a staging area awaiting their flight to Nui Dat. The departing 106 Battery guys gave a welcoming shout of '365 and a wakey' to the new lot of gunners before boarding their plane and heading for home. Larry was thinking what is all that about, and was soon to find out that it was an indication of the amount of days left to serve in Vietnam, 365 days being a full tour of Vietnam. 102 were then flown from Tan Son Nhut airport by the US military and straight into the 1ATF base at Nui Dat.

Larry's first vivid memory of Nui Dat was when he, along with other noncommissioned officers (NCO's) was given a base orientation.

³⁸ 103 Field Battery RAA Vietnam 1966/67, 'Settling In At Nui Dat', <http://www.103fieldbatteryraa.net/index.html> (accessed 4 December 2012).

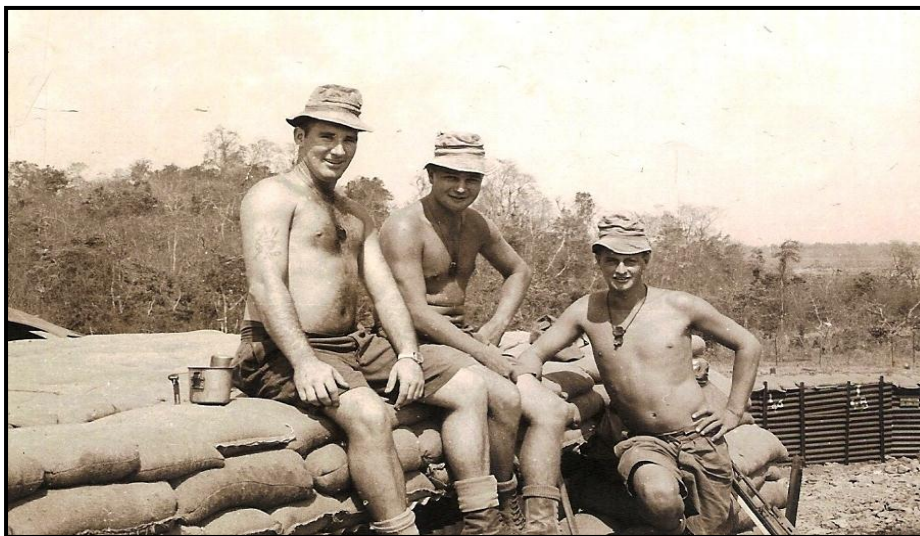
We were in the back of some vehicles and heading around the base getting a gist of the place when out of the blue small arms fire erupted. Thinking shit we're under attacked I immediately started going through the contact drill in my head, when the bloke taking us around tells us that he forgot to mention that the diggers over there are testing their weapons, we knew this was serious stuff now.³⁹

For Larry, Nui Dat was home away from home and whatever was available in the way of accommodation, food and showers you simply had to make the most out of it, or as many of the diggers often do, bend a few rules to get what they need in true Australian fashion. 'The Dat' was to become for most men their sanctuary, the place to have a beer and a comfortable sleep before heading back out into the jungle (the J) to establish another FSPB.

One thing that Larry remembers about 'the Dat' was the noise, although incessant at first over time it became just a part of life there.

There was generally heavy air traffic with planes bringing in supplies and helicopter movements in and out of the area. You also had artillery and mortar fire that was called in to support the infantry in the field both day and night; I guess you just tune out to it over time.⁴⁰

At the height of the Vietnam War, the Dat housed close to 5,000 Australian personnel although there was never that many in the base at any one time as for most Australian combat units and soldiers who served in Vietnam on a 12-month tour of duty, most saw very little of Nui Dat as they were generally out on operations. In and around the Dat there was always something happening, whether it be men heading out on operations, singers coming in to entertain the troops, artillery firing off rounds, helicopters and planes bringing in supplies, the Dat was never silent.



***Left, Ian Warren
Larry and Tomo
at a gun
emplacement,
Nui Dat 1968-69.***

³⁹ Larry D'Arcy, 21 April 2011.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

Below, 102 Fd Bty tent lines at Nui Dat and the tent occupied by Larry, Tomo, Tom Carmody and Tony Townsend (Charlie Gun).



The Mushroom Club



Left, Bdr John Burns (Echo gun), Bdr Larry D'Arcy (Charlie gun) and Bdr Ian Warren (sig CP) enjoying a beer and a laugh at the Mushroom Club.

After heading back to the Dat from operations the next port of call for most of the men was

always the boozier or the 'Mushroom Club' that it was better known by the men from 102. Why Mushroom Club? Simply because the men considered that they were kept in the dark and fed bullshit, similar to a mushroom. The men could head there have a few beers, a laugh and generally chat among themselves as officers were not allowed unless invited, which was very rare.

The Mushroom Club gave the men an opportunity to look at the war from their perspective. Most often they would conduct their own analysis, generally with a few beers under the belt

and decided on the best way of running and winning the war. They guessed this could best be done without the officers, but all knew that would never happen so best just get on with the drinking.

The Sandpit



Left, The end result of a hastily loaded truck.

Life at Nui Dat was full of routine and at the beginning of every day a job allocation was passed around during rolecall which was held outside the Mushroom Club. This was where the men were allocated tasks of resupplying

ammunition, building material for FSPBs and maintaining and improving 102 Bty lines.

One thing that was a constant while the men were at Nui Dat was the chore of refilling sandbags, a job that most of the men were happy to be a part of. This entailed heading to 'the sandpit' located just outside the base perimeter where there was sandbag filling station. The men headed there armed with shovels, extra ration and any spare Military Payment Certificates (MPC) to use for a bit of hearts and minds with the locals.

The task was required to be completed before curfew which often varied so the men would have a steady day of filling sandbags. What went on at the sandpit was not always what the Army expected as the sandbag filling was often overlooked as the bartering with the locals seemed alot more important at that time. There was always a laugh and some fun to be had with the locals and this is often why the men got a little bit behind with the designated task. The mucking around would eventually result in an almighty rush to complete the task and head back to the Dat.

Unfortunately on this one occasion the haste to fill the truck resulted in an overloading incident which ended with the truck becoming bogged to its axel. The men had to hastily unload the truck, get it unbogged then reload the truck and make it back to base before the curfew as they could not leave the truck out there unprotected. Realising that they might have a bit of explaining to do if returning late, they got stuck into the work and fortunately made it back in due time.

Hornbill Pad, Nui Dat

The Hornbill Pad was named after the 102 Fd Bty emblem and was where all the artillery guns, ammunition, stores and men were loaded into the choppers and lifted into new FSPBs'.



Above, 102 Fd Bty gunners at the Hornbill Pad, Nui Dat prior to being lifted to a new FSPB. Front far left Doug Arnold, front centre Tom Carmody, front right cigarette in hand is Cossie, behind him is Tomo, all from Charlie gun. Note: The large cylindrical tubes the soldiers are carrying are splintex rounds. They will become very useful at FSPB Coral.



Above, the guns of 102 Fd Bty about to be lifted in an air move to new FSPB, 1968-69. This was a crucial time for the artillery as the men had to ensure that all appropriate gear was ready to be lifted at the allocated time.

Rules....Why all the RULES?

Military protocol was certainly not thrown out the window while the soldiers were at Nui Dat much to the annoyance of the diggers. The base had curfews in place and if the men wanted to visit a mate in another sector then there was a reporting process to be adhered to. The rules were so everyone could be accounted for at any given time and also the men could be informed to get their gear together and be ready to move at short notice. The rules were enforced wherever the soldier went, even when on R&C in Vung Tau, once again to their annoyance. Below are just a few of those rules.

Rules at Nui Dat (AWM95-7-3-68 part2)⁴¹

- Shaving: All members are to be clean shaven before 0700 hrs daily
- The standard of a unit is reflected by its saluting. The correct salute is always to be given, and at all times compliments paid to officer will be returned in the prescribed manner.
- Sun glasses are not to be worn unless authorised for medical reasons.
- The consumption of alcoholic liquor will be strictly controlled and will be only be available during certain times. Variations will only be authorized with the prior approval of the Commanding Officer.
- The dress manual prescribes that any male member may grow a neat moustache, but otherwise his face must be clean shaven. Side levers are permitted down to the centre of the ear canal; they are not allowed to be tapered or bushy. Hair below the level of headdress is to be kept short.
- Units are to ensure that the correct toilet paper is supplied for the use in flush toilets. Paper hand towels are not to be used in the above installations as this practice causes drain blockages.

Local leave in Vung Tau (AWM95-7-3-68 part 2)⁴²

- Civilian shirts are to be worn at all times when on leave outside the 1st Australian Logistic Support Group Vietnam (ALGS).
- Sleeves may be rolled, short sleeves are permitted and ties are not required.

⁴¹ Australian War Memorial, AWM95, 7/3/68 PART 1-21-28 February 1971, Narrative, Duty Officer's Log, *South East Asian Conflicts Diaries-AWM95, Sub-Class 7/3, 3 Battalion Royal Australian Regiment*, <https://www.awm.gov.au> (accessed 13 November 2011).

⁴² Australian War Memorial, AWM95, 7/3/68 PART 2-21-28 February 1971, Narrative, Duty Officer's Log, *South East Asian Conflicts Diaries-AWM95, Sub-Class 7/3, 3 Battalion Royal Australian Regiment*, <https://www.awm.gov.au> (accessed 13 November 2011).

- The wearing of 'hippie' style garments is forbidden at any time. The wearing of this apparel is viewed with strong distaste by the Vietnamese population and harms the image of the Australian soldier.
- All bars, steam baths and/or massage parlours, hotels and restaurants in Vung Tau which do not display the 'Approved' sign are out of bounds to all Australian and New Zealand servicemen.

This is only a very small sample of the rules that all Australian soldiers were ordered to following while serving in Vietnam, much to the annoyance of most.

First time out

Approximately three weeks after arriving in Vietnam, 102 headed out for the first of many operations and were to support 7RAR on this occasion, one of the last times they would support this battalion as 7RARs tour had come to an end. The artillery and men were moved by road, which was a unique experience as most of the movements would become air movements as the tour progressed. They were trucked to a village not far from Hoa Long which was a known VC stronghold and subsequently not far from the 1ATF base at Nui Dat. With the guns in position and weapons pits prepared well before nightfall, the men sat, waited and looked to the sky as the wet season was upon them and pretty soon they would be experiencing what the wet season means in Asia.



Left, Larry standing with Tomo, Pommy, Algie and Cossie having a break at an early FSPB.

The general tactic of the NVA was to probe the Australian defensive lines at night looking for possible weakness and at the same time creating a bit of a stir. This tactic would hopefully reveal the machinegun emplacements giving vital information to the attacking force. This probing tactics was not lost on the Australian soldiers as they adhered to a very strict firing policy which they were taught throughout their training. Although the enemy may have

been firing off random shots, the Australians would hold their fire until they actually had a good visual on the target. This was especially important for those who were on picquet duty as the procedure was to contact the Command Post and let them know that there was movement around the wire perimeter. The soldiers would only then engage the enemy if they had a positive visual on them or received orders from the duty officer. Unlike other allied units operating in Vietnam who engaged the enemy at any given opportunity, the Australians for the reason mentioned above were regarded as highly professional and well respected soldiers.

The role of a Fire Support Patrol Base (FSPB)



Left, Pommy holding the star picket, with Cossie on Tomo's shoulders preparing to set up the FSPB.

The primary role of the FSPB was to fire in support of the infantry. The Battery operated six M2A2 Howitzers that had a maximum range of approximately 10,000 metres and could have a devastating effect on the

enemy. It was essential that the gunners be highly proficient in all tasks regarding the gun in case the numbers were reduced due to illness or injury. The gun crew consists of at least seven men comprising the Sergeant, Bombardier and five other ranks, a worst case scenario could see the guns manned by three men, but as Larry puts it 'you're pretty stuffed if you are down to that many men'. Luckily for Larry that never eventuated.

The FSPBs' that 102 operated while in their first combat tour in Vietnam were measured in days. That means that they could be dropped into an area, be set up in a short period of time and have guns ready to fire before moving to a new FSPB a short time later. The FSPBs' were pretty rough, the sleeping accommodation was basic with individual pits, but that said it was better than sleeping out in the rain and did offer some comforts. As for modesty, well there was not much of that and any opportunity for a wash was quickly taken.



Above, Gun Sgt Algie, Charlie gun enjoying his time in the bath with Tomo in the background probably thinking about what he can do to Algie and get away with.

The establishment of a new FSPB required a large amount of manual labour, especially in the initial stages of the deployment. The constant maintenance and restocking of stores continued on throughout the entirety that the artillery stayed at the base. Initially, a Battery Reconnaissance Party (Bty Recce Party) was first into a FSPB and the location was determined by the Gun Position Officer (GPO) either by map reading or by using survey instruments carried by the party. Although the artillery guns were dropped pretty close to the required position, once there they needed to make small adjustments according to the area they were to operate in.

With all six guns located within the FSPB, it then became the responsibility of the gun crews to begin the tasks of preparing ammunition and stores and setting up their own personal sleeping areas. All this was to be done in between fire missions as the artillery's prime role was to support the infantry out on operations. The gun crews operated in very close confines with each, instilling great camaraderie and team work. If one gun crew had set up they would lend a hand to the others to get established. They all knew that for the FSPB to be fully operational and effective it required the use of all six guns.



Above, Charlie Gun crew hard at work maneuvering the gun into a new position, Algie, right trail and Tom Carmody left trail with Larry at far right of gun and below, Larry back to camera firing the gun, Tomo (helmet on) and Tom Carmody holding artillery shell.





'OP' Toan Thang: The calm before the storm

102 Fd Bty was located at FSPB Harrison on 11 May 1968 when orders came for the move to a new FSPB, this was the beginning of what many men would describe as their longest 24 hours in Vietnam and probably their most defining, not only gunners in 102 Fd Bty, but as soldiers in the Australian Army. The move from FSPB Harrison to FSPB Coral was conducted by air and Larry remembers this being a bit unusual for the fact that 102 Fd Bty would generally head back to Nui Dat at the end of their time allocated to a FSPB.

Operation Toan Thang (Complete Victory) was the name given to the offensive that was to be conducted by the United States (US), South Vietnamese, Australia, New Zealand and Thai troops, was in all some 70,000 Allied troops, one of the biggest multi-unit operations conducted by the Allies during the war in Vietnam.⁴³

1ATF mounted their first operations under Toan Thang on 21 April into the Nui Dinh, Nui Thi Vai and Hat Dich areas with little result and the period between April to early May the Australian units encountered only sporadic skirmishes. The dynamics of the war would change on 12 May with the establishment of FSPB Coral, further north and into NVA country where the Australians would come into contact with the NVA in regimental strength.⁴⁴ FSPB Harrison had to be dismantled piece by piece, everything that the men had put up at the beginning needed to be removed and packed ready for the lift to FSPB Coral. Every hole that they had dug also needed to be filled in and was more often than not a tiring and unrewarding task, but a task that had to be done.

If you were told to dig a hole you did and if told to fill it in, well that's exactly what you did and everyone just got into the job without too much fuss.⁴⁵

⁴³ Paul Ham, *Vietnam: The Australian War*, (Australia: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), p. 363.

⁴⁴ Ian McNeill & Ashley Ekins, *On the Offensive: The Australian Army in the Vietnam War, January 1967- June 1968* (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2003), p.349.

⁴⁵ D'Arcy, 20 August 2011.

FSPB Coral, situated in the Bien Hoa province was to be the site of the biggest battle for the men of 102 Fd Bty. The Area of Operation (AO) was named Surfers and 102 consisting of six guns, Alpha (No. 1), Bravo (No. 2), Charlie (No. 3), Delta (No. 4), Echo (No. 5) and Foxtrot (No. 6) were the artillery support unit for that AO. Larry was second in command (2iC) on Charlie gun. The deployment from FSPB Harrison to FSPB Coral was delayed when the US helicopters allocated for the air move were withdrawn to carry out operations in support of US forces engaged in a fierce contact not that far from where FSPB Coral was located. This certainly set the scene as the Battery now understood that they were heading into hostile territory and most likely encounter some resistance.

The Chinooks, large transport helicopters capable of carrying a 105mm Howitzer, its stores and detachment, eventually arrived at FSPB Harrison and equipment and men began being shuttled to FSPB Coral, much to the relief of the men, but that was just the beginning of their problems. The designated landing times and landing zone (LZ) for the men and guns seemed to go astray and pretty soon a dangerous period for all began. With a complete drop of the guns and crew around 1400-1530 hours on 12 May 1968, it was all hands on deck and the guns were ready to fire in a short period of time, as per operating procedure. The normal defensive works in the Battery position were not completed by last light due to the late delivery of Defence Stores. (No claymore mines were sited and no barbed wire was laid since they had not been delivered)

The guns were placed into their allocated firing position, ammunition bays constructed, ammunition was sorted and personal weapons pits were dug. The late arrival of equipment and men resulted in some tasks being unable to be started let alone completed. The guns also needed to be protected, but the battery O sized bulldozer was only able to place dirt bunding around three of the howitzers and the machine gun sentry pits located out to the front were semi complete.

With the long and drawn out air movements, most of the men were beginning to tire as a result of the long and physical day. With darkness fast approaching Larry remembers looking forward to a break, preferably a warm brew, something to eat and hopefully a bit of sleep. At the end of the day FSPB Coral contained about 130 soldiers in total, this number was made up from approximately 20 from the 1RAR Mortar Platoon, 20 from HQ Battery 12 Field Regiment, eight from 131 Divisional Locating Battery and around 80 gunners from 102 Fd Bty. The standard picquet's were sent out in position while the rest of the men busied themselves with their tasks or attempted to get some well-earned sleep. Little did they know that their much loved sleep was to be disturbed in the next few hours.



Close Combat: The First & Second attack on FSPB Coral

Unknown to the Australians on the ground, the NVA were in close proximity and monitoring the movements of the Battery. Later that evening light rain started to fall masking the sound of an approaching NVA battalion and two infiltration groups. They moved into an attacking position under the cover of darkness while the Australians continued on securing their defences, digging in and grabbing a meal when able. In the early hours of the morning, 13 May 1968 well before first light FSPB Coral was attacked with ferocity no one expected.

Green tracer signaled the start of the attack and the base came under heavy enemy rockets, mortars, and small arms fire. The NVA probed and breached the Australian defences with the heaviest bombardment falling on 102 Fd Bty and 1RAR Mortar Platoon. The men at FSPB Coral were now in for a close and vicious fight as the NVA assaulted their position. The enemy attacked in massive numbers, spread out over a long line and literally charged head first into the artillery guns. Foxtrot gun (No.6), located on the outer edge of the gun line was overrun within the first 10 minutes of the attack, but the Gun Sergeant, Max Franklin removed the firing mechanism as the Gun Detachment withdrew.

Initially the sound of gunfire did not really alarm Larry as he had firstly thought it was 1RAR test firing their weapons. This reasoning resulted from a previous experience at FSPB Harrison when an Australian APC decided to open up with their guns, but failed to notify other troops in the near vicinity. So consequently when those first few rounds came into FSPB Coral most thought it was a 'Balls Up' again. That lasted only a brief moment as pretty soon rockets and mortars started hitting FSPB Coral, Larry knew then that this was no friendly fire and the FSPB Coral was under attack by the NVA.



Above, Aerial photograph showing state of 102 Fd Bty and Mortars as of last light 12 May 1968.⁴⁶ Note: 1RAR HQ is located to the south east. The purple smoke is the 102 Fd Bty LZ. The bunding of the guns is incomplete with only No.4, 5 and 6 guns protected. The proximity of the Mortars to the guns can clearly be seen. The area to the left has been blanked out as it contains elements not present on 12 May 1968.

The contact was heavy and ferocious and the NVA were within 15 metres of the gun crews when fire support was called in. The first salvos came in courtesy of 161 Royal New Zealand Artillery (RNZA) approximately 1.5 kilometers to the south west of FSPB Coral. That alone was not enough to deter the enemy as a major prize was to overrun the Australian FSPB, thus eliminating effective artillery support for the diggers in the field.

Each gun had a compliment of six anti-personnel (splintex) rounds which contained 7200 small arrow shaped darts and these rounds were well used to keep the advancing enemy at bay with horrific results for those on the receiving end. The guns continued to fire High Explosive (HE) and splintex rounds over open sights with the enemy directly to their front.

⁴⁶ Colonel I.F.Ahearn (Retd), 'South Vietnam: First Battle of Coral 12th–13th May 1968, The Real Story', *Cannonball: Journal of the Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company*, vol. September, no. 84 (2012), p. 14.

There was no time to set fuses, the NVA were hitting us pretty hard and we were battling to keep them out so we abandoned the fuses and let the guns rip with direct muzzle blast and this had a devastating effect at close range, remember we were getting the hell blasted out of us and the HE and splintex rounds were very useful at this time.⁴⁷

It has been written in an official account of Coral, that by aiming the guns towards the ground and firing the round out to approximately 40-50 metres in front, the result was to hopefully deflect the round off the ground and into the air where it would explode over the heads of the attacking enemy force.⁴⁸ This could only be seen as pure fantasy. With all the noise going on around him, Larry and many more experience gunners and officers very much doubt that it is even possible as the guns in question were bundled. The gun barrels were basically parallel to the ground and by firing the way mentioned above would result in the round hitting the dirt bunding.



Above, The 102 Fd Bty, Mortar Platoon and Regimental CP positions and the red line showing the extent of the NVA penetration.⁴⁹ Note: The three guns at the right of photograph are pointing north while remaining three guns are pointing east.

With Charlie gun (No. 3) unable to fire splintex rounds over the other guns and with Delta gun (No. 4) having run out of splintex and in need of more, Larry and Tomo leopard crawled across from No. 3 gun to No. 4 gun cradling the rounds in their arms. The reason for the

⁴⁷ D'Arcy, 21 September 2011.

⁴⁸ McNeill & Ekins, *On the Offensive*, pp. 368-369.

⁴⁹ Ahearn (Retd), 'South Vietnam: First Battle of Coral 12th–13th May 1968, *The Real Story*', p. 17.

leopard crawl was to avoid the incoming small arms rounds that were cracking over and around the Battery guns. This incident reminded Larry of the training conducted at Canungra with the Vickers machine gun firing over their heads. At the time of training not really thinking too much of this method, but could now see the importance of it. Both Larry and Tomo had a laugh about this and later remarked that

If we could carry another round in our teeth then we would have done so, but luckily we only had to make the one trip.⁵⁰

Throughout all this there were a few light hearted moments, on one occasion in the heat of battle with rockets, rounds and grenades going off all over the place, a member of the gun crew stood up and displayed a few Kung Fu moves along with a few words directed at the NVA. This again gave the men a bit of a laugh and certainly broke the tension they were currently under. This ability to have a laugh in the face of adversity is by far a trait of the Australian soldier that has been evident since the larrikins on the hills at Gallipoli. What must also be said is that the soldiers could have very easily been overrun right there and then and we would be remembering the Battle of FSPB Coral as a disastrous defeat and a massive loss of Australian lives.

During the initial attack Larry was manning the M60 machine gun and was laying in what is known as a shell scrape approximately one foot in depth. The spoil (dirt removed from the scrape) was moved to the perimeter side for better protection. The NVA had now come into grenade throwing range and started peppering the diggers in their scrapes. One grenade that was thrown landed on the top of the dirt mound that was protecting Larry, but fortunately the grenade rolled away on the downside and exploded at the base of the mound. This caused another problem as the exploding shrapnel damaged the link ammunition belt that fed the M60 causing a gun stoppage.

Initially Larry was not sure what was causing the gun to stop firing, but could still see movement to his front. Yelling out to his mate Cossie, who was situated in the adjoining shell scrape to pass his rifle over as Cossie could not bring his rifle to engage the enemy from the position he was in. Without hesitation Cossie passed his rifle to Larry who went about engaging the enemy and emptying the magazine in their direction. With an empty magazine Larry decided he now had two weapons that were no longer working, one out of ammunition (SLR) and the other jammed (M60), so he decided it was best to get the one which fired the most bullets working first and went about clearing the damaged M60 link belt.

If the enemy soldier had an extra spoonful of rice then he may well have thrown the grenade just that bit further and I would not be here to tell it how it was.⁵¹

⁵⁰ D'Arcy, 21 November 2011.

⁵¹ *ibid.*



Left, Larry in the early morning after the initial attack on FSPB Coral. The M60 and steel helmet just behind.

Circled in Larry's hand is the M60 link ammunition that was hit by shrapnel and below is the link.

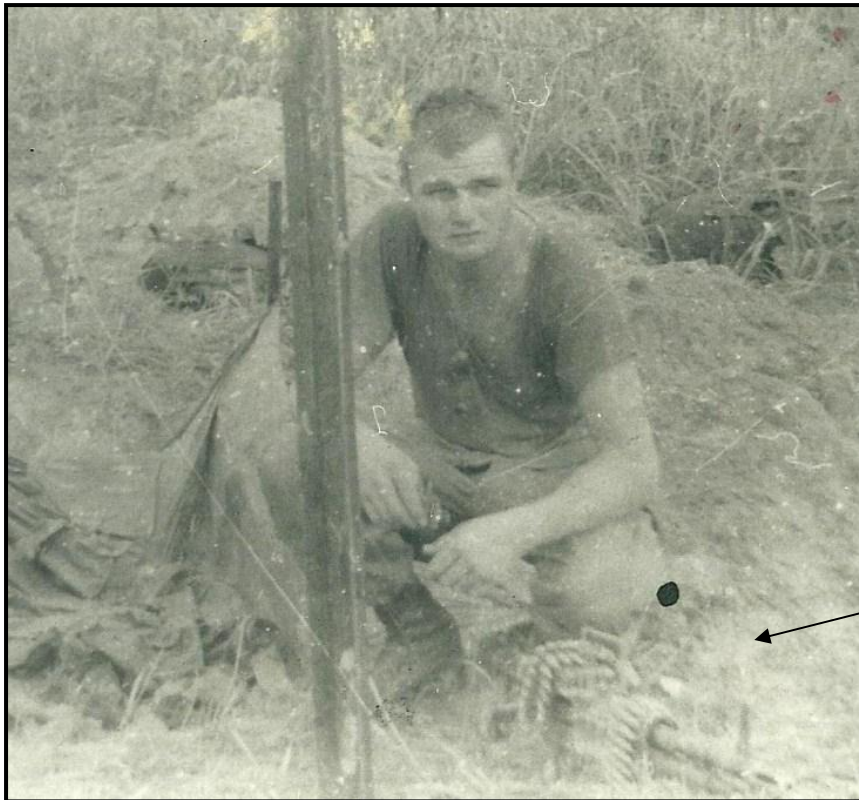


The mateship and trust that the men of 102 Fd Bty had with each other was evident in the way Cossie passed his SLR in the heat of battle to Larry without hesitation, an act of trust that Larry still remembers and admires to this very day.

FSPB Coral was also supported by Cobra gunships and Snoopy, Spooky or Puff the Magic Dragon, which was a United States Air Force (USAF) DC3 Dakota that fired flares and miniguns out the side door. The gunship was capable of pouring 400 bullets into a circle of 10 metres in a four second burst. It had a range of approximately 1500 metres and was devastating for the enemy, but a great morale boost for the men at Coral. Above the noise already going on at Coral, snoopy coming in very low over the area was great for the troops.

An incredible sight as it lumbered around and ripped off flares and an endless tracer stream roaring from the miniguns. It was certainly a morale booster and I would not have liked to be on the receiving end of it.⁵²

⁵² D'Arcy, 13 January 2012.



Left, Larry's firing position during the initial attack.

Grenade impact point.

At first light things began to quieten down a fair bit, with only the odd sporadic shot ringing out as the NVA pulled back into the jungle. The time was used effectively as the men were sent out do a sweep of the area, a job that Larry was never really fond of.

I was not a big fan of all the long grass and after heading out on clearing patrols I really respected what the infantry had to do day in day out. For me I much preferred the safety of the guns.⁵³

Larry was informed by the 102 Duty Officer that he was to get some men together and conduct a clearing patrol. Larry collected Bombardier Burns, gunner Ayson and a few others and began clearing from No.6 gun through the mortars and to the rear of the Battery HQ. Within minutes of setting out, one of the gunners fired his rifle at some enemy still active in the area which initiated a contact drill and Larry clearly remembers hitting the ground, acting on instinct and expecting another enemy attack. What happened next for Larry was a moment frozen in time although played out in fast forward. Upon hitting the ground Larry was virtually within metres of an enemy combatant and staring down the barrel of an AK47.

Without hesitation Larry pulled the trigger of his M60 but the sound that resonated was not one of a live round exiting the muzzle, but a gut wrenching click of a miss fire. While carrying out a stoppage drill, Larry remembers screaming at Bombardier Burns in no uncertain or pleasant terms to 'shoot him' (him being the enemy). Unbeknown to Larry, the NVA soldier

⁵³ *ibid.*

in the grass was already dead due to a previous bullet through the head. Larry was unable to view this due to the prone firing position that he had now taken up on the ground. After a considerable amount of yelling Bombardier Burns assured Larry that the soldier in question was dead and he can get up and stop yelling. The next task was to bury the dead NVA; this was simply done by digging a big hole and laying them in there, no emotion, just a task that had to be done and after that, the day was spent strengthening their defences, digging weapons pits and evacuating their wounded.



Above, the dead VC being searched for weapons and documents and below, the bulldozer hole prepared to bury the dead NVA.



The men at Coral knew they would be coming under attack again and more than likely under the cover of darkness. There was certainly no time to sit around and relax, if they were not out fixing the wire, cleaning their weapons or digging weapons pits, they were restocking the artillery guns with rounds and grabbing a quick brew.

By now my pit was so deep I had to stand on my helmet to see over the top of it, I was making sure that my head was well below the firing line if and when they had a go at us again.⁵⁴

Another wonderful aspect that Larry remembers about his mates at Coral was the way they all pitched in to lend a hand. The simple pleasure of putting a brew on (boiling the billy) for a cup of tea was one way of helping your mates. Everyone had a role to play and all the men worked as a collective unit to achieve these goals. Larry recalls the somber job of carrying in the dead Australian soldiers from the mortar platoon after sweeping the area after the first attack. Although they were all in it together the fact that the men who lost their lives were not closely known to Larry made the job a bit easier.

It is not a good feeling to be bringing in dead Australian soldiers, it certainly makes you realise just how vulnerable we were and how much we relied on each other.⁵⁵

After the first attack at on Coral, the supporting infantry from 1RAR moved back in to consolidate and strengthen the area. The routine tasks at Coral kept the men busy so there was no time to really think about what had just happened, they were more concerned with getting all the defences sorted and pits dug. With last light coming and 'stand to' called, Larry remembers feeling a little uneasy and edgy knowing that an enemy attack could once again be coming at them.

This was the first big battle that the men of 102 Fd Bty would face while holding Coral. With approximately 130 men at the base, 102 would not have to wait very long to be tested again, but this time they would be better prepared and ready to rock and roll. Over the next few days the enemy was spotted in and around the base perimeter and patrols conducted by 1RAR engaged small enemy groups who were testing the Australian defences. With defences fully established and all positions well dug in by 15 May, the second assault on Coral began as the Vietnamese forces attacked once again under the cover of darkness.

⁵⁴ D'Arcy, 23 April 2012.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

The conduct of the battery was exceptional and in that they received well earned praise from the Commanding Officer of 1RAR, Lieutenant Colonel P.H. Bennett which reads.

“TO DAY THIS CALLSIGN WITH G10 (102) AND G98 (RHQ) UPHELD THE HONOUR AND TRADITIONS OF THOSE BEFORE US. I NOW BELIEVE THAT AN EN (enemy) BN (battalion) HAS BEEN SEVERELY MAULED AND OUR LOSSES HAVE MORE THAN BEEN ACOUNTED FOR. I CONGRATULATE YOU ON A JOB WELL DONE WITH STEADINESS AND BRAVERY”⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Robert Lowry, *The Last Knight: A Biography of General Sir Phillip Bennett AC, KBE, DSO* (Australia: Big Sky Publishing, 2011), p. 96.

The Second Attack on FSPB Coral

The second attack on Coral happened once again in the early hours of the morning around 0230hrs (2:30am) on 16 May 1968. The first signs that the men received was in the sound of a dull thud and then approximately 30 seconds later the mortars started hitting Coral. The Vietnamese had the range of the base from the previous attack so they could zero in on the positions of importance. Larry had just finished a fire mission and returned to his gun pit when the mortar barrage began. Once again it was all hands on deck and this time the artillery was effectively used in their primary role. The gunners were able to pound the area where they suspected the enemy mortars were coming from in an attempt to silence them for good. The NVA hit with another regimental sized attack in the opposite direction to where the mortars were coming from in the hope of catching the Australian's off guard and over running the base. The barrage was mainly directed towards A Company, 1RAR, 102 Bty, Task Force HQ and 'A' Bty, 2/35 US Artillery. The latter with its 155mm Self Propelled guns had arrived with the road convoy on the morning of 13 May.

The NVA were soon on the receiving end of some heavy fire as artillery and mortars established the coordinates of the enemy mortars and cause them some trouble. The second attack at Coral brought in unlimited fire support from three batteries of 105mm, three batteries of 155mm, two batteries of 175mm and one battery of 8 inch Guns. This barrage was accompanied with another nine mortars in direct support and air support from helicopter gunships and Spooky in and around the area. With all this the NVA were still determined to break through and overrun the base and by 0240hrs (2:30am) they launched a battalion attack, but the majority of the attack was held at the perimeter wire with only a small group able to infiltrate. Airstrikes by US Air Force Super Sabres engaged the enemy remnants' with napalm. By 0500hrs (5:00am) the main body of the attack was halted and by 0630hrs (6:30am) the enemy began to withdraw.⁵⁷

Once again the tenacity of the Australian soldier and the effectiveness of air and artillery support assisted in securing the base. 102 Fd Bty continued on at Coral without any real further problem, they set about maintaining their presence in the AO and operated with excellent results supporting the infantry in their primary role as artillery support.

⁵⁷ McNeill & Ekins, *On the Offensive*, p. 377.



Above, Just days after the second attack, FSPB Coral is a hive of activity with US military sky cranes bringing in supplies and the men working away re-establishing defences and fighting pits.

After Coral, the remainder of the battery's tour was pretty much the usual stuff of setting up new FSPB's, supporting the infantry with fire missions or who ever needed artillery support. Throughout their tour 102 Fd Bty continued to uphold the strong artillery traditions that had gone before them and once again had shown the enemy that the Australian gunners were a more formidable force that they had expected.

Decorated at Coral were, Sergeant John Stephens Military Medal (MM), Sergeant Rodney 'Robbie' Robertson the British Empire Medal (BEM) and Sergeant 'Algje' Elgar received a Mentioned in Dispatches (MiD) and Major Gavin Andrews the Member of the Order of the British Empire (BEM) for the part they played at FSPB Coral.⁵⁸

Not all soldiers at Coral operated the guns, Larry's mate John Harms was the signaler for the Battery Commander (BC) throughout the attack on Coral. The signalers role was a vital link between all headquarter elements. After Coral, John moved to 'A' Company 1RAR who were supported by 102 Fd Bty. As a Forward Observer Assistant (FO Ack) his role was to call in fire missions for the guns when the infantry was in a contact. It was a job that required immense concentration and the ability to effectively and quickly relay grid references for the artillery to fire at.

⁵⁸Australian War Memorial, Vietnam 1962-1972 Units, Artillery Units, 102 Field Battery, '102nd Field Battery', <http://www.awm.gov.au> (accessed 30 November 2012).



Above, John (second from left) with gunner Black at far right (standing). This photo is taken while on operations in the Phuoc Tuy province sometime after May 1968. It clearly shows the centurion tank in back ground and a M113 Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) in foreground.

The conditions that the soldiers would often find themselves faced with while on patrol in Vietnam were pretty tough and having to operate in dense jungle, mud, monsoonal downpours all the while on constant alert for the enemy and or booby traps and mines added to the daily stresses that the men faced.



Above, requiring some assistance to get out of the mud, the photo shows the gear that John was required to carry while a FO Ack. The radio aerial is visible behind his head and the radio handset is attached to a clip just below his right armpit. Just visible is the top of the water bottle. All this along with his standard issue M16, ammunition supplies, maps, coordinates and whatever else the FO Ack needed certainly weighed the men down.

Along with the nightly news coverage of the Vietnam War which was broadcast on Australian television sets and directly into the living room, newspapers were also keeping people updated with events in Vietnam. The following five newspaper clippings come from the Daily Telegraph and let the readers back home understand what is happening in Vietnam. The clippings are about the attack on FSPB Coral and the actions of 102 Fd Bty.

2 MORE DIGGERS KILLED

CANBERRA, Wed. — Australian casualties in Vietnam in two days of fighting now total 12 killed and 35 wounded.

A RMY headquarters have not released details of the fighting in Bien Hoa Province where the Australians suffered nearly all their casualties.

The two killed in the latest clash in Bien Hoa Province were:

- Corporal Ian Kenneth Dawson, 23, single, of Punchbowl, 1st Battalion, RAR.
- Corporal John Gregory Pearce, 22, single, of Clifton Gardens, 1st Battalion, RAR.

Two of the 10 wounded are from New South Wales, six from Victoria, one from South Australia and one from Western Australia.

Those from N.S.W. are:

- Corporal Albert Thomas Thirkell, 23, single, of New Lambton, near Newcastle, 1st Battalion—"condition satisfactory."
- Lance Corporal David John Griffiths, 23, of Millthorpe—"condition satisfactory."

The wounded have been evacuated to hospitals at Long Binh.

The Army also released the names of another soldier killed and eight others wounded in the Viet Cong attack on the Australian base on Monday in which a total of 10 Australians were killed and 25 were wounded.

The 10th soldier killed was Corporal John Hunter Whitton, 28, single, of Rutherglen, in Lanarkshire, Scotland, a member of the 1st Battalion.

New list

Four of the new list of wounded are from N.S.W., and one each from Western Australia, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania.

Those from N.S.W. are:

- Sergeant Clyde Edward Laxment, 29, married, of Villawood—"condition satisfactory."
- Private Barry John Green, 21, single, of Yagooona—"condition serious."
- Gunner Kevin Nichols, 19, single, of Welby via Mittagong—"condition serious."

- Gunner Malcolm Anthony Hundt, 20, single, of Willoughby—"condition satisfactory."

In two separate incidents another soldier and an Army adviser were wounded in action.

They are:

- Sapper Victor George Underwood, 21, single, of Chippendale, N.S.W., a member of 1st Field Squadron Royal Australian Engineers, who was admitted to 1st Australian Field Hospital, Vung Tau, where he is in a satisfactory condition.
- Warrant Officer Class Two Raymond Allan Purton, 41, single, of West Ulverstone, Tasmania, a member of the Australian Army training team, who received minor wounds while on operations in Quang Tri Province.

He remained on duty after treatment.

Latest reports from Saigon today show the Australian force in Bien Hoa Province has killed 70 enemy troops in battles which began on Sunday.

In actions in the last 24 hours Australian troops have found seven Chinese Communist AK47 automatic rifles, one M16 rifle and a pistol.

Meanwhile in Phuoc Tuy province, a task force patrol contacted a small party of Viet Cong, killing one, west of the task force base at Nui Dat.

An Army reconnaissance helicopter was fired at in Phuoc Tuy Province today but was not damaged, an Army spokesman said.

There were no casualties. Artillery fire was directed at the Viet Cong position which fired at the helicopter, but results are unknown.

Land clearing operations, just north of the Ap Suoi Nghe resettlement village, were carried out today by tanks from "C" squadron of the First Armored Regiment, supported by infantrymen of the Second Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment.

Ap Suoi Nghe is two miles from the Australian base camp at Nui Dat.

Above, Daily Telegraph, Thursday 16 May 1968.

Newspaper articles like these gave the Australian public an account of battles that the Australians were involved in whilst in Vietnam. News about the war in Vietnam increased throughout 1968 as major NVA and VC operations were ramping up and Australian troops were becoming heavily engaged in the jungles of Vietnam.

Diggers kill 46 V. Cong

SAIGON, Mon. — Australian troops today killed 46 Viet Cong in Bien Hoa Province.

An Army spokesman said Australian casualties were "light." He gave no further details.

An estimated Viet Cong battalion attacked an Australian fire support base, close to the border of Binh Duong Province, the spokesman said.

"The enemy attack was successfully repelled and at this stage 46 Viet Cong bodies have been counted at the battle site," he said.

Two battalions of the Australian Task Force have moved to the north-west of Bien Hoa Province as part of a counter-offensive against Communist attacks in Saigon.

It is the farthest the Australians have moved from their headquarters camp at Noi Dat in Phuoc Tuy Province.

The First and Third Battalions, Royal Australian Regiment, with tanks from "C" Squadron, Third Cavalry Regiment and the 12th Field Artillery Regiment moved to the north-west of Bien Hoa Province yesterday.

They were under the personal command of the Commander of the First Australian Task Force, Brigadier Ron Hughes, of Stafford Heights, Brisbane.

The first contact in the area occurred late yesterday when Australian troops clashed with a small party of Viet Cong, killing two.

The action—part of the huge Allied "Toan Thang" sweep of the 11 provinces surrounding Saigon—is similar to that taken by Australian troops before the year's Communist of-

Vietnamese generals declared today the main Viet Cong thrust against Saigon has been crushed.

Large numbers of Viet Cong have been trying to withdraw during the past 48 hours after losing 5700 killed or captured since the attack on the capital began nine days ago, they said.

Small attacks, terrorism and harassing attacks by the Viet Cong are still possible, but the main thrust has been crushed, the generals said.

Twenty-six battalions—about 10,500 men—were involved in the attack on the city area.

The South Vietnamese Government and American military command issued a list of statistics today following the Viet Cong's attack.

Among them were: 194,000 refugees, 10,700 homes destroyed, 114 civilians died in hospital, 2702 civilians wounded, 5270 Viet Cong killed in Saigon and the provinces around it, 399 Viet Cong taken prisoner, 415 American and South Vietnamese forces dead.

Viet Cong guerrillas have shelled Hue, a South Vietnamese military spokesman said today.

The guerrillas poured 24 rounds of mortar fire into Hue last night.

The spokesman said four civilians were killed and 14 wounded. Three

FIVE AUST. DEAD IN 2nd VIET CONG ATTACK

CANBERRA, Fri. — The Army today released the names of five Australian soldiers killed and 16 wounded at the Australian fire-support base, "Coral".

The casualties were sustained in the second Viet Cong attack on the base in a week.

Australian casualties in Vietnam so far this week have been 19 dead and 54 wounded—the highest for any week since Australian troops entered the war in 1965.

The Australian troops, from the 1st and 3rd Battalions, have suffered the bulk of the casualties since they moved into Bien Hoa Province on Sunday as part of an Allied drive against the Viet Cong in the northern approaches to Saigon.

The Coral fire-support base is in the north-west of Bien Hoa, about 25 miles north of Saigon.

The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops have attacked it twice this week, and Australian casualties in both attacks total 16 dead and 41 wounded.

Army headquarters said today the Australians had killed 167 enemy troops since Sunday.

Many of these were North Vietnamese regulars. Australian troops have found "drag marks" near the fighting, indicating that enemy dead and wounded had been taken away.

The Army said it believed the enemy casualties could be more than 150.

The Australians have also captured five prisoners, believed to be either Viet Cong or North Vietnamese.

Casualty list

The five Australians killed in the second attack on the Coral base were:

● Lance-Corporal William Henry Martin, 22, single, national serviceman, of Winton, Queensland.

● Private Allan John Wallis, 21, married, national serviceman, of Newcastle.

● Private Brian Thomas Young, 21, single, national serviceman, of Southport, Queensland.

● Signalman Alexander Henry Young, 21, single, national serviceman, of Accacia, Queensland.

● Private Harry Winston White, 23, single, of West Ryde, Sydney.

Signalman Young was a member of the 104th Signals Squadron, while the four others were all members of the 1st Battalion.

Seven of the wounded were from New South Wales, two from Victoria, two each from South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania, and one from Queensland.

Those from New South Wales are:

● Sergeant Rodney James Robertson, 30, married, of Holsworthy (condition serious).

● Second Lieutenant Timothy Andrew Fischer, 22, single, of Boree Creek (condition very satisfactory).

● Warrant Officer Class Two Bruce Malcolm Hughson, 42, single, of Eastwood (condition serious).

● Private James Allan Poland, 21, single, of Moss Vale (condition serious).

● Corporal Lyndon Anthony Samuels, 25, married, of Anzac Village, Holsworthy (condition very satisfactory).

● Lance-Corporal John Francis Koosache, 20, single, of Maroubra (condition very satisfactory).

● Corporal Graeme Albert Stovens, 27, married, of South Hammondville (condition very satisfactory).

The wounded have been evacuated to hospitals at Long Binh in Bien Hoa Province, a big American military base.

At Coral, the battle-weary Australian troops had an incident-free night, an Army spokesman said today.

But there was little rest today for the Diggers as they fanned out through waist-high grass and scrub looking for signs of further Communist troops.

Above, Daily Telegraph, Tuesday 14 May and Saturday 18 May 1968.

Reds kill nine Diggers

CANBERRA, Tues. — Nine Australian soldiers died and another 17 were wounded in yesterday's bitter clash with a North Vietnamese battalion.

ARMY Headquarters in Canberra released the first details of Australian casualties today.

Four of the dead were from New South Wales.

The clash was the fiercest engagement Australian troops have had since the battle of Long Tan in August 1966 when Australian casualties were 18 dead and 25 wounded.

So far the Australians have found the bodies of 52 North Vietnamese soldiers around the Australian fire support base they attacked early yesterday morning.

The battle lasted six hours.

Four of the nine killed were National Servicemen.

One of them Gunner Ian James Scott, 21, married, of Camperdown, Victoria, a member of the 12th Field Regiment had been in Vietnam only four days.

Those from N.S.W. who were killed were:

● Gunner C. J. Sawtell, 19, single, of Seven Hills, 12th Field Regiment.

● Private John Alfred O'Brien, National Serviceman, 21, single of Crows Nest, 1 RAR.

● Corporal Robert Bernard Hickey, 24, married, of Holsworthy, 1 RAR.

● Private Errol John Bailey, National Serviceman, 23, married, of Abermain, 1 RAR.

Victims

Four of the 17 wounded are from New South Wales, five from Victoria, four from Queensland, three from Western Australia and one from South Australia.

Those from New South Wales are:

● Private Joseph Terrance Griffin, 21, single, of Clyde, a member of 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, seriously ill.

● Corporal Michael Raymond Madden, 25, married, of North Gosford, 1 RAR, very satisfactory.

● Private John Milton Rands, 21, single of Temora, 1 RAR, very satisfactory.

● Private Graham Richard Stevens, 22, single, of Punchbowl, 1 RAR, very satisfactory.

Army Headquarters revealed tonight the battle took place about 25 miles north of Saigon in Bien Hoa Province.

Apart from the 52 North Vietnamese killed in the battle two prisoners of war

ified as members of the 141st North Vietnamese Regiment.

The enemy were dressed in a mixture of green and black uniforms and were armed with rockets, mortars, and small arms.

A further three enemy were killed after the early morning battle.

The 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment killed one yesterday afternoon and one last night.

The total enemy killed since the Australians moved into North-west Bien Hoa province on Sunday now stands at 58.

Offensive

The move was part of a counter offensive against Communist forces attacking areas around Saigon since early this month.

The 1st and 3rd Battalions Royal Australian Regiment with elements of "A" squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, 12th Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery and Engineers are under the command of Brigadier Ron Hughes.

Three helicopters of No. 9 squadron, RAAF have been permanently deployed in support of the task force in its new position.

DIGGERS REPULSE 2 'WAVE' ATTACKS

SAIGON, Thurs. — North Vietnamese troops early today launched two "wave" attacks on an Australian base in Bien Hoa Province.

THE battles raged for four and a half hours before the Australians drove back the Communists.

In each onslaught the North Vietnamese sent wave after wave of troops into the attack.

The North Vietnamese left 39 dead when they retreated.

Australian casualties were described as "light."

The 141st North Vietnamese Regiment started its first assault at 2.40 a.m. against the 1st and 3rd RAR battalions.

They opened up with rockets, artillery and mortar fire.

Then North Vietnamese troops stormed the perimeter of the base.

They broke through the first defence.

Aussies send

Reds reeling

The Australians immediately launched a counter-attack and sent the Communists reeling back.

Seventeen dead were left behind by the Communists in this attack.

The enemy forces then re-formed and attacked the Australian 12th Field Artillery Regiment camp.

The gunners repulsed three charges and the North Vietnamese then withdrew.

The Australians had called in support from United States artillery, U.S. helicopter gunships and aircraft.

Australian troops counted 39 enemy dead when the two attacks died out.

An Army spokesman said drag marks indicated a greater number of enemy had been killed in the action.

The 1st and 3rd RAR battalions and the 12th Artillery Regiment form the base code-named "Coral."

It is 25 miles north of Saigon, and on the route taken by Communist troops retreating from their abortive attack on Saigon.

It was the second attack this week against "Coral" base.

On Monday North Vietnamese troops penetrated the camp but were beaten back leaving 52 dead.

The Australians lost 11 men and 25 wounded that day.

Above, Daily Telegraph, Wednesday 15 May & Friday 17 May 1968.

Late in the tour, 102 were in position at Xuyen Moc supporting 9RAR who were new to country. The practice of clearing the area differed throughout the military forces operating in Vietnam and the US and ARVN cleared their areas by using the M60s and small arms fire as they believed was that if there was any enemy nearby they would either be dead or deterred from trying to attack the base. The Australians on the other hand cleared their areas by using small patrols made up of five to six men who would head out through the perimeter and visually clear the area before heading back in. This was a tried and tested method that worked well for the Australian soldiers and gave them a good understanding of what was outside their perimeter wire.

Somewhere in all of this no one notified the ARVN that the Australians were also operating in the area and subsequently they opened fire as per clearing routine. This came as a bit of a shock as Larry and the rest of the battery were only 36 hours away from actually flying home and leaving Vietnam for good. Luck would prevail as the men were more concerned in getting their heads down in the dirt to avoid the incoming rounds until radio contact was established and the firing ceased.

I was not overly happy about it all and was a bit edgy after all of that and was hoping not only the minutes but the hours would tick away very quickly. It was a great example of friendly fire, the ARVN were just lucky we did not fire back.⁵⁹



Above, an example of an ARVN outpost.

⁵⁹ D'Arcy, 17 June 2012.



FSPB's & Commanders Diaries



Left, 102 Fd Bty at an unknown FSPB, firing in anger.

Over the 12 months that 102 Fd Bty spent in Vietnam, they operated approximately 30 Fire Support Patrol Bases. This number clearly indicates that 102 did not occupy a FSPB for a very long time period and the men and guns were constantly on the move.

Below is a list containing some of the FSPB's that 102 occupied throughout their 1968-69 tour. Although unable to locate all FSPB's due to insufficient records, what has been achieved will allow the reader to understand the actions 102 were involved in. The extracts come from the 1RAR Commander's diaries as they were the Infantry Regiment supported by 102 Field Battery.

Clowes (24-30 April), Wattle (3-5 May), Harrison (6-11 May), Coral (12 May-6 June), Long Binh/Kiama (12 June-3 July), Horseshoe (8-15 July), Gladstone (29 July- 6 August), Longreach (12-13 September), Coolah (14-20 September), Dampier (20-28 September), Cedar (29 September-16 October), Lion (28 October-15 November), Leopard (15-17 November), Lynx (19-26 November), Gladstone (31 November-?), Dyke (3-11 December) Diggers Rest (16-31 December), Chestnut (13-26 January), Margaret (dates unknown).

102 FD BTY FIRE SUPPORT PATROL BASES 1968-69

1RAR Commanders Diaries extract used to determine the FSPB's of 102 Fd Bty.

FSPB's 1968

Clowes: 24-30 April

YS 397633 FSPB 'CLOWES'	24 Apr 68	1030	FSPB CLOWES established at YS 397633. 102 Bty in direct support protected by B Coy.
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(Commanders Diaries AWM95-7-1-77)

Harrison: 6-11 May

FSPB HARRISON	6 May		D Coy, sect Mor Pl, 1 Tp A Sqn 3 Cav Regt, 102 Fd Bty's ni loc.
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11 May	AM		Orders were received for redeployment to AO SURFERS (BIEN HOA Province). All coys moved to vicinity of FSPB HARRISON to enable rapid fly out to AO SURFERS. (1 RAR AO- AO BONDI)
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(Commanders Diaries AWM95-7-1-78 part 1)

Coral: 12 May-6 June

12 May	0722	Bn recce party was airborne to FSPB CORAL in AO BONDI.
12 May	0730 to 1610	Generally confused move to FSPB CORAL due to elms of 1 US Div engaged with VC in vicinity of XT 9027 until 1300 hrs, and the 3 RAR coy securing FSPB CORAL being hel landed in the wrong loc. US elms remained in 3 RAR's AO until 1500 hrs so 3 RAR remained in vicinity XT 930295 until then. 161 Bty was hel landed at XT 92634 and 102 Bty at XT 936293.

XT 964280	12 May	1935	While harbouring 4 Pl contacted 10 NVA with unknown results.
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XT 936293	13 May	0015	2 en approached Mor Pl and were fired upon with unknown results. This was a definite en probe into the defences of FSPB CORAL.
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XT 940311	13 May	0215	<p>3 en were engaged by 12 Pl. They were apparently a scout elm for an NVA coy. The main body returned fire with RPGs which fell in 11 Pl loc. Aust cas for the action were:</p> <p>KIA: 3790506 Pte L.R. SHEPPARD. WIA: 44289 Pte B.D. PRIEST frag wounds to back and left knee, 3791457 Pte P.W. NELL frag wounds to body, 5714950 Pte I.K. MEAD frag wounds to head and body, 2786655 Pte J.T. GRIFFIN multiple frag to head and back and all extremities, 3790947 Lcpl I.L. McCARTNEY frag wound to upper left leg, 3791449 Pte G.A. HOBLEY frag wound to right arm, 1201209 Pte P.W. FULTON frag wounds to buttocks and both hips, 215760 Cpl M.R. MADDEN frag wound to left ankle, 2787069 Pte J.W. RANDS frag wound to right knee and 3791147 Pte R.R. WATT frag wound to head.</p>
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13 May	0330	<p>Heavy mor and rkt fire on the Mor Pl, 102 Bty and BnHQ preceeded a ground attack by several NVA coys from rubber at XT 935294 to the Mor Pl and 102 Bty posn. Guns could not fire splintex because they were masked by the Mor Pl. LFT was requested by BnHQ.</p>
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13 May	0345	<p>En overran elms of Mor Pl and harassed the gun posns occupied by 102 Bty. Fire sp from 161 Fd Bty and 3 RAR Mor Pl was directed through 1 RAR FCC.</p>
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13 May	0355	En fanning out from the gun posn were effectively engaged by 90mm HCL splintex from A tk Pl. 2IC Mor Pl directed fire of 3 RAR more and called for splintex to be fired onto his posn. En endeavoured to use one of 1 RAR more against 102 Fd Bty
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13 May	0400	LFT on station and was directed to fire at en to north east of 102 Fd Bty. A large fire was used to indicate own posn to LFT. SNOOPY dropped flares on en.
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13 May	04 25	Under fire from LFT and SNOOPY the en attack faltered and the en appeared to fall back into the rubber to the north east, leaving small elms behind. Gunners from 102 Fd Bty were able to engage the en with HE and splintex rounds and fired over the Mor Pl posn.
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13 May	0500	The fire used to direct the LFTs went out. Despite flares from SNOOPY accurate indication of fire from the LFTs was difficult until 0530 hrs. The en realised this and attacked again with smaller forces. This time HE and splintex from 102 Fd Bty and splintex from A tk Pl was very effective.
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13 May	0610	A tk Pl with CO's party commenced sweep. Last en in loc was killed by 102 Bty in No 6 Gun posn. LFT engaged en in rubber at XT 935294. 3 RAR ptl with CO's party cleared from north. The CO's party included the RMO.
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13 May	0630	Dust-off commenced. LFT engaged en escape routes. Search of approaches to FSPB CORAL indicated NVA Bn attack.
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FSPB CORAL	16 May	0230	Mor attack on FSPB CORAL. Main impact on HQ 1 ATF and 1 RAR A Ech.
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16 May	0400	1 Pl and 3 Pl were still being heavily engaged. En did not press on once he had opened up gap in defensive wire. Arty and mors engaged forward of A and B Coys on close DFs.
16 May	0430	Flares were dropped from SNOOPY. LFT engaged area forward of A and B Coys. Arty fire resumed forward of A and B Coys after LFT strike.

XT 946294	16 May	0545	Airstrike brought in on target requested by Bn HQ. Diggings seen by FAC, who engaged with bombs napalm and cannon.
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FSPB CORAL	18 May	0700	B Coy, A tk Pl and Bn HQ redeployed inside FSPB CORAL. New locs were: B Coy XT 932290;
		to 1730	Bn HQ 935294; A tk Pl 936294. 1 Pl A Coy was now flanked by 102 Fd Bty. Areas forward
			of A and B Coys were cleared with bulldozers. Standing ptls only were forward during
			the redeployment.

22 May	0300	20 - 30 mor rounds landed in FSPB CORAL. No cas. Counter mor fire was brought down.
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28 May	0244	Mor and RPG fire was coming into FSPB CORAL, particularly at 102 Fd Bty, A 2/35 US Arty,
		C Coy, 1 RAR, and Bn HQ.

30 May	1120	C Coy again received mor fire. Arty and LFT supported C Coy throughout the action.
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(Commanders Diaries AWM95-7-1-78 part 1)

4 Jun	1130	Orders were issued for the abandonment of FSPB CORAL and return to NUI DAT.
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(Commanders diaries AWM95-7-1-79)

Long Binh/Kiama: 13 June-3 July

FSPB KIAMA	13 Jun		BNHQ, 102 Fd Bty and 3 Tp A Sqn's ni loc.
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YT 067184	18 Jun	2001	12 Pl observed 4 people in open at YT 067184 and engaged with arty. NTR.
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(Commanders diaries AWM95-7-1-79)

3 Jul	1230	Rd convoy of 102 Fd Bty, 2 Tp A Sqn 3 Cav Regt (escort), 1 RAR echelon, A tk Pl and Pnr Pl with elms of BnHQ departed LONG BINH for NUI DAT.	
3 Jul	1530	Rd convoy arrived at NUI DAT.	

(Commanders diaries AWM95-7-1-83)

Horseshoe: 8-15 July

576589	16 Jul	0805	POSSUM reported a camp with new bunkers and hutchies. The target was engaged with arty.
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574598	16 Jul	1205	POSSUM reported five bunkers at this loc with a track joining them with bunkers at 566589. The area was engaged with arty.
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(Commanders diaries AWM95-7-1-83)

Gladstone: 29 July-6 August

Place and grid reference	Date	Time	Event or information
NUI DAT	28 Jul	0930	Representatives from all units under and attached to 1 RAR were present for CO's conference on Op PLATYPUS.
	29 Jul	0630	D Coy with 3 Tp A Sqn left HEAVYWEIGHT to join 102 Bty for convoy move to FSPB GLADSTONE.
	29 Jul	0820	Proposed area for FSPB was found to be unsuitable and another was selected.
	29 Jul	0900	The fly in commenced from KANGAROO.
	29 Jul	0915	CP opened at FSPB GLADSTONE at YS 263737.
	29 Jul	1000	A Coy moved into AO 2 with mor sp only.
	29 Jul	1028	102 Bty was ready for action.
	29 Jul	1100	The fly in was complete.

(Commanders diaries AWM95-7-1-83)

298796	2 Aug	PM	C Coy found a tin shed. The shed contained 1500 7.62mm link and 2 B40 rkts. Two old bunker systems at YS 301796 and 303797 were found. Each was of coy size and had been extensively damaged by air and arty. 1 B P Coy—275/65—55m
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3 Aug	0045	102 Bty sentry saw a torch outside gun posn. Movement was seen through a Starlight scope and engaged with SA with NTR.
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YS 325865	5 Aug	1150	10 Fl heard splashing in a creek. Approx 20 - 30 VC were moving east. Arty fired on the track to the east.
	5 Aug	AM	Fresher finds were made by C Coy in the bunker complex. Docus found give identification as 1 Pl 4 Coy 2 Bn Arty NVA Unit.
326843	5 Aug	1243	B Coy were in contact with 2 VC in a bunker with an RPG. Claymores and AK.47 were also fired. B Coy withdrew and had the area engaged with arty. Own cas were as follows: 1200448 Cpl D.A. CALDWELL multiple frag wounds to right leg and left thigh, 61811 Pte G.W. CHIFFEY frag wound to left hand and chin, 3790521 Pte M. ZUKOWSKI frag wound to left thigh and 4718994 Pte B.J. BURGESS shrap to left side.

(Commanders Diaries AWM95-7-1-86)

Longreach: 12-13 September

	12 Sep	0630	B Coy, a sect mors, 1 Tp A Sqn and 102 Bty moved from NUI DAT for FSPB LONGREACH, arriving at 0805 hrs.
YS 562850 (LZ)	12 Sep	0800	Airstrike on LZ were cancelled due to bad visibility.
	12 Sep	0830	Arty preparation commenced.
	12 Sep	0855	LFT preparation commenced.
LZ	12 Sep	0900	A Coy touched down with no contact.
LZ	12 Sep	1037	A, C and D Coys were complete at LZ. C and D Coys commenced search to west.
	12 Sep	1057	BnHQ flew into FSPB complete.

(Commanders diaries AWM95-7-1-89)

Coolah: 14-20 September

412908	14 Sep	1320	BnHQ completed their air move to FSPB COOLAH.
	14 Sep	1500	102 Bty completed fly in to FSPB COOLAH.
	14 Sep	1615	B Coy was complete at the LZ. The coys moved to occupy their ni locs.
	14 Sep		Ni locs: A Coy 389896, B Coy 415916, D Coy (-) 403879, 10 Pl 404894.
	14 Sep		B Coy evacuated ofe of their number with suspected accute appendicitis.
	14 Sep		The Bn was informed by TF that 3 guns of A Bty 2/35 US Arty would arrive at COOLAH on 15 Sep.
	15 Sep		A, B and D Coyscommenced patrolling west.

Y3 389860	18 Sep	0915	An air strike was carried out on a camp.
	18 Sep	1200	TF Comd Brig R.L. HUGHES visited the GO. Orders were issued for the FSPB to be moved to DAMPIER. BnHQ was to move to KWINANA at 313874. A Fd Tp from 1 Ri Sqn was to assist clearing a trail between COOLAH and DAMPIER. C Sqn was to move forward from NUI DAT to COOLAH.
	18 Sep	1302	An air recce indicated that the 155mm guns of A Bty 2/35 could not cross a creek immediately to the west of COOLAH. They were advised that a bridge layer would be made available.

19 Sep		B Coy remained at KWINANA. C Coy with Sp Coy, 102 Bty, elms A Bty 2/35 and C Sqn with attachments remained at COOLAH.
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(Commanders diaries AWM95-7-1-89)

Dampier: 20-28 September

	20 Sep	1200	102 Bty commenced flying to DAMPIER by GH 47. The move was completed by 1430 hrs.
Y3 274896	20 Sep	1350	10 Pl struck an occupied camp. The en fired RPG rkts hitting 1 M60 + claymores and M16 mines - nil cas. GO ordered 10 Pl to withdraw to allow target to be hit with air and arty fire. D Coy regrouped with 10 Pl 350m south east of the camp and the main body 350m to the south west. A small party (A Sect 12 Pl) was left at Y3 276887 to look after the coys packs.

20 Sep	1558	A further request for air strike was rejected due to the bad weather. The GO informed D Coy that arty would engage the camp for preparation of assault by D Coy.
20 Sep	1650	D Coy commenced the assault on the camp and found that some bunkers were still occupied.
1 B P Coy—275/65—55m		

23 Sep	0650	Approx 4 VC fired AK.47s and B40 rkts into D Coy harbour posn. Initially fire was returned onto the en posn, about 100m south, with M60 and M79. Arty was then called in, 102 Bty fire effectively covering the area. 6708871 Lcpl L.P. McDOUGAL received minor shrap to back and shoulder but remained on duty. A sweep of the area by 10 Pl revealed that 4 VC had left the area and moved east. There was no sign of en cas.
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YS 265892	23 Sep	1722	10 Pl found 3 bunkers and fresh tracks. A search revealed two Chicom claymores.
266888	23 Sep		11 Pl located a camp with fresh tracks and they heard voices. 102 Bty engaged the area. Following arty shelling 11 Pl swept into camp. There was evidence that the en in the camp had withdrawn east. 1/2 lb Chicom explosive was found.

(Commanders diaries AWM95-7-1-89)

Cedar: 29 September-16 October

29 Sep	1230	Fly in of Bn gp was complete, Sp Coy having carried out air assault of KWINANA after
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313875		Preparation by 161 Bty and LFT. BnHQ at KWINANA.
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YS 264876	5 Oct	1338	<p>After 102 Bty engaged the area 1 Pl swept in and found a bunker system.</p> <p>2 Pl came under auto fire from the front and left flank from en who were in a bunker system.</p> <p>Due to thick bamboo Maj ADAMSON, OC A Coy, withdrew 2 Pl, engaged the camp with arty and assaulted with 1 and 3 Pls. The en fled, leaving behind significant radio eqpt, a printing press and typewriter.</p>
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8 Oct	1240	<p>The DUSTOFF attempting to winch out the C Coy cas was hit by en fire and forced to return to VUNG TAU for damage assessment. Another winch point was selected further to the north</p>
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and eventually, by 1444 hrs, all cas were out. The CO in POSSUM directed LFTs and during this phase the camp was engaged by BOUNTY HUNTER 18 and MUSTANG 22. After the DUSTOFF was complete the camp was hit by 102 Bty, Mor Pl of 3 RAR from KWINANA and two air strikes. BDA was carried out by POSSUM.

305846	10 Oct	0947	<p>A ptl from 9 Pl discovered a small en camp which they believed might be occupied. The sect adjusted arty fire onto the camp site and returned to C Coy.</p>
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11 Oct	0730	to 1100: Bn completed the fly out to NUI DAT, leaving B Coy to remain with 161 Bty at CEDAR .
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(Commanders diaries AWM95-7-1-92)

Lion: 28 October-15 November

28 Oct	0700	Arty preparation of LZ commenced.
28 Oct	0735	A Coy air assaulted into the LZ. They met no opposition.
28 Oct	0815	to 1115: B Coy moved and secured LZ (RACETRACK). C Coy secured FSPB LION. 102 Bty occupied the posn and D Coy completed their fly in to LION. BnHQ completed move to RACETRACK where B Coy was relieved to move towards the south and clear AO 1 and then AO 3. A Coy commenced move into AO 5 and D Coy into AO 4.

31 Oct	1505	102 Bty engaged en trucks at 677910 destroying two with direct hits. At 1700 hrs 102 Bty fired a destruction shoot at 677904 at a downed gunship which had hit a tree. The gunship was destroyed.
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YS 658873	7 Nov	0702	A POSSUM aircraft was fired at by small arms from 658873. This loc was deducted from bearings given by A and D Coys. The area was engaged by 102 Bty.
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(Commanders Diaries AWM95-7-1-95)

Leopard: 15-17 November

15 Nov	1315	G Coy less 8 Pl left LION with one sect 102 Bty, one tp A Sqn 3 Cav and three tracked load carriers towing the 105mm guns.
15 Nov	1540	G Coy secured FSPB LEOPARD.

(Commanders Diaries AWM95-7-1-95)

Lynx: 19-26 November

19 Nov	0745	Bn Tac HQ and recce party of 102 Bty arrived at LYNX.
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19 Nov	0747	C and G ship returned to RACETRACK, while hel of 9 Sqn RAAF refueled and move of 102 Bty was completed.
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19 Nov	0955	Preparation of an LZ at YS 834795 by 102 Bty commenced.
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22 Nov	1608	G Coy reported shots fired due south of their loc, about 500m away. Arty was fired into the area and G Coy searched but found nothing.
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733893	25 Nov	1411	11 Pl found a camp covering an area of 100m x 200m and containing 20 bunkers and a schoolhouse. It had been damaged by arty on 24 Nov and appeared to have been evacuated at the same time.
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26 Nov	0700	to 1600:	1 RAR and 102 Bty were extracted to NUI DAT by air.
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(Commanders diaries AWM95-7-1-95)

Dyke: 3-11 December

YS 2780	3 Dec	0700	Road convoy started moving from NUI DAT.
	3 Dec	1100	The Bn was complete in the area of FSPB DYKE. A Coy with 2 Tp C Sqn, B Coy and C Coy started moving.

FSPB DYKE	4 Dec	1949	102 Bty fired its 50,000th round in DS of 1 RAR, appropriately 4 Dec is St Barbara's Day.
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10 Dec	1820	GO attended HQ 1 ATF and learned that the FSPB loc at DYKE was to be moved, on 11 Dec, to the area of DIGGERS REST at YS 270870. A sect from 104 Bty was to be included in the grouping.
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(Commanders Diaries AWM95-7-1-98)

Diggers Rest: 11-31 December

YS 270870	11 Dec	0735	B Coy reported DIGGERS REST secure for the fly in of the FSPB.
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11 Dec	1100	Bn HQ started the fly in to DIGGERS REST. The move was completed in 45 mins.
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230893	13 Dec	1454	While securing an LZ for later use by C Coy, 8 Pl heard voices to their south. A pl was sent to investigate and came under fire from en in bunkers. The sect was withdrawn to
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the pl while arty engaged the camp. 8 Pl then assaulted from the right and secured the objective, which was a camp containing 15 bunkers. There was no sign of en and they were thought to have escaped to the south west.

268408	15 Dec	1241	11 Pl were fired at by 3 en in 2 bunkers. While withdrawing to allow arty engage the en posn 11 Pl contacted a further 2 VC to their right rear who were moving into a separate bunker posn.
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276847	19 Dec	0751	POSSUM reported sighting 3 packs. They were in the general area that had been engaged by 102 Bty after a IIFV report of an en HQ loc. The CO ordered that the Atk Pl to move from FSPB DIGGERS REST to recco the area.
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YS 230945	24 Dec	2040	The coys reported mor primaries and secondaries to their north. A VC force was attacking FSPB BARBARA of the 2nd Airborne Brigade (ARVN). 102 Bty fired against suspected mor posns.
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25 Dec			During the day the coys remained in posns near LFs, receiving a Christmas lunch which included two cans of beer for each man. The coys were also visited by the CO and, at different times, by all the offrs in BnHQ.
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25 Dec	1438		The Minister for Air and the Comd 1 ATF visited the FSPB where they spoke to soldiers of 1 RAR and 102 Bty.
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(Commanders Diaries AWM95-7-1-98)

FSPB's 1969

Chestnut: 13-26 January

13 Jan	0745	Road convoy with Sp Coy and 102 Bty left NUI DAT.
13 Jan	0800 - 1500:	C Coy secured the area of the FSPB whilst recce parties from BnHQ and 102 Bty determined the lay-out.

217769	18 Jan	0745	An ambush party from 12 Pl fired on about 3 VC who returned fire. The en fled south east. Arty was used to sweep the area and a later sweep revealed tracks which were followed for some time but eventually lost.
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194888	19 Jan	0645	B Coy sighted 70 VC moving west to east. The en were dressed in greens and were carrying large packs. The area was engaged by 102 Bty, 104 Bty and B Bty 2/35 US Arty. Because of this increased en activity the CO ordered A Coy to marry up with a tp of APCs and a tp of tks in order to sweep through the general area and locate the en force.
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26 Jan

PZs for extraction to NUI DAT. In this move A Coy was to secure the area of DYKE which was to be the loc of 4 RAR's FSPB. D Coy was to secure a a PZ in YS 2380 from which C and then D Coys were to be extracted. The B Coy PZ was to be in the general area of YS 2476. BnHQ and 102 Bty were to return by road to NUI DAT, while Sp Coy was to remain in the 1 ATF AO, to protect land clearing teams, until relieved by B Coy on 29 Jan.

encl

(Commanders Diaries AWM95-7-1-100)



Combat & Bloody good GUNNERS

The initial stages of battle are considered by many soldiers as the make or break time. How will you react to live fire being directed at you? How will you overcome your fear of dying there on the battle field? Will you do the right thing by your mates? These are a few brief thoughts that flashed through the young mind of Larry D'Arcy as the NVA began their assault on FSPB Coral.



Above, A bit of quiet at FSPB Coral, at left are Pommy, Cossie, Larry, Tomo (obscured) and Stoney Bourke. The holes in the tent roof were from the previous night's encounter with enemy bullets and rockets.

Throughout 102's deployment, Larry felt the desire to be tested again like they were at FSPB Coral. The feelings and emotions that rushed over him during combat were varied depending on the situation.

*Mixed emotions, a unique feeling of fear mixed with adrenalin, something very hard to explain. Initially it is fear of dying, not something that I wanted to do so early in life that for sure and then it is all about getting stuck in and doing the job that you were trained to do, making sure you are there to support your mates. No one wants' to let his mates down.*⁶⁰

Throughout the battle of Coral, Larry recalls the feeling of time slowing down, although the battle was noisy and rapid, there was a perception that things were happening in slow motion. Whether that was the effectiveness of the training the soldiers received or simply a state of mind, but the one thing that has stayed with Larry is the dull thud a M60 makes when there is a misfire.

*The dead thud of the bolt hitting nothing is embedded in my mind, it has to be one of the most frightening sounds when you pull the trigger of your gun and nothing happens.*⁶¹

Larry was lucky enough on a few occasions when a gun stoppage did not cost him his life, especially on one occasion when he was staring down the barrel of an enemy AK47 when a stoppage occurred. Looking back on that battle, Larry believes that his military training and his tours in Vietnam have made him acutely aware of his surroundings, in a sense a lot more street smart and aware of potential hazards.

Initially after returning from Vietnam Larry had found it hard to deal with large crowds and excessive noise and still today Larry is not a fan of big crowds or noisy jack hammers which resemble a 50 caliber machinegun firing, but other than that not a lot else seems to get Larry to excited or flustered, he can only guess that his experiences in the Australian Army and his combat tours in Vietnam have somehow attributed to his overall understanding of actual fear compared to perceived fear.

One thing that Larry still admires and looks to the skies is when he hears a helicopter overhead. For Larry, the helicopter was a sign of good things for him in Vietnam, others may view this differently, but for Larry it meant bringing in the 105mm howitzers, the resupply of ammunition, rations (although somewhat tasteless), but with a bit of curry powder a gourmet meal. When called for the Hueys and Cobras could unleash a tremendous amount of fire support with rockets and miniguns to assist the men who were in a bit of trouble with the enemy. The delivery of mail to the men in the field was a great morale boost, a simple letter from home could lift the men's spirits. This is something that Larry believes is important for soldiers who are away from home. What Larry fondly remembers about the hueys is being lifted out of the jungle and whisked away back to Nui Dat or more importantly heading off for Rest and Recreation (R&R) or Rest in Country (R&C).

⁶⁰ Larry D'Arcy, 15 May 2012.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

One helicopter ride Larry remembers well, was being picked up in the jungle by a resupply helicopter, call sign Albatross, as it was his time for R&C. Larry boarded the helicopter with great delight as this meant getting out of the dirty old clothes he was currently wearing, good bye to the ration packs of freeze dried food and into some clean kit, decent food and furthermore the opportunity to head out to the bars in Vung Tau and a few beers with his mates.

Climbing into the helicopter I sat on of a stack of empty jerry cans as there was nowhere else to sit and remember the air and noise of the rotor blades as they began to increase in speed. Lifting off was a great feeling until the helicopter began some steep banking evasive turns which caused the jerry cans to shift under me. Not a good feeling as I began clutching at thin air. I looked across at the door gunner with absolute fear on my face and the expression of 'what the hell is happening' which was returned by 'what's the problem with you mate'. I made a mental note not to sit on the jerry cans in future helicopter sorties and make sure that I had something to hang on to, not just thin air.⁶²

Another occasion during 102s deployment, a three gun section was being relocated by road from FSPB Lion to FSPB Leopard. As with any road move, there was some element of risk involved and no matter how well prepared the men were aware of the imminent dangers. The guns and men were moved by APCs, with most of the men preferring to sit on top, as they considered riding inside a bit like being in a coffin.

During the move, the lead APC hit a mine causing a halt in proceedings. Now in a vulnerable position, the gunners had to dismount and take up defensive positions in case the enemy was preparing to engage them.

Automatically as on instinct you go into a firing positions, but the scary bit was the actual stepping down off the carrier as there was no knowledge of the surrounding area and if there was any other mines or booby traps nearby that would kill or main you. This incident really enhanced the appreciation I had of the infantry soldier who was faced with these scenarios day in and day out.⁶³

Fortunately no enemy was found and the move to FSPB Leopard continued. Once arriving at Leopard the men set about their tasks of positioning the guns and getting the ammunition sorted for the guns. The move to FSPB Leopard was very brief, lasting from 15-17 November before moving off to FSPB Lynx.

⁶² D'Arcy, 12 June 2012.

⁶³ *ibid.*



Above, one of the 102 guns being hooked up to the APC and ready to move to FSPB Leopard and below, the three gun section on the move. Note: The green sandbags (circled below) are used to prevent back blast from claymore mines. Used for defending the FSPB at night.



During his first deployment to Vietnam in 1968, Larry and the members of 102 were flown into an area to establish a new FSPB located on a hill top. Captain Don Tait approached Larry and produced a NVA bush hat that had been recovered in the area and was still wet with sweat and requested Larry to get four other diggers and head out and see what they could find. Not a task that Larry ultimately enjoyed as the hat was still wet, which could easily be seen as the NVA may still be in the area. The diggers were ready and equipped with a radio and an M60 machine gun while the others carried the standard issue 7.62 SLR, while Larry carried a US issue M16. They were ordered to set out and clear the track as Don Tait suspected that this track had only one route in and out and were also told not to be observed. Something that Larry finds hard to figure out as he was sure that they, the NVA were watching the Australian soldiers most of the time.

Taking the lead, Larry led the men onto the track to begin a scout of the area in question and it did not take long until Larry's mind started to conjure up all the horrible images of what could happen if they hit an ambush or strike booby traps in the area.

I looked down and noticed a row of large ants making their way across the track, not unusual, but for the simple fact that the ants were actually congregating around a foot print and a lot of dead ants, this sent the alarm bell ringing in my head and I was sure that at least one enemy soldier if not more could well be in the near area. We quickly got off the track and took up firing positions on either side waiting for a possible attack. I got on the radio and sent a message back to the FSPB of what was happening and for the next three hours we set up a listening post and waited silently and patiently for any possible outcome.⁶⁴

After three hours of waiting with no result, which Larry says with a smile, 'no result was a good result', he gathered that the enemy was either a spotter who did not have a gun or was simply not prepared to die that day. After further radio contact, Larry was called back to the base and reported what he had observed on the track.

Among all the noise of heavy machinery and guns firing, the sounds of a B52 airstrike is something that is hard to describe as being there is the only way to really understand the ferocity of such an airstrike. Larry recalls the sounds of many airstrikes that were called in to support troops on the ground and can only refer to the noise that is similar to a heavily laden freight train, the ground literally shakes beneath your feet, an experience never forgotten, then to see firsthand the size of the craters that these bombs leave is evident of their enormous firepower.

Along with B52 air strikes, the use of napalm was also widely used throughout the Vietnam War. Napalm is a thickening/gelling agent generally mixed with gasoline or a similar fuel for use in military operations and has been used in warfare since the Second World War. What is so effective yet devastating about napalm is that it is very useful against dug-in enemy positions as the burning flammable gel flows into foxholes, trenches and bunkers causing

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

complete devastation to those in the area. Those in areas that were undamaged during the air strike can be killed by heat stroke, radiant heat, dehydration, suffocation, smoke exposure, or carbon monoxide poisoning as one firebomb released from a plane can damage an area of 2,100 m² rendering the area a death zone.

Although devastating, Larry was thankful for its use during the attack on FSPB Coral as air strikes were called in to give support to the troops on the ground and suppress the enemy attacks. The air strikes that were called onto Coral dropped their payload just off the perimeter, approximately 500 metres away in the area that was heavily manned by the enemy. The impact of a napalm strike is something that Larry also remembers with great clarity and recalls the sounds of the jets coming in on their runs and knowing that they were going to drop napalm, but did not really know what to expect. Although the napalm was dropped off in the distance, the effects were mind blowing and devastating.

I can only describe the noise like turning the gas on a BBQ, letting it run before lighting it, and then there is a whooshing sound as the gas ignites.⁶⁵

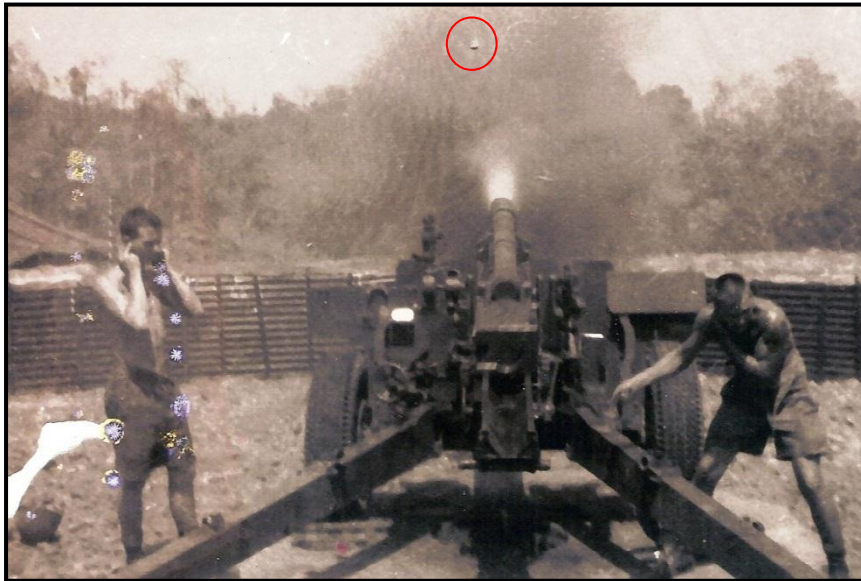
Considering the temperature that Napalm can generate is between 800 degrees Celsius (1,500°F) to 1,200 degrees Celsius (2,200°F), there is no wonder that when dropped it literally scorches the earth to its very core. On many occasions Larry viewed the after effects of napalm as he flew over the jungles of Vietnam and was thankful that he was not on the receiving end of a napalm strike.

Throughout the time in Vietnam, Larry experienced many different phases of war. From the experiences of the battle at FSPB Coral where he was involved in intense and close quarter combat to the fun times while on R&C with his mates down at Vung Tau, experiences that always remain.

Fire Mission Orders

Fire Orders are/were complicated, with specific words having specific meanings. The ultimate aim being to NOT make a mistake, either in the transmission of the orders over the radio, or the transmission of a 'different' set of orders to the guns. I say 'different', because the orders from the Forward Observer (FO) relate to grid references and bearings FO to Target, and this must be converted, by the Command Post (CP), into a bearing gun-target, an elevation (for range) and so on. Finally, for this preamble, the orders FO to CP are repeated back, verbatim, so the orders would go, "10 this is 12, Fire Mission Battery, over"; "12 this is 10, Fire Mission Battery, out." Where 12 is the FO and 10 is the CP.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*



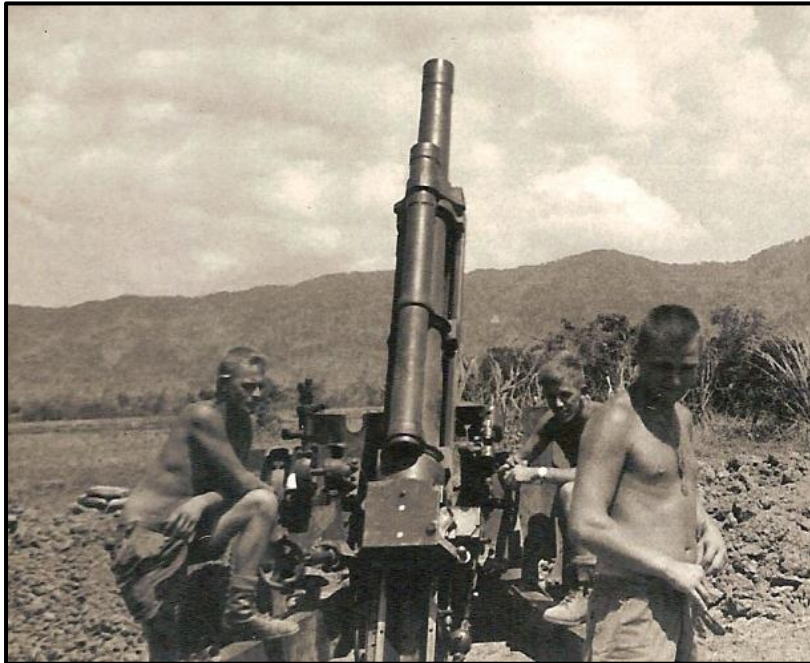
Left, Larry firing the gun at Nui Dat 1968-69 with Pommy standing nearby with adequate hearing protection (fingers in the ears). Circled is the projectile that has just been fired from the gun.

For simplicity, I will not write the repeated orders, but simply give you the FO set of orders.

Forward Observers Sequence of Orders (the orders in bold were mandatory):

1. **Observer's Identification**- (his call sign)
2. **Warning Order** - "Fire Mission ..." (can be one gun, two guns, three, four, five guns, or Fire Mission Battery - all 6 guns). Larger missions would be Fire Mission Regiment, Fire Mission Division, and so on.
3. **Location of Target** - (normally a grid reference)
4. Direction - (the line, along which the FO will order corrections to the fall of shot.)
5. Description of Target
6. Method of Engagement - (may include trajectory, ammunition, distribution of fire, etc)
7. At My Command - (the CP must report "Ready" when the guns are ready to fire)
8. **Method of Adjustment or Method of Fire For Effect** - (one gun is normally adjusted onto the target, the remainder of the guns 'follow' the orders but do not fire; OR the FO can use all six guns (Bty Adjust) which was the norm in Vietnam when Australian infantry were in contact with the enemy. Adjustment was followed by Fire for Effect, e.g. "Five Rounds Fire For Effect" when all guns fire five rounds.)

9. Report Time of Flight/Splash - (the CP informs the FO of the Time of Flight, so that the FO can calculate when to observe, OR Splash is reported to the FO five seconds before the round(s) is expected to hit the target) these details are available from Range Tables for the gun in use



Left, Tomo, Larry and Cossie awaiting fire orders. The gun elevation indicates that the objective is the distant mountain range.

A full set of Orders, for a simple fire mission, might look something like this, without the Command Post (CP) repeating back the orders.

Forward Observer (FO) to the Command Post (CP)

"10 this is 12, Fire Mission Battery, over" - (FO wants all 6 guns)

"Grid 123456, Direction 1600, over" - (at that grid reference, and I will adjust fire along the 1600mil line - 90 degrees)

"Enemy Bunkers, over" - (this is what we are shooting at)

"Adjust Fire, over" - (you select a gun and commence firing as soon as you are ready)

The fire orders are then transformed from Command Post (CP) to guns. When the guns receive and understand the orders they acknowledge the orders by lighting a 'light on the Tannoy'.

The orders would go like this.

Command Post (CP) to the guns

"Fire Mission Battery" - (as ordered by the FO)

"HE M51 Quick, Charge 4, No 3 Load" - (ammunition to be used, the fuse setting, and nomination of the gun which will adjust fire)

"Bearing 5650" - (bearing gun-target)

"Elevation 327" - (elevation required, with Charge 4, in order to hit the target)

"No 3, Adjust Fire" - (No 3 can fire when the gun is laid)

As soon as No 3 fires, the Signaler in the CP will report "Shot, over" to the FO, to warn him that the projectile is on its way.

With both of these sets of orders (FO-CP and CP-guns) there are a multitude of variations and almost no two sets of orders would be the same. The important part of the fire mission is the sequence of orders; this is something that is critical, especially when the artillery is firing their guns in support of the infantry. The worst case scenario is a round falling in among their troops, creating a blue on blue. To prevent a blue on blue from happening, the sequence of fire is known by all so that if an order is missed, the receiver of the order can ask for verification of what is missing.

102 Field Battery 12 Field Regiment Royal Australian Artillery

Battery Appointments

Battery Commander – Major Gavin Andrews, Captain – David Brooks, Captain – Don Tait

Gun Position Officer- Lt Ian Ahearn, 2Lt Bob Lowry

Section Commander Right - 2Lt Bob Lowry, 2Lt Ron Lenard

Section Commander Left – 2Lt Matt Cleland, 2Lt ‘Dutch’ Holland

BSM WO2 – Arthur Cox

Battery Guide- WO2 Les Wheeler, WO2 Lee Pullen

Bombardier – Chris Coape-Smith, Bombardier – Dave Lang

Lance Bombardier – Ian Diamond

BC's Party

Major- Gavin Andrews

Sergeant- Nev Lemon

Bombardier- John Femby

Gunner- Charlie Hankin, Dave Carlson, Geoff Weismantle,
Kevin Le Nephew, Trevor Bryant, Russel ‘Red’ Hogan

Forward Observer Parties

A Company: Capt Ernie Jacobs, Bdr John Harms, Gnrs Ian Black, Val Barry, Chris Eldridge

B Company: Capt Don Tait, Capt Poole, 2Lt Ronald Mayne-Leonard, Bdr Dale Quigley, Gnrs Jeff Knox, Bob Hart, Steve Filewood, Geoff Thomas, Graham Reid, Peter Daff

C Company: Capt Geoff Reed, Lt Ian Ahearn, 2Lt Bob Lowry, Gnrs Russel Hogan, Jack Summers, John Femby

D Company: Lt Gordon Alexander, Bdr John ‘Bluey’ Ericsson, John Gainsford, Ian Warren
Gnrs Vince Dunn, Colin Oriti, Jeff Rendall, John Free, Jeff Knox

Battery Surveyors

Sergeant- Nev Lemon, Dick Creek

Bombardier- Ray McVey

Gunners- Stan Carbines, Jeff Dwyer, Rick Cranna, Neil Lloyd-Jones, 'Snowy' Easton,
Trevor Bryant, Ross Prowse, Peter Storey, Mal Chambers

Battery Headquarters

Captains- David Brooks, Don Tait

BSM WO2 – Arthur Cox

Bombardiers- Ian Coape-Smith, Dave Lang

Lance Bombardier- Ian Diamond

Battery Q Store

Staff Sergeant- Bob Bushby

Bombardier- Dave Lang

Gunner- Foster

Art Sigs

Sergeant- Maurie Lashman

Gunners- Jack Arnold, Vince Dunn, Russell Hogan, John Lynch, Bob Hart

Chris Eldridge, Barry Twoomey, Bob 'Dodger' Noonan

Alpha, No 1 Gun

Sergeant - Ray Dial

Lance Bombardier - Neil Jardine,

Lance Bombardier - George Bale

Gunner - Ron Maher (Bluey), Gunner - Neil Ahern

Gunner - Alan Floyd, Gunner - Lou Le Jeune

Gunner - John F. Feint, Gunner - Ray Carlin

Gunner - Rex Childs, Gunner - Graham Gourlay

Gunner - Douglas Arnold,

Gunner - John Free

Bravo, No 2 Gun

Sergeant - Leonard Humphry (Skeeter)

Bombardier - Kevin J. Williams (Shorty)

Lance Bombardier - Geoff Grimish (Grimmo)

Gunner - M. Vance (Jock)

Gunner - Peter Riley

Gunner - Kevin Nichols

Gunner - Bruno Kurkowski

Gunner - Paul Haw

Gunner - Steve Beer

Gunner - J. Easton (Snowy)

Gunner - Bill Collier

Charlie, No 3 Gun

Sergeant - Lindsay Elgar (Algie)

Bombardier - Larry D'Arcy

Lance Bombardier - David Thomas (Tomo)

Gunner - Robert Costello (Cossie)

Gunner - Dennis Fisher (Pommy)

Gunner - Tom Carmody

Gunner - Tony Townsend

Gunner - Richard Grey (Dick)

Gunner - Val Barry

Gunner - Peter Geelen

Delta, No 4 Gun

Sergeant - L. John. Stephens

Bombardier - Ray Darragh

Bombardier - Barry J. Twomey

Gunner - Jimmy Cook

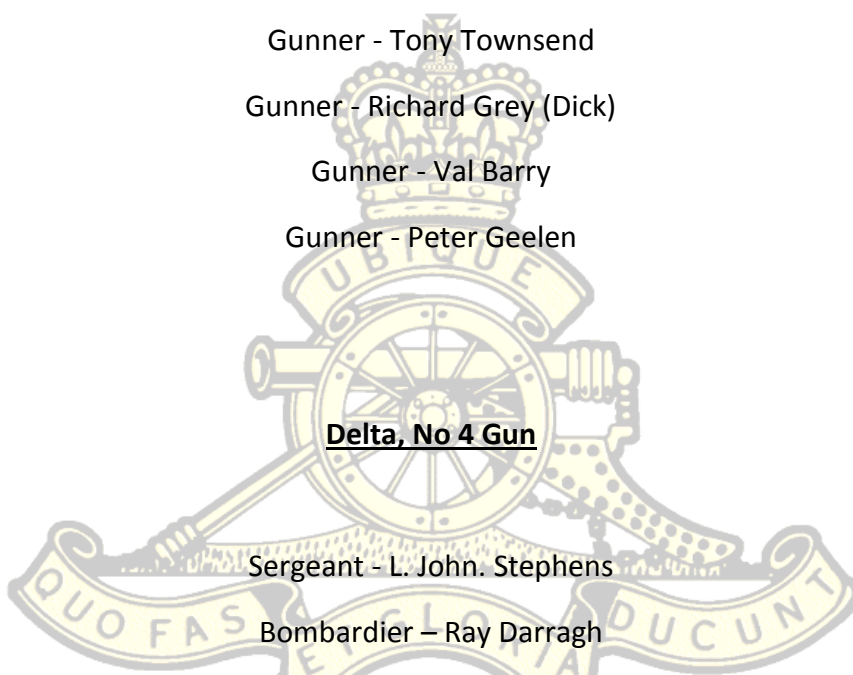
Gunner - Richard A. Duldig (Dick)

Gunner - Stuart McKeown

Gunner - Duncan McDonald

Gunner - Bill Johnson

Gunner - John Hahn



Echo, No 5 Gun

Sergeant – Charles Robertson (Robbie)

Sergeant - Len McMullen

Bombardier - John Burns

Lance Bombardier - Laurie Bird

Gunner – Dave Carlson

Gunner - Jeff Stein

Gunner - Ray Smith

Gunner - Joe Herman

Gunner - Bruce Morris

Gunner - Tony Klisc

Gunner - Robin Parkinson

Foxtrot, No 6 Gun

Sergeant - Max Franklin

Bombardier - Tony King

Gunner- Greg Ayson

Gunner – Tim Browne

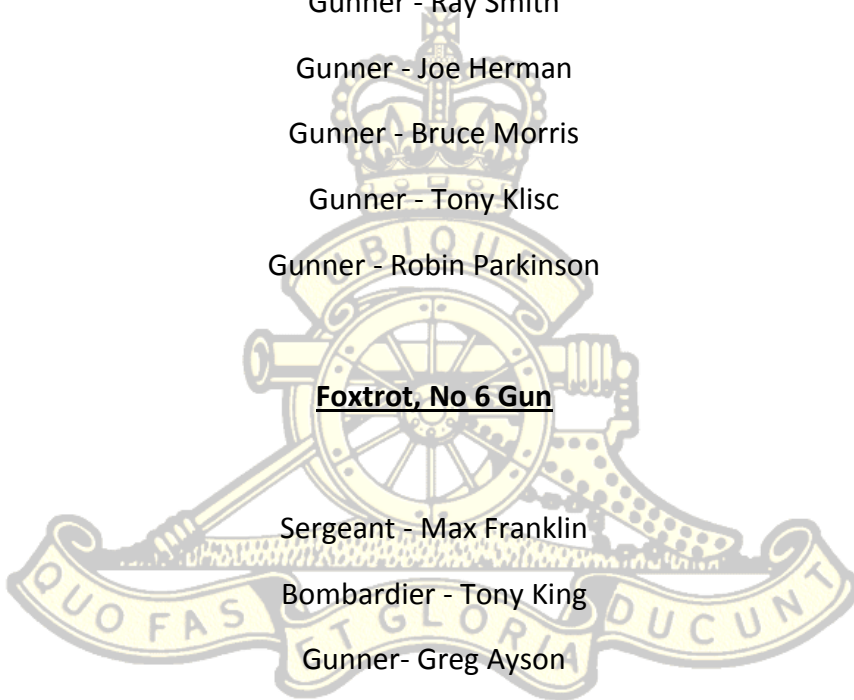
Gunner - John Schwarze

Gunner - Ken Walker

Gunner – Bill Farqueson

Gunner – Allan Good

Gunner – W.J Grimes (Mick)



Command Post

Gun Position Officer – Lt Ian Ahearn (Scrubber)

Survey Sergeants – Dick Creek, Maurie Lashman

Bdrs – Ray McVey, Stan Carbines

Gnrs – Geoff Dwyer, Russel Hogan, Rick Cranna, Jeff Weismantle

Charlie Hankin, Dave Carlson, Trevor Bryant

Kevin L. Nephew, Neil Lloyd-Jones

Transport Section

Sergeant- Arthur Glendenning

Bombardiers- Kevin 'Shorty' Williams, Dennis Willmot

Gunners- Doug Arnold, Bill Collier, Robert Costello, Peter Leonard,

Dave Carlson, Peter Riley, Cyril Tee, Bruce Browne

Attached Troops

Medic- Corporal Alistair 'Doc' McKenzie

HQ Battery Personnel at FSPB Coral

Captain- Mick Elkman

WO1(RSM)- Les Partridge, WO2(BSM)- Garth Ellis

Sergeants- 'Bluey' Lamont, Arthur Penn

Bombardier- Andy Forsdike

Gunners- Ian Scott, Michael Sawtell, Mal Hundt, Dennis Kershaw,

Vic Page, Rod 'Ginger' Orford, David Dalton, Owen Hood



Goodbye Nui Dat

As 102 Fd Bty's 1968-69 tour neared completion the feeling among then men was one of satisfaction and of a job well done. The call went out to the new guys coming in was '365 and a wakey', basically telling them that they had a whole year to look forward to in Vietnam. 102 had accomplished a great deal in their tour and were fortunate enough to be returning home without too many losses. Those they did lose in battle were not forgotten by the men as they picked up their kit had a good clean up and left Nui Dat.



Above, John Harms, Tomo, Inchy and Larry, having a last drink at 'The Dat'. The bottles of spirits the men have are illegal for regular soldiers, but hey it was their last night and what could the establishment do? Send them to Vietnam.

It was a low key affair for the men leaving Nui Dat, mostly happy to be leaving and looking forward to getting home to family and friends. From Nui Dat to Tan Son Nhut airport Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) and a short wait to board the QANTAS 'Freedom Bird', to take them

home. Not allowed off the base at Tan Son Nhut the men milled around and generally chatted among themselves until the time came to board. Once airborne they were on their way home and it was time for a well-earned beer or two or a few more. Although the beer was free flowing Larry recalls that there was not a lot of activity on the plane as the atmosphere was pretty subdued, not a lot of reflection on the flight home, just happy to be getting out and heading home to see the family was the main thought going through Larry's mind.

Arriving late, Larry remembers coming over Sydney in the dark of night, but not really wondering why they were flown it at that time. For Larry it was simply, 'that's what the Army did so no problem'. Checked in through customs to make sure none of the soldiers were bringing in any contraband, those who were housed at Holsworthy like Larry, simply boarded the bus and headed to Holsworthy Army Barracks to be reunited with his family. Upon returning from Vietnam, Larry was promoted from Bombardier to Sergeant which was well deserved. After being given a new posting and a return date Larry took his required six weeks leave and was able to leave the Army behind for a short well-earned break.

For many it was the end of their time in the Army, many of the Nashos went home to pick up their lives while others decided on a career in the Army. For the Regulars and Nashos it was time to continue on with life and try to put the past behind. This is what the Army would have preferred, but unfortunately for many this was not as simple a task as the Army had expected. For Larry it was back home to Holsworthy and family and to see what the Army had planned for the future.

I was happy to be heading home to family and friends and was very proud in what not only I, but what all the blokes in 102 had achieved.⁶⁶

There was no welcome home parade from the government or from the Regiment itself, the Battery simply got on with the job of being home. Unlike many who came home on the HMAS Sydney as a Battalion, they were fortunate enough to be rewarded with a march through the city street. This in comparison to 102 Field Battery which comprised an approximate total of 100 men upon return, no such march or parade was given. Back at Holsworthy, the time was spent doing general duties around the barracks, training the new artillery gunners along with sharpening the skill of the old hands. With all this happening a rotation was coming up and 'A' Bty was heading to Vietnam and Larry requested and was granted a transfer to 'A' Bty. Pretty soon the battery would be heading up to Townsville for training and then off to Vietnam.

⁶⁶ D'Arcy, 7 July 2012.

The photograph below was taken in 1969 while Larry was still with 102 Fd Bty, before his posting to 'A' Bty. The clipping from the Daily Mercury (Illawarra Mercury) was cut out by Larry's Mum and was recently found among family documents and is another proud memento that the family now has of Larry.

VIETNAM BATTLE TRAINING



Two Wollongong men in Queensland on Vietnam battle training are Sergeant L. Darcy, 23 (left) and Gunner G. Kay, 21.

They are attached to the Army's 102nd Field Battery, Royal Australian Artillery.

The unit is on exercise in the Shoalwater Area of North Queensland for the Vietnam preparation of the 8th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment.

Sgt Darcy is the commander of one of the battery's six 105mm pack howitzer guns.

The 8th Battalion leaves for its first tour of Vietnam duty before the end of the year.

Above, Daily Mercury, Tuesday 14 October 1969.



12th Field Regiment: Memories from Vietnam



Left, Bdr John Burns (Echo gun) all dressed up and looking very stylish, Nui Dat 1968-69.

Below, LBDR Geoff Grimish 'Grimmo' and SGT Leonard Humphry 'Skeeter' (Bravo gun) relaxing at a FSPB.





Above, 102 Fd Bty guns have just been dropped in at a FSPB, Vietnam 1968-69 and below, Cossie and Tomo (Charlie gun), Alan Floyd (Alpha gun) having a yarn. Probably asking Tomo for a lend of the M79.





Above left, standing is Larry, at back is Algie and Tomo, sitting at centre on gun trail is Dick Gray, Tom Carmody, Tony Townsend, kneeling is Pommy Fisher.



Above, Paul Haw sitting on top expended shells and as you can see it was a tough day at the office for the gunners at the Horseshoe 8-15 July 1968-69. Paul was later wounded in an APC mine incident and stayed on to continue his tour.



Above, M60 gun pit in the process of being completed with all the additional equipment that was required. It generally took two men to work on the gun pit along with some help from the dozer to push the dirt around. The hole was dug by hand making it pretty tough going in the beginning. Below Tomo, Cossie and Larry awaiting fire orders at unknown FSPB.



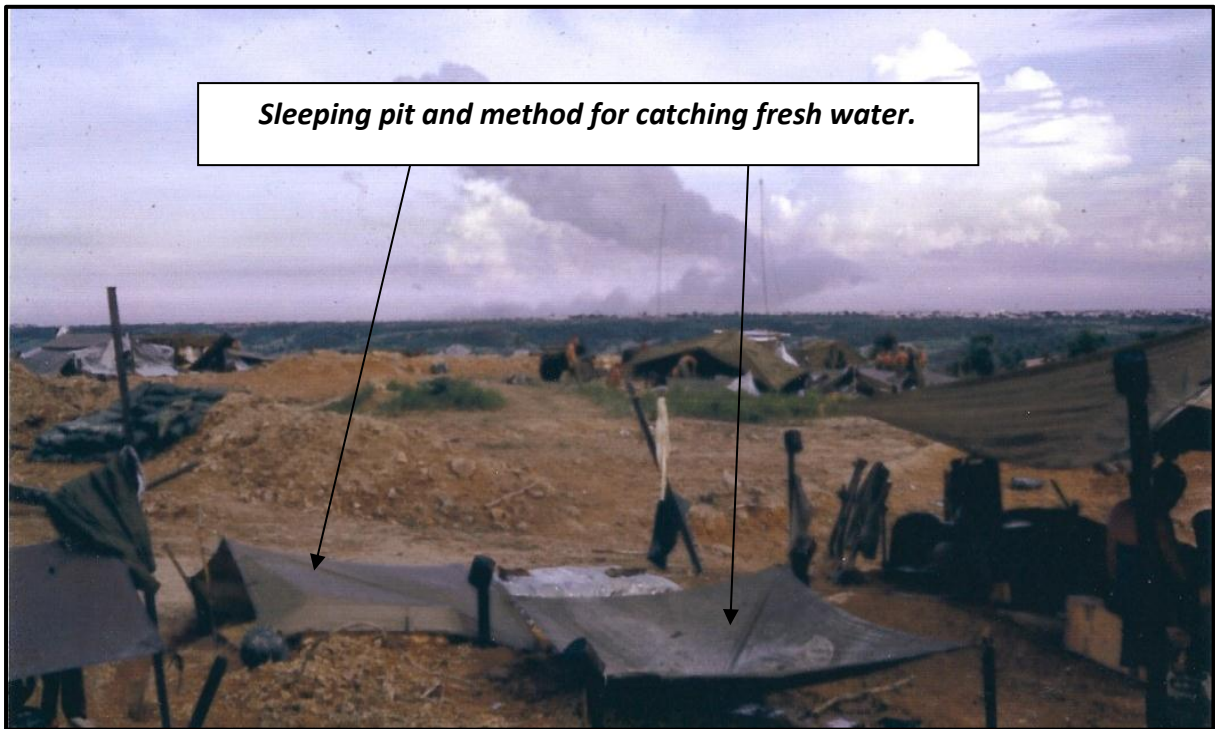


Above, Larry at a FSPB during 1968-69, and in the background is a bridge laying machine and below, an early move for 102 Fd Bty as the Chinook departs.





Above, Left to right is Larry, Algie and Pommy having a brew during a short break between setting up another FSPB. Quite often one man would head off and get the brew going and by pooling the rations the men could then enjoy a reasonable tasting meal and a hot cuppa and below, another FSPB occupied by 102 and highlights the rough conditions that the men lived in.





Left, Larry (facing camera) not looking overly happy with proceedings and Tom Carmody in the back of a truck, either heading to or from Nui Dat, 1968-69.



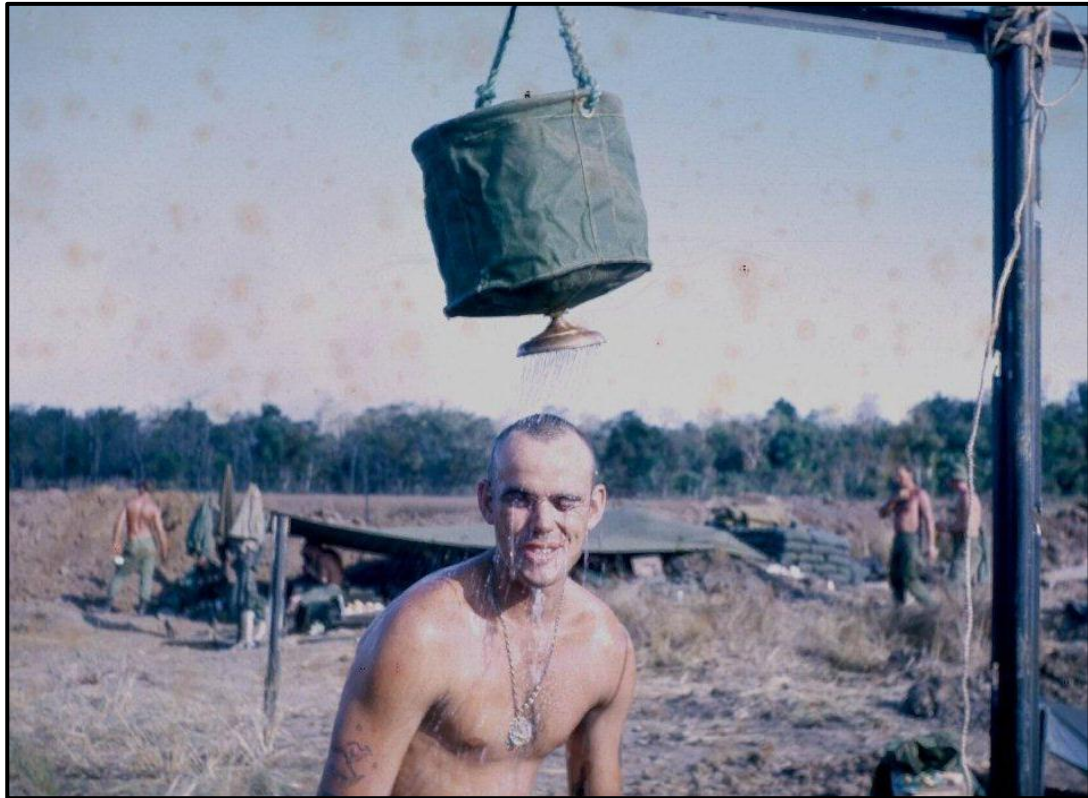
Front left to right Tomo, Cossie Pommy with Tom Carmody behind and Larry centre at top distinguished by his Malaya basic webbing and his watch.



Left, Larry and Rick Cranna having a break at the sandpit during the early part of 102's tour.



Left, Group photo taken at Nui Dat, pictured is back left Algie, Larry, Peter Geelan, front sitting is Tomo, Pommy and Tom Carmody.



Above, Paul 'Stallion' Walsh having a shower and Larry is at left with back to camera. Below from left to right are Chris O'Rourke, Stallion, Rabbits and Bluey Maher (MM). 'A' Bty tent lines, Nui Dat 1971.





Left, Rabbits relaxing at a FSPB during 'A' Bty's tour in 1971.

Below, Bdr Paul 'Crash' Kennedy at right gun trail, South Vietnam 1971. Note: The finger in one ear and mouth open to avoid becoming deaf.





The return with 'A' Battery 1971



The 'A' Field Battery plaque depicts a central shield with two scrolls positioned above and below the shield. The center holds a multi-flamed grenade on top of a laurel wreath, with a red lightning bolt against a black background with the Latin word "Semper Paratus" meaning "Always Ready".⁶⁷

In January 1970, 12 Field Regiment moved from Tobruk Lines Holsworthy to Lavarack Barracks in Townsville for 12 months continuation training, live fire, basically working as a complete six gun detachment. Larry's role as a Gun Sergeant was to apply the correct information for the fire a mission, so basically any stuff ups, Larry's ass was on the line. While in country no miss fire events occurred, but while training at Townsville, one stuff up occurred. Larry fired through the fire mission without actual command being given to fire, much to the disbelief of his detachment that were all a little hesitant to fire, *'nothing a few extra duties did not fix'* a lesson well learnt.

At 26 years old, Larry was now a full gun Sergeant and was in command of Echo gun (No. 5) and back with 'A' Bty, the oldest serving unit in the Australian Regular Army and finally getting their opportunity to serve in Vietnam. As a professional soldier the opportunity to return to Vietnam with 'A' Bty and complete a second tour was not to be missed, yet for

⁶⁷ Australian Artillery Association, *The History of A Field Battery Royal Australian Artillery* (2007), <http://australianartilleryassociation.com/index.htm> (accessed 9 July 2012).

many the need to take a second tour seemed pointless. The thought of staying in Australia and having to conduct garrison and parade duty certainly was not the way Larry wanted to continue his Army career. So once more Larry was back in familiar territory and looking forward to the challenge of a second tour. The advance party flew into South Vietnam in late January 1971 where it was joined by the main body at 1ATF, Nui Dat on 4 February 1971. The role of 'A' Bty was of general support for 1ATF and they were to be the designated support unit for the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR).



*Left, 'A' Bty
Lines, Lavarack
barracks
Townsville.*



*Left, Gun Sgt Kevin Tucker with Gun
Sgt Larry D'Arcy at Townsville
Barracks. Both heading to Vietnam for
their second tour.*

First contact for 'A' Field Battery

The deployment with 'A' Bty was to be a more subdued operation compared to the first with 102 Fd Bty. The atmosphere in Vietnam had now changed and most of the movements for the battery were by road. Along with that, the FSPB's were no longer positioned out on the extremities like Larry had experienced on his first tour. All that said it was not long before 'A' Bty were called into action to show that they could also mix it with the best. In early March, the Battery was called into action to support D company 3RAR who were engaged with a known enemy of substantial size. During the engagement, 3 guns: one section who were at FSPB Marj fired illuminating shells, while the remaining three guns still at Nui Dat joined in on the action firing (HE) high explosive shells into the designated area.



***Left , gunner
R.G. 'Otis'
Redding, Larry
centre and
right is Chris
O'Rourke.***

Later that month when the battery was at FSPB Beth, 3RAR twice encountered the local Viet Cong D445 Battalion, and once again requested the services of 'A' Bty. During the first engagement in support of 3RAR a battery of Kiwi gunners got stuck into the action thus forming an ANZAC battery. A section of guns that had been at FSPB Marj joined the battery headquarters in April and moved north to FSPB Ziggy. The move north was in order to provide close artillery support for 3RAR. The remaining three guns occupied FSPB Jane and Lindy. They were to support 2RAR, waiting for 104 Fd Bty to relieve them at Lindy.



Above, Echo gun crew, standing from left to right is Tony Pearce, Larry, Ron 'Rabbits' Hare Bdr Paul 'Stallion' Walsh, R.G. 'Otis' Redding. Kneeling left to right, Phil Haynes, Chris O'Rourke. Below, with the gun having just being fired and with no defences and flak jackets on, Larry looking down the barrel of the gun with Rabbits on left and Phil on the right.



For most of 'A' Bty's tour, the six artillery guns were generally split into three gun sections and moved to and from Nui Dat and the FBPS's in the AO. Although this was something that was not overly appreciated by the gunners, that said they did their job without hesitation.

'A' BTY FIRE SUPPORT PATROL BASES 1971

Below are the FSPB records that were able to be sourced and include the approximate dates and times that the bases were used and operated. Note: The movement of the Battery guns during their time in Vietnam was hard to trace due to the guns being split into three gun sections. Apologies for any errors.

March: FSPB Marj 01-31 (one section), Nui Dat 01-06 then to FSPB Beth 06-31 (one section).⁶⁸

April: FSPB Beth 31/03-26/04 then to Nui Dat 26/04-01/05 (one section), FSPB Marj 31/03-25/04 then to FSPB Ziggy 25/04 (one section).⁶⁹

May: FSPB Ziggy 25/04-31/05 (one section), FSPB Lindy 01-02 then to FSPB Jane 03-17 then to Nui Dat 17-31/05 (one section).⁷⁰

June: FSPB Ziggy 31/05- 05/06 then to FSPB Pamela 05-14/06 then to Nui Dat 14-30/06 (one section), Nui Dat 01-04/06 then to FSPB Jane 05/06 then to FSPB Pamela 05-13/06 then to Nui Dat (one section), (Pamela was closed on the 14/06 and all guns were at Nui Dat from the 14-31/06).⁷¹

July: FSPB Ziggy 01-28 then to Nui Dat 28-31/07 (one section), Nui Dat 01-14 then to FSPB Lynette 15-31/07 (one section).⁷²

August: FSPB Lynette 31/07-06/08 then to Nui Dat 06-15/08 then to FSPB Ziggy 15-23 then to Nui Dat 23-31/08 (one section), FSPB Centenary 10-31/08 (one section).⁷³

September: FSPB Centenary 31/08-15/09 then to Nui Dat 15-18 then to FSPB Shirley 18-20 then to Nui Dat 20-30 (one section), Nui Dat 31/08-18/09 then to FSPB Maree 19/09-01/10 then to Nui Dat (one section).⁷⁴

'A' Bty returned home in October 1971 without completing a full 12 month tour due to the withdrawal of Australian troops from active duty in Vietnam.

⁶⁸ Australian War Memorial, South East Asian Conflicts Diaries- AWM95, Sub-class 7/3, 3 Battalion Royal Australian Regiment, AWM95, 7/3/69, 1-31 March 1971, Summary of Events, Duty Officer's Log, <https://www.awm.gov.au> (accessed 28 April 2012).

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, AWM95, 7/3/73

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, AWM95, 7/3/75

⁷¹ *ibid.*, AWM95, 7/3/77

⁷² *ibid.*, AWM95, 7/3/79

⁷³ *ibid.*, AWM95, 7/3/81

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, AWM95, 7/3/85



Above, Larry reading a letter from home at a FSPB somewhere during the tour and below at left is Chris sitting on a chair made of used ammunition cases while Rabbits used an ammo box. A lot of improvisation was used to create a few comforts while out at the FSPB's.





A little bit of cheer

The Vietnam War was winding down for the Australian's and 'A' Bty's tour was not going to reach its full year. The Battery and the rest of 12 Field Regiment took part in operations in Phuoc Tuy province until the withdrawal of the 1ATF in November 1971. With a lot more time being spent in Nui Dat on the second tour, an altercation between Larry and a CMF officer occurred. Upon returning to Nui Dat after an operation, 'A' Bty squared away their kit and those who were free headed to the 'mushroom club' (the boozier) while the unlucky ones had to man the perimeter guns.

Larry had the night off so headed to the boozier for a well-earned beer and after a few under his belt decided that it would be good for the men in the other ranks (OR) lines to have a 'little bit of cheer' as Larry likes to call it. Knowing it was against orders to have alcohol in the OR lines he proceeded on with his task. Bringing a little bit of cheer to his mates and sinking a few more beers, Larry then wisely or unwisely decided to crash in their lines as there was a curfew at Nui Dat and it was also considered unwise to wander around the base at night. Early next morning a tent inspection which was not a normal thing and something Larry never experienced on his first tour was called.

The inspection was conducted by a Nasho officer who seemed to be out to make a name for himself with tent inspections. Coming across Larry and various amounts of empty beer cans did not overly please the officer and a subsequent discussion between Larry and the officer escalated. Several words were exchanged, not to the officers liking before Larry decided to lay one on the officer. Larry was then marched up to the Battery Captain where he proceeded to state his case.

I knew I was in the shit and realised that no matter how much operational experience I had, it did not trump the rank of an officer, but I continued to push the boundaries none the less and described the officer in no uncertain terms which did not go down very well.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ D'Arcy, 10 July 2012.

The end result was a loss in pay and stripped of his rank as Sergeant, demoted to Bombardier and moved out of 'A' Bty and placed in Task Force HQ and 131 Divisional Locating Battery (131 Div Loc Bty). His role there was as a liaison officer assistant working with the allocation of choppers for various movements. This was certainly a disappointment for Larry and in hindsight things were not really handled properly from either end. Maybe if the officers in charge had been Duntroon officers and not a Nasho and a CMF officer then the situation could have been different.

The officer approach that Larry experienced during his first tour with 102 was different at times compared with his second tour. Larry clearly remembers while at Coral, Ian 'Scrubber' Ahearn, the GPO and other battery officers were constantly in and around the guns and the men. This gave the men a lot of confidence to see the battery officers clearly in command of the situation and getting involved.

With the incident occurring mid tour, Larry never returned to operational duties with 'A' Bty and eventually took R&R in the later months returning to Australia for a rest. With five to six days of R&R, his time home was well spent with family and once returned to Vietnam; Larry resumed his duties with Task force HQ until late 1971.

Operation Overlord 5-14 June 1971

During Larry's absence 'A' Bty was engaged in Operation Overlord, named after the D-Day landing at Normandy during World War Two. Intelligence had gathered enough information about an enemy build up near the Courtenay rubber plantation, approximately three kilometers north of Phuoc Tuy Province. This was to be a significantly large operation with the engagement of three battalions conducting cordon and search operations.⁷⁶ The role of the artillery was to establish three new FSPB's, with the combination of artillery at FSPB Ziggy and at Nui Dat enabling 'A' Bty to establish FSPB Pamela early on 5 June. Having a designated AO, the battery guns were established early and in a position to provide support to the infantry when called into action⁷⁷.

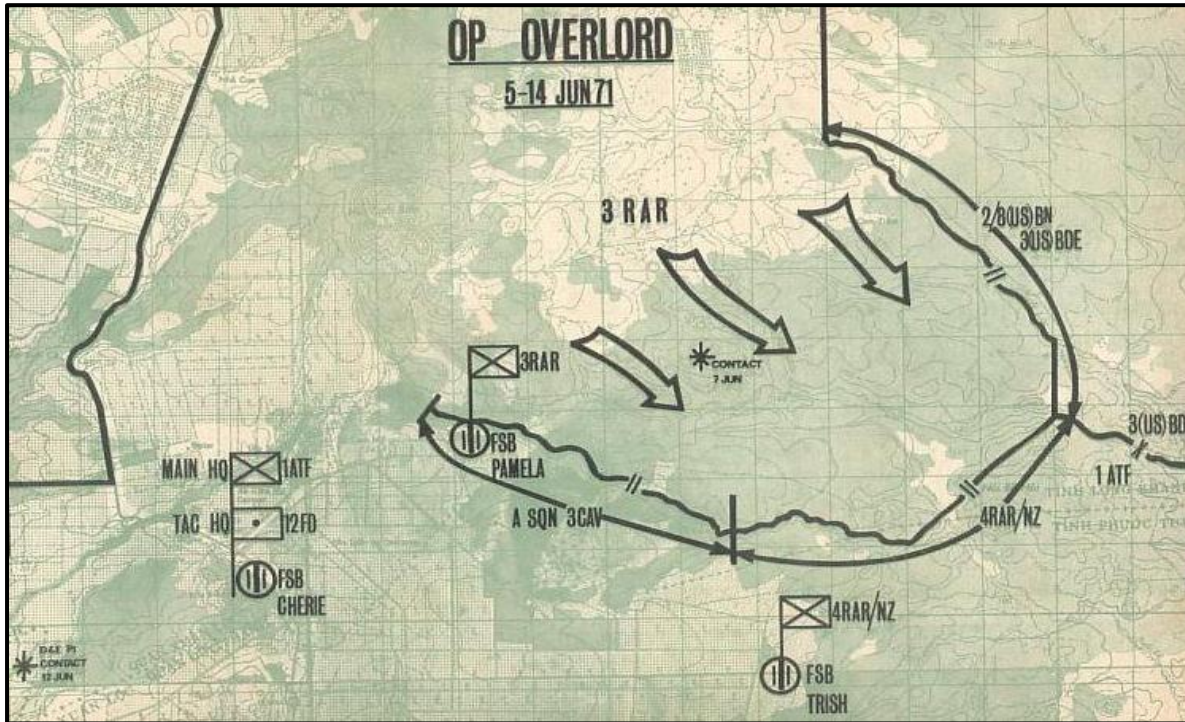
The other two FSPB's were taken care of by 104 Fd Bty who occupied FSPB Trish and 'C' Bty, 5th Battalion 42nd US Artillery positioned three of its howitzers at FSPB Cherie. The positioning of the guns at the FSPB's gave added power as they were all able to engage the same targets, which meant that Regimental fire missions were made a possibility. At 1200hrs on 5 June, the forward Task Force Headquarters assumed operational control along with the Artillery Tactical Headquarters (Arty Tac) at Courtenay Hill.⁷⁸ During a search on the

⁷⁶ Major G.F.B. Rickards, *Twelve in Focus: 12th Field Regiment in South Vietnam 1971* (Brookvale: Printcraft Press Pty Ltd, 1971), p. 96.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

first day, evidence of an enemy presence was found and on the following day 6 June contact was made with a substantial sized enemy force. Contact was made around 1700hrs (5:00pm) and after withdrawing 5 Platoon, C Company 3RAR, the artillery opened up and hit the enemy with over 700 rounds of 105mm and 150 rounds of 155mm.⁷⁹



Above, map detailing Operation Overlord, 5-14 June 1971.⁸⁰

It was during third day of 'Op' Overlord that forward observer Second Lieutenant Ian Mathers, 'A' Bty, was killed during the fighting on 7 June. Lance Bombardier 'Blue' Maher, took command and directed battery fire for nine hours, bringing the artillery fire within 100 metres of the Australian infantry, a call that was needed at the time to deter an attacking enemy and ultimately save the Australian soldiers in the field. Blue was later awarded the Military Medal (MM) for his role in the battle.⁸¹

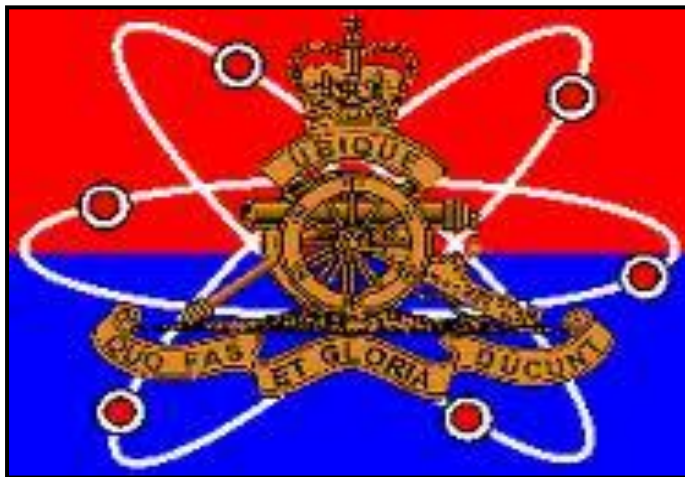
⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 97.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, pp. 96-98.

The contact for 'A' Bty was a true test of their ability to operate under pressure and with over 1000 rounds fired by the battery proved they were up to the task. With additional fire power coming from 104 Field Battery RAA, the US 'C' Battery 5th Battalion 42nd US Artillery and a battalion mortars, Operation Overlord was a successful joint operation.⁸² While in Vietnam, 'A' Bty celebrated its centenary on 1 August 1971. Some members of the battery flew back to Sydney to take part in a ceremonial parade at Victoria Barracks, where the battery's 67-year-old King's Banner was replaced by a new Queen's Banner. In Vietnam three of the battery's guns were at FSPB Lynette and the other three were at Nui Dat, where they fired a ten-gun salute at midday. A total of 50 rounds were fired at various locations in Australia and Vietnam to mark the occasion.⁸³

131 Divisional Locating Battery (131 Div Loc Bty)



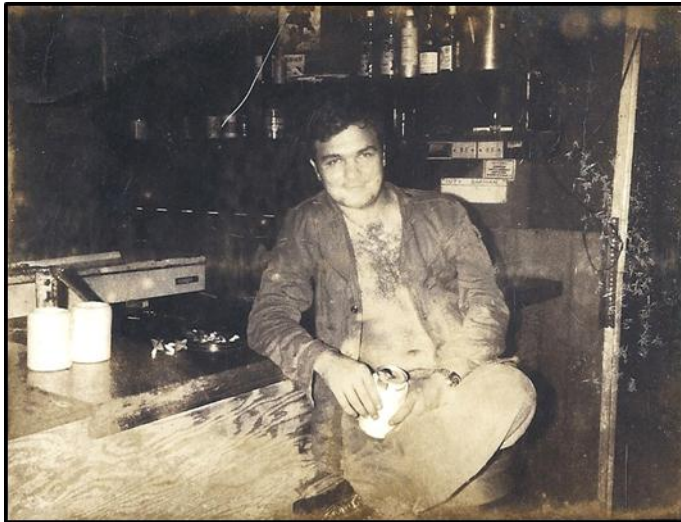
*Left, 131 Divisional Locating Battery emblem.*⁸⁴

Although still officially part of 12 Field Regiment, Larry no longer served in a combat role and remained in the allocated barrack at Nui Dat, before making the short walk over to Task Force HQ to work with 131 Div Loc Bty. The HQ was a massive complex that was the hub for all military activities/operations/movements in the Phuoc Tuy province and housed representatives from the Army and Air Force.

⁸² *ibid.*, p.106.

⁸³ *ibid.*

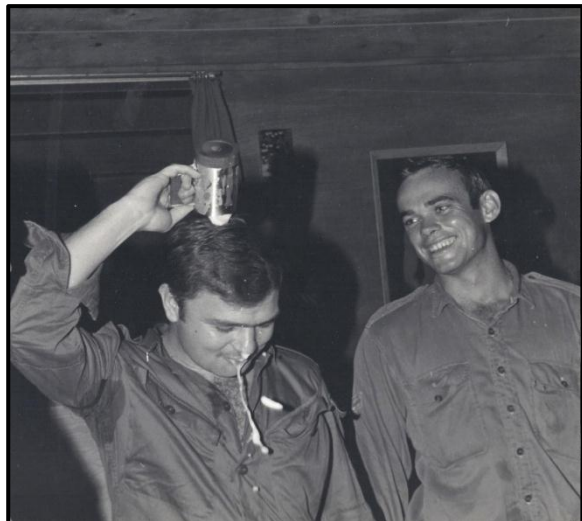
⁸⁴ 12 Field Regiment (Vietnam) Association, *History* (2007), <http://12fieldregiment.com> (accessed 30 November 2012).



Left, Larry enjoying a bit of quiet at the RAAF boozier while detached to 131 Div Loc Bty 1971.

The irony of Larry being busted for drinking with his mates in the 'A' Bty lines was to be sent to work with the RAAF and within their lines was an endless supply of alcohol, including spirits which was prohibited for other ranks within the Army. Attached to

the RAAF as a liaison between HQ and the helicopters, Larry's work involved the resupply of troops and equipment in the field and the allocation of resupply hueys, with the Army call sign of 'Albatross'. The Army would send in their location (Loc.Stats) which was then decoded into grid references and allocated to helicopter tasks and timings. Troop movements, guns anything that had to be moved or resupplied by air needed to be coordinated. Certainly not the most favorable of jobs as Larry considered it a Pogo posting, something he was not happy about and missed the camaraderie of the Artillery gunners and certainly missed being out in the field.



Above, at left, Larry with unknown Australian helicopter pilot and at right pouring the beer over his head with Bdr Paul 'Stallion' Walsh who was Larry's 2iC on Echo gun. Note: The drinking game at the OR's mess required the unfinished beer to be poured over one's head.

The endless operations placed a heavy strain on the soldiers regardless of whether they were infantry, supporting units or in static positions. The constant alertness and need to be ready at all times weighed heavily on a lot of soldiers and this, accompanied with the

climate could become exhaustive over prolonged periods.⁸⁵ Soldiers needed some down time and most preferred to have that time with a few beers. While out on operations their daily ration would add up and when returning to Nui Dat they were able to consume what had been accumulated. Beer became the safety valve and this manifested itself into binge drinking and sometimes causing further problems within the ranks.⁸⁶

Larry was informed that his services were no longer required and that he would be returned home in the not too distant future. Much to Larry's disappointment he was not able to resume his artillery duties with 'A' Bty and he departed Vietnam before the rest of his mates. The Battery was eventually withdrawn from Vietnam and they also boarded the 'freedom bird' and headed home. Upon returning home, Larry took his leave entitlement then returned to Holsworthy Barracks and was duly promoted back to the rank of Sergeant and remained with that rank until his discharge in 1973.

A' Bty 12 Field Regiment Royal Australian Artillery

Echo, No 5 Gun

SGT, Larry D'Arcy (Cuddles), Gun Sergeant

BDR, Paul Walsh (Stallion), Gun Bombardier (2iC)

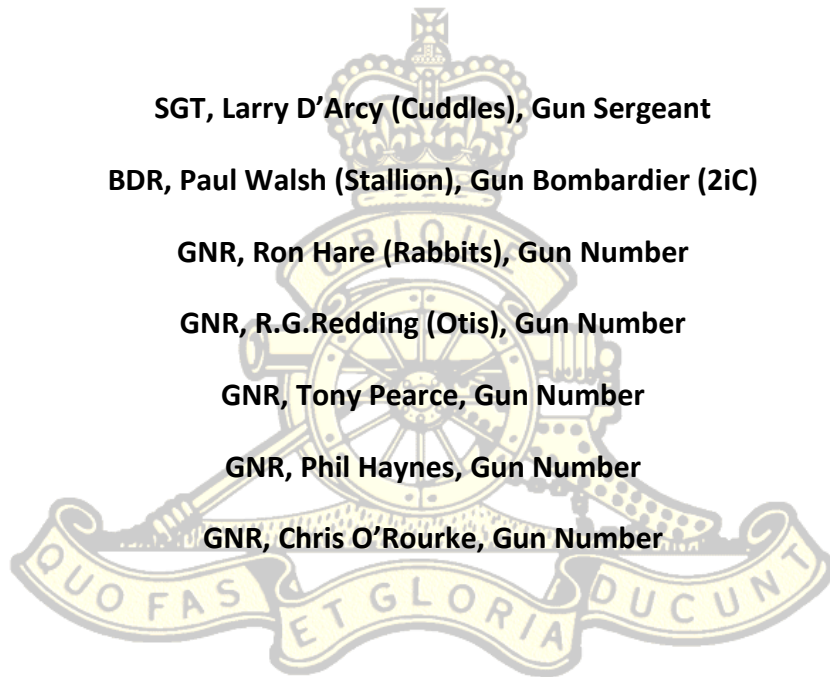
GNR, Ron Hare (Rabbits), Gun Number

GNR, R.G.Redding (Otis), Gun Number

GNR, Tony Pearce, Gun Number

GNR, Phil Haynes, Gun Number

GNR, Chris O'Rourke, Gun Number



⁸⁵ Ashley Ekins & Ian McNeill, *Fighting to the Finish: the Australian Army in the Vietnam War 1968-1973*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2012), p. 350.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*



Two tours, Good mates & a lot of laughs

Comparing the two tours is always a difficult task for anyone, the defining factor for Larry is combat. To be tested in combat and to come through fairly unscathed is a remarkable achievement; you build an instant bond with your mates as it was only the men there who had that battle with you.

The battle for FSPB Coral will be forever etched in the memory of Larry as it will be with all those who served there at that given time, a unique experience. Although 'A' Bty never came under any ground attack like the one faced by 102, Larry could not have been prouder to serve with this group of men as well. What Larry clearly highlights is the quality of the gunners, and is proud to say that the men of 102 and those of 'A' Bty were on equal footing. The soldiers that Larry served with on both tours were of the highest standard the Army could produce and were an absolute credit to the RAA. Be it a Regular or Nashos, to a man none could be faulted and were professional in their duty at all times.

One of the big differences between the two was the way the guns were deployed. During his first tour, the guns were deployed as an entire battery (six guns) in comparison with the second tour where the guns were deployed in sections, that is three guns at a FSPB compared to the entire compliment of six guns. Another important factor in all this was the way that the men and guns were now deployed. During Larry's first tour most of the movements were by helicopter as the area was not deemed safe for road transportation compared to the second tour where this was a complete opposite and the men and guns were trucked to the AO. This was also an indication that the AO's 'A' Bty were now operating in had been considered more secure that the AO's that 102 operated during their tour in 1968-69. One thing was constant throughout both tours was the noise of war and the laughs had with the men.

The Vietnam War was a melting pot of military units, South Vietnam, Australia, United States, New Zealand, Thailand, Khmer Republic, the Kingdom of Laos, the Republic of China and South Korea. With all these countries operating in areas and under different command, the Australian units generally preferred to operate by themselves. The infantry preferred to have the Australian artillery as opposed to the US or any other artillery unit for support as the RAA were able to bring their 105mm howitzers in closer for support than the US with

their 155mm self-propelled guns. That said, when the US Artillery provided direct support it was always appreciated by the men in the field, especially if they were in a bit of trouble with the enemy.

We were tasked with a fire mission to protect the downed US helicopter and considering we were the closest for direct support our guns fired continuously round after round for hours to keep the enemy away from the downed helicopter. There were certainly no problems or concerns this day of artillery expenditure and the guns just kept firing until they were finally called to stop firing.⁸⁷

Another good memory from Vietnam was the opportunity to trade their kit, whatever was not bolted down could be swapped. A popular item for trade between the Australians and the US soldiers was the Australian slouch hat. The US soldiers thought these were the best bit of gear they could get their hands on and so the price for the old slouch hat went up. For the Australian soldier it was simply a hat and they went down to the Q Store to get themselves another one, easy as that. The US soldiers had some inventive ration packs and probably some of the best equipment and clothing so the trade was generally pretty well evened out in the end.

Humour in Country: remembering the Dat Do Dance

Throughout the two tours there were plenty of laughs to be had among the men. One in particular that Larry remembers well was the 'Dat Do Dance'. This was a bit of a ritual among the men and a way of initiating the new boys to the unit and involved a good splash of the much loved 'Old Spice' aftershave. The new blokes were told that they have to get ready for the dance in town and make sure that they had their clean polyesters on and liberal amounts of Old Spice as the ladies loved the smell of Old Spice.

The important point was to make sure that they took special care in the down stairs department with the Old Spice. They lined up for an inspection, the transport blokes came down with the truck which had an escort of M60 gunners onboard, and all this to make it look like the real deal. By this stage the Old Spice had started to take effect down stairs and the men started to dance around in some discomfort creating much laughter among the seasoned soldiers. This was the 'Dat Do Dance' and this tradition was handed down from unit to unit and was a great way to ease the pressures of being in Vietnam.

I remember this indoctrination well, never on the receiving end of the 'Dat Do Dance' more a contributing influence and watched a few Nashos coming to grips with the dance during my time there. It certainly was a good way to build camaraderie, although not so funny for those blokes on the receiving end at that time, certainly fun for the blokes watching.⁸⁸

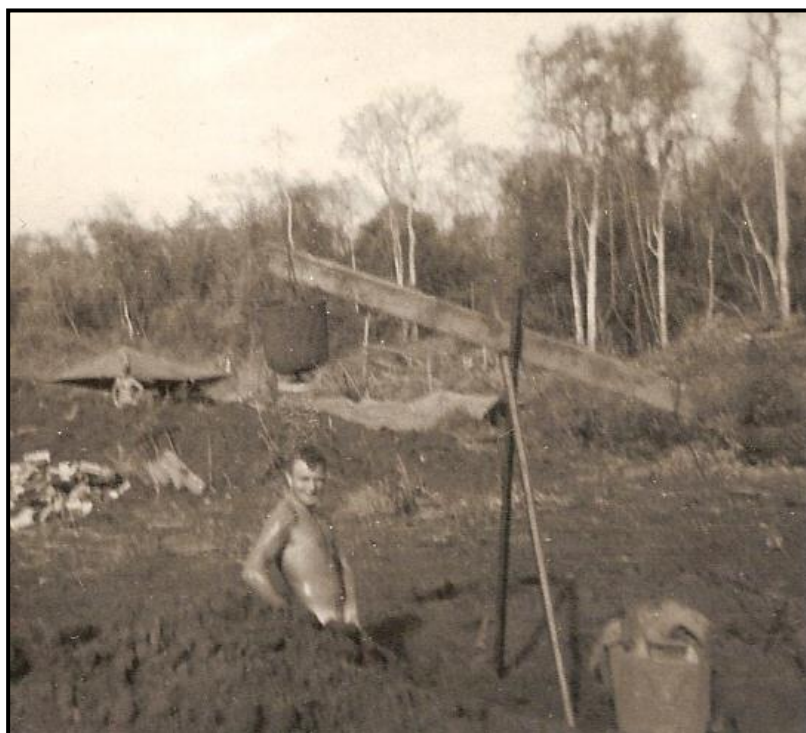
⁸⁷ D'Arcy 18 September 2012.

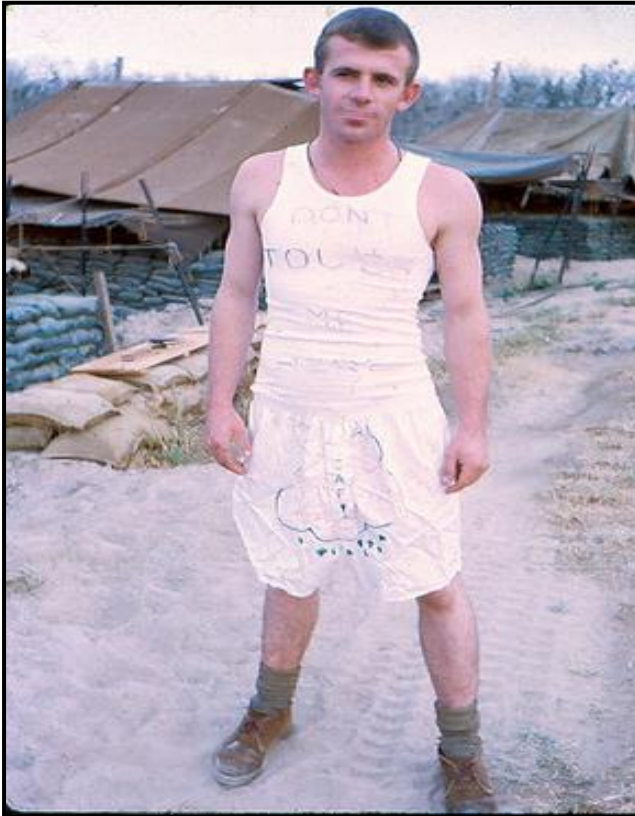
⁸⁸ *ibid.*



Left, Always time for a laugh, 102 Fd Bty gunners, Tom Carmody, Cossie and Alan Floyd doing what mates do best, share a laugh and a joke prior to leaving or returning from a patrol.

Right, Larry about to take a shower at a FSPB somewhere during his first tour. Possibly looking for any of his mates who may be lurking around with a smoke grenade.





Left, Tom Carmody, (Charlie gun) at Nui Dat in one of his more unusual outfits. That said Tom was a good member of the unit and well liked among the men.

There were always a few characters in the Army, no more than Larry's mate Tom Carmody. Tom was known as a bit of a character with 102 Fd Bty and always up for a laugh. On one occasion when a fire mission was called in the early hour

of the morning, Charlie gun as part of the duty detachment were called into action. Tom appeared in a pair of leopard skin jocks, GP boots unlaced ready for action. Larry to this day was never sure who got the biggest shock, the gun crew or the enemy who may have spotted the crazy Aussie in the leopard skin jocks.

FSPB Kiama 1968-69

102 Fd Bty relocated to FSPB Kiama and this was a disaster for many of the men as the establishment of the new base was built over an old disused US base. That may not seem so bad, but the real problem began when the men began to dig their weapons pits and they literally hit the shit. It became apparent that the US did not dig deep latrines like the Australian did and once the digging began they exposed the waste left by the US soldiers. The 102 gunners needed to establish the FSPB in a built up arrangement instead of digging in as was their preferred style. That was just the tip of the iceberg, with the waste being exposed a lot of the men came down with dysentery in some form or another. This literally disabled the gun crews, limiting their effectiveness to around 40 percent which meant an additional workload for those who were not suffering any ill effects. With the men falling sick, this did not mean that the FSPB became non-operational; they were still required to maintain their perimeter and conduct fire missions when required.



Above and below, the preparation for the M60 weapon pit at FSPB Kiama.



Rest in Country & Rest and Recreation

One thing that the soldiers looked forward to while in Vietnam was the opportunity for a bit of a break from the war. Rest in Country (R&C) and Rest and Recreation (R&R) were allocated to all men and able to be taken throughout their tour.

Late in his first tour, Larry decided to take his R&C with Dave Thomas, Ian Warren, Vince Dunn and Johnny Harms and headed to Vung Tau or Vungas as the Australian's called it. Vung Tau was situated approximately 30 kilometres to the south of Nui Dat and was a

regular haunt for all service men regardless of what side. The irony around Vung Tau was that the Australian soldiers and all allied forces could have well been walking next to the exact enemy who were not so long ago in the field trying to kill them.

They were to have two days in Vung Tau to wind down and get away from the war that was going on around them, but that did not eventuate. A favourite spot for the Australians was the Badcoe Club and the Grand Hotel. These two places along with the beach and booze, not necessarily in that order was the basic requirements to be had. The Military Police (MP) were generally on hand to quell any trouble, but sometimes they were the party police and cut short the youthful fun that the men were having. A curfew also applied in Vung Tau which meant that all persons must be off the street by a certain hour. Soldiers who disobeyed this direct order could face punishment through a fine or possible lock up.

Upon arriving in Vung Tau, they handed in their weapons and changed into civilian clothes, this was probably done to try to get the soldiers to unwind and being in civilian clothes was part of that process. The money that they had was accumulated while they were in the field and when returned to the lines at Nui Dat they had a pay parade and the men nominated how much money they would require. If heading on R&C or R&R more money the merrier. The money was called Military Payment Certificates (MCP) and was like monopoly money. The money was coloured and throughout the year they Army would change the colour of the denominations to try to prevent a black market developing.

As for the time spent in Vung Tau, well Larry remembers getting on the booze and not a lot else as they were promptly asked to leave early and so ended their R&C in Vung Tau. Larry won't point the finger at the culprit, but is adamant it was not he who started all the trouble and with a laugh simply say's *'something's are best left in Vietnam'*.

The next break for Larry was R&R and as it approached the more he was looking forward to heading home for a break and being with his family, but things did not go according to plan. After getting picked up late by a helicopter at the FSPBs, Larry arrived back to Nui Dat and consequently had missed the first Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) caribou flight to Saigon. This began a series of missed flights as he now had to wait for another flight to depart from Nui Dat. Finally a flight departed, but upon arrival at Tan Son Nhut airbase Saigon the allocated flight home was missed and Larry spent the night in the airbase barracks.

Larry's family knew the time and date of his initial arrival so they were all there waiting to see him walk off the plane. The family waited patiently until the very last person left the plane, unaware of the flight delays that caused Larry to miss his original timeslot. By now the family was somewhat concerned and his Dad approached the ground personnel in charge of movement control and saw that there was a big red line through Larry's name; this did not go down too well with the family as the big red line could only mean that Larry would not be coming home for good. After a short wait and some more enquiries on his

whereabouts, Larry's family were informed that he was safe and well and he missed the connecting flight and will be arriving on the next one.

Finally when the plane arrived in Sydney and Larry walked off the plane, his family was very pleased to see him and he was able to enjoy a few days at home with family and friends. The war was a world away as Larry enjoyed the home comforts of a decent bed and a good home cooked meal. Putting the war aside for the five days, Larry settled as best he could back at his home at Holsworthy and waited until his time came to return to Mascot airport and then back to Vietnam to rejoin 102 Fd Bty and his mates.



Equipment & Training

The Artillery gunners operated a number of weapons besides their M2A2 105mm howitzers. The gunners were issued with basic infantry weapons which they were skilled in the use of, as there were times when the gunners were used as infantry. These included the standard issue Self Loading Rifle (SLR), the M79 grenade launcher through to the M60 machine gun, the 50 Calibre Machine Gun, the M16 Armalite rifle and the M18 Claymore mine.

SLR and M16 Armalite



Left is the SLR and right is the US M16. Note: The field dressing on the stock of the M16 at right.

Standard issue the L1A1 Self Loading Rifle, commonly known to the Australians as the SLR and the US issued M16 were both used by the Australians. The Australian gunners generally had the SLR and this was a robust gun and well like among the diggers. It fired a 7.62x51mm NATO round, gas operated with a tilting breech block, the rate of fire was semi-automatic, the magazine was either a twenty or thirty round detachable box and the gun was finished with an aperture rear sight and post front sight. The SLR weighed approximately 10 lbs (4.5 kgs) and had more hitting power (7.62mm round) and

less prone to stoppages. The M16 which fired a smaller caliber (5.56mm) round and most NCOs carried the M16 as they had to carry extra gear for patrols, but it was purely a personal choice.

The M60



Left, Val Barry (Charlie gun) with the M60. Val was wounded in the arm while on patrol with the infantry. Given the opportunity to head home, Val preferred to remain in Vietnam with his mates in 102 Field Battery.

The M60 was also Larry's gun of choice as it was capable of firing a lot of rounds in a very short time, something Larry considers very important when 'in the shit'. The downfall with the gun was its innate ability to jam just when the operator required it most.

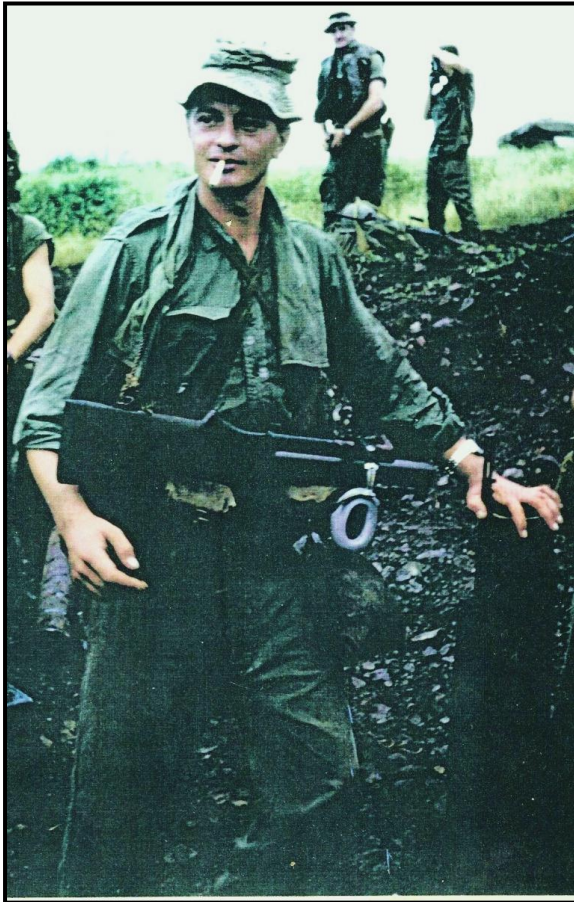
M18 Claymore Mine



The claymore is an anti-personnel mine which fires steel balls, out to about 100 metres and was used by the Australian's in defensive positions. While at a FSPB they were set up to secure the perimeter overnight and were disarmed in the morning.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Global Security, 'M18 Claymore', (2000-2013), <http://www.globalsecurity.org> (accessed 13 January 2012).

M79 Grenade Launcher



Left, Tomo with customary cigarette and trusty M79 grenade launcher. Note: The earmuffs near front, possibly there just to keep the military brass happy as one could not imagine that if the shit hit the fan you would say to your mates, 'hey wait a minute as I need to protect my hearing so I will put these earmuffs on', highly unlikely.

The M79 fires a variety of single-shot 40mm grenades and issued to each gun crew. The M79 was used to enhance the firing capacity of the weapon pits at night. Most often came into play when firing an illumination round to light up the perimeter.

105mm M2A2 Howitzer



Left, 105mm Howitzer used throughout the Vietnam War was 'king of the battle field' and much loved by the Artillery gunners.

The 105mm weighed 2,260 kilograms, total length of 5.54 metres, width 2.21 metres and a total height of 1.73 metres. With a gun barrel length of 2.31 metres, the howitzer fired a 105x372R round, a horizontal breech block with the recoil being hydro pneumatic, constant

110cm. The gun had an elevation range of -5 degrees to +66 degrees and a traverse of 46 degrees. The 105mm has a muzzle velocity of 472m/s (metres per second) and was able to reach a maximum range of approximately 11,000 metres. The gun fired semi-fixed ammunition, with 105mm Cartridge Case M14. The propelling charge consisted of base charge and six increments, forming seven charges from 1 (the smallest) to 7 (the largest).

123 Training Battery

Returning home after the second tour, Larry was posted to 123 Training Battery where he took up the position as a gunnery instructor. The battery was firstly located at the Holsworthy Barracks before being relocated to the School of Artillery at North Head. The role of the gunnery instructor was to educate the new artillery recruits in correct artillery procedures. This was an important role and one that Larry enjoyed as it gave him the opportunity to pass on the knowledge and skills that he acquired not only through training, but the more important skills that were learnt in actual combat roles while in Vietnam. Larry spent the next two years with 123, living in the soldier's accommodation at North Head before headed home to Dapto on the weekends to be with his family.

The change in government in December 1972 also meant the Army structure underwent some monumental changes. Literally overnight National Service was dropped, resulting in a reduction in Army numbers. 123 Training Battery were effectively disbanded as there was no longer the numbers to sustain a Training Battery. With the changing nature along with a couple of charges for drunkenness and insubordination, Larry felt the future looked a little bleak as there was no calling for a field soldier with operational experience. At this time Larry was advised by the Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) to stick it out and continue on in the Army, but the thought of becoming a garrison soldier was not how Larry had seen his future in the Australian Army.

Larry did not want to be just a soldier, he joined as a 17 year old to be a field soldier, a soldier who is operational not desk bound. With three overseas deployments under his belt and no real foreseeable future, Larry was now a little bit jaded by the system. After Larry returned to Holsworthy he continued with general artillery duties before his discharge in February 1973.



An Honourable Discharge

What was disappointing for Larry was the way the soldiers were being treated after returning from Vietnam. The Australian government and parts of the Australian public did not offer support or assistance for the soldiers and this did hurt. Larry never lost his love of the Army, but at times did lose respect for the general public and the government. There was a big difference in public opinion from Malaya to Vietnam and this was something that Larry was very aware of. From 1965 to 1971, Larry was involved in the theatre of war; this along with the changing face of society is well remembered.

I went over to do my bit, proud of my service and proud to serve my country in Malaya and Vietnam. I did a job that I was trained to do and feel that not only I, but all those who served in Vietnam did their bit one way or another.⁹⁰

What Larry found difficult after he left the Army was the temporary loss of mates, something that was very strong while serving in the Army. Due to Larry's moving around as a young child he was never able to sustain a strong friend base and for him, the Army was his life.

If I did have a close nonmilitary friend that I could have talked to after Vietnam, I may not have felt so isolated with society, I guess I didn't really look to make many new friends early on as I wasn't real sure what to talk about and didn't really want to talk about my military service as I guessed they wouldn't understand anyway.⁹¹

This feeling is often expressed by other soldiers, as no one can really understand what they have gone through. Larry remembers going to Port Kembla RSL and asking to join as a member and was promptly told that he could not join as a full member, only as an associate

⁹⁰ D'Arcy 18 September 2012.

⁹¹ *ibid.*

member. This was the RSL, and at that time did not regard Vietnam as a war. From then on Larry never bothered with them again.

Army life was something that Larry still wanted and it was during the late 1970s, Larry enquired about re-enlisting into the Army. Now in his early 30's Larry made all the relevant calls and informed them of his previous rank and his past history in the Australian Army. Having been honorably discharged as a Sergeant, Larry was unable to return to that rank, but could return as a Bombardier or less. Over several phone conversations, Larry was informed that the Army was not looking for field soldiers with Larry's military service and skills. The Army was interested in recruiting new soldiers or re-enlisting soldiers with technical or trade backgrounds as the general makeup of the Army was now more geared towards peace time. Looking back on that time Larry realises that the reasons for him leaving the Army was for that very same reason, the Army were now in a relative time of peace and there was no need for a field soldier.

Looking back at what he had witnessed while in Vietnam, Larry never received any debrief after being involved in battle and upon returning to Australia any thought of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was thrown out the window. As Larry said '*I simply tried to get on with life*'. Debriefing was not a big thing in the Army and most of the tough times that we had in Vietnam was generally laughed off and swept under the carpet as showing a softer side to your mates was not a very manly thing to do. This unfortunately had devastating results for many Vietnam Veterans in the following years as they later became aware of and had to deal with PTSD.

Vietnam was a good time and Larry recalls a lot of great laughs were had with mates while serving his country. A sad fact is that many of his mates lost their way after returning home as did Larry for some time. Larry found it hard to settle down into the civilian lifestyle after his service in the Australian Army. Often finding the non-regimented lifestyle hard to understand and also the lack of drive and pride within the general population.

Drinking Culture

Joining the Army at 17 years of age, Larry looks back now and can see how impressionable young men are when surrounded by older soldiers who have been in combat and invite you for a drink.

It is very hard to say no to those men, there was certainly a healthy amount of respect for these blokes and I guess you really wanted to fit in and become one of the boys and drinking with them was certainly one of the ways to fit in.⁹²

⁹² D'Arcy 27 September 2012.

Diggers 'on the binge' in Vietnam

CAMERON STEWART

ALCOHOL abuse by Australian soldiers in the Vietnam War was rampant, with the equivalent of six cans of beer a day for each soldier shipped from Australia to Vietnam in 1969, according to the official history of the conflict.

The account, to be released next week, documents how binge-drinking was rampant in the final years of the war as exhausted and stressed Australian soldiers sought relief through alcohol.

This was a major cause of fights, ill-discipline and mental illness, and in one case led to the murder of an officer by a private.

"The biggest single problem from the man-management point of view in Vietnam ... was grog," the commander of 1st Australian Logistic Support Base, Max Simkin, is quoted as saying.

Colonel Simkin and many other officers believed alcohol was behind almost all serious discipline problems in Vietnam.

The candid look at alcohol abuse in Vietnam is contained in the final volume of the history of the war, to be launched in Canberra on Tuesday by former Australian Defence Force chief and Vietnam veteran Peter Cosgrove.

The 1140-page book, *Fighting to the Finish*, by military historians Ashley Ekins and Ian McNeill, is the final volume of the official history of Australia's involvement in Southeast Asian conflicts, and covers the years 1968 to 1975.

It examines the activities of the Australian Task Force in Vietnam during the peak years of 1968 to the end of 1971, when the pace of operations was unrelenting, leaving more than 250 soldiers dead.

Mr Ekins said the struggle with alcohol was a fact of life for many soldiers. "It's part of the story, and it had to be told because it became a big problem," he told *The Weekend Australian* yesterday.

The book reveals that, in the six months to November 1969, the Australian Services Canteen Organisation shipped a total of 7.5 million cans of beer to the Australian forces in Vietnam, the equivalent of five to six cans per day for every soldier in the force.

As reunions come and go so do the men, but the one thing that has stood out is the effects of alcohol and some of the problems that it has created for many Vietnam Veterans and their families. Over the years Larry has often wondered about his time in the Army and why some decisions were made when others were not. The years spent after the army has given Larry time to reflect on the past as most people do as they get older and one thing that has often puzzled him is to why the Army fosters a drinking culture. Larry's mate John Harms has also wondered about this and over the years has spoken at length with Larry on this very subject.

Both men feel that the drinking culture fostered within the ranks of the Army becomes an expectation. To drink is to be accepted by the men and higher ranking soldiers. Both men look back of their time in Vietnam and agree that any down time was spent having a few beers and those that decided not to drink were seen as outsiders, as if something was wrong with them. Although, in hindsight nothing was wrong, they just preferred not to drink. Larry does not blame the Army for this drinking culture or any effects it had on his life then and now, it is merely a ponderous thought as to why drinking was is widely accepted in society as a whole.

This is further supported by *Fighting to the Finish: the Australian Army in the Vietnam War 1968-1973*, by Ashley Ekins and Ian McNeill.⁹³ The level of alcohol per soldier at Nui Dat was regarded as unacceptable and was seen as a major problem resulting is the death of some soldiers. With an allocated 48 hours off when returning to Nui Dat from operations, many soldiers made the most of this time by getting stuck into the booze and winding down.

Left, Newspaper clipping: *The Weekend Australian*, 3-4 March, 2012.

⁹³ Ekins & McNeill, *Fighting to the Finish*, p. 75.

Trucking Life



Left, the road trains that Larry drove up to Darwin NT with Byers.

Obtaining a truck licence while in the Army was an advantage for Larry when he decided to leave in 1973. Shortly after leaving, Larry first purchased a small four tonne truck from his Army severance pay. He began his truck driving career working for Pioneer

Quarry at Bass Point NSW carting loads of rubble to and from various places.

This quickly moved into bigger things and in the early 1980s Larry decided to purchase a MAN Diesel semi-trailer and began working as an owner operator driving interstate. This work took Larry in and around NSW and also to South Australia, Victoria and Queensland. Being an interstate truck driver generally kept Larry away, anywhere between three to 10 days depending on the trip. Most of the material being hauled in these early days was steel out of Port Kembla Steelworks NSW. For the next 10 years Larry could be his own boss and did not have to overly associate with others. A life of solitude was Larry's way of coping as he found it difficult at times relating with people who had not served in the Military or more to the point people who did not serve in Vietnam. Larry did not disrespect these people, but simply could not open up to them as he could with other Vietnam Veterans.

Although the work was demanding, for Larry it was enjoyable, but the only downside was the actual business side with all the paperwork. This eventually took its toll and Larry sold the truck and went to Work for Verdons Transport driving tippers and interstate work. The life of an interstate truck driver is certainly arduous, but with that comes good mates and it's this mateship that Larry regards of equal importance to the mates he made in the Army.

After spending some time with Verdons and driving interstate, it was time to spend a bit more time in the Illawarra and so Larry began working for Heggies Transport driving coal truck out of West Cliff, Avon and Yellow Rock collieries or whenever Heggies would be contracted to. The downturn in the economy in the 1980s resulted in Larry becoming retrenched as it was a policy of last on first to go, but with that door closing another soon opened with Byers transport.

Byers was contracted to cart merchant bar from the Merchant Mill at Port Kembla to Darwin, so once again Larry was back on the road working interstate. The trips to Darwin would coincide with a return trip via Bourke where Larry would then be loaded with cotton to deliver to the wharfs at Port Botany for later export. Eventually the interstate work dried

up and with the economy beginning to improve, Heggies Transport was rehiring so Larry returned to work there. With around 15 years under his belt working for Heggies, it was time for Larry to trade in the blue singlet and blundstone boots and settle as best he could into retirement, like all men who had been involved in work for the majority of their lives retirement was not the easiest of jobs to handle, but over time Larry has been able to settle into the easier lifestyle.

Larry fondly remembers starting at Heggies and being shown the ropes by a few of the men who were old hands in the coal truck industry. Blokes like Terry Sperring, Barry Kershaw, Ricky Russell, and Brian Hunter to name just a few of the many good mates from the transport industry. Larry recalls the trip to the US with Rick as a great time, landing in LA the two hired a campervan and headed across to Nevada and down to Mexico on a six week road trip, just two mates having a great time.

A few rough years in the late 1980s really brought out some true mateship between Larry, Brian, Terry and Barry. The support that these men offered Larry at this time was extremely helpful and is well remembered today by Larry. Just like the mates from the Army; his mates in the transport industry also epitomise the mateship code. To this day Larry has fond memories of his army career and truck driving days and has been happy to have been involved in two very different careers. Although seemingly different Larry is quickly able to draw parallels between the two when he describes the challenging work of an artillery gunner and a soldier in the RAA is equaled in part with the challenges of being an interstate truck driver and having to maintain a road train. The one thing that both were able to provide is mateship and both have given Larry some very good mates who he remains in contact with to this day.

Vietnam Veterans M.C (VVMC)



*Left, The Vietnam Veterans Motorcycle Club patch.*⁹⁴

The Vietnam Veterans Motorcycle Club (VVMC) for many is considered a life saver. Larry first came across the VVMC at the Tamworth Country Music Festival and decided to become a member. Like most motorcycle clubs Larry became a nominee in 2000 before becoming a full member in mid-2002. What the club has been able to offer Larry and other Vietnam Veterans is the ability to mix with men who have been through similar experiences and had

⁹⁴ Redback Tourers mcsa, 'Vietnam Veterans Motorcycle Club', <http://www.redbacktourersmcsa.com> (accessed 7 August 2012).

served in Vietnam. Many of the men have gone through some difficult times and the mateship and the camaraderie within the club has enabled them to soldier on and hold their heads up high. Mateship is just as important for the Vietnam Veteran today as it was while serving in Vietnam and is why the VVMC hold an important place for many of these men.



Left, Larry in his VVMC Colours on his Harley Davidson Night Train. Note: The number plate (GUNNR), once an Artillery gunner always an Artillery gunner.

A big part of the VVMC is the monthly meetings that are held at the clubhouse in Murrurundi. This gives the members an opportunity catch up over a few days and enjoy the festivities that the club puts on.

Along with these meetings the VVMC also organise bike runs and other activities that keeps them engaged with not only the club and their mates, but also with the community.



Left, Larry on a VVMC bike run in the early years of becoming a member.



Mates, Beers & Reunions

When we look up mateship in a dictionary it is defined as, a mode of conduct that stresses equality, friendship and solidarity, but it is so much more than just words upon a page. Mateship is what epitomises the Australian soldier and you will always hear that they were there for their mates.

Larry served with many men while in the Army and if you talk with current or former soldiers you will find that if asked the question, why did you do this or do that? The answer will be *'that I did it for my mates; I didn't want to let them down'*. This sentiment is echoed throughout this book and describes how Larry feels about the men he served with while in the Army. With the passing years the men may not see each other for a while, but there is still a close mateship between them. When they gather at a reunion or a small catch up mateship is not just a word to them. It is born out of their experiences in combat, the fun they had at the Mushroom Club or while on leave in Vung Tau. It is about the hardship they faced then and now, the dangerous encounters and the mutual experiences.

Reunions, be it a school or a sporting reunion all hold a certain amount of significance to the individual. Military reunions are equally important for the soldiers as it is their time to catch up with old mates, chat about the good and the sometimes bad times, but most importantly it is a place where they know they will not be judged by outsiders. Having marched in a few ANZAC day marches after leaving the Army, Larry never really felt comfortable, not so much for the memory of serving in Vietnam, although appreciative of the cheering crowds, but more for the fact that Larry didn't feel as though he should be receiving these accolades as he was only doing his job.

Welcome Home Parade 3 October, 1987

Larry remembers reading about the upcoming Welcome Home Parade march through the papers and also from mates he served with in Vietnam. It was gathering momentum and becoming an important ceremony for Vietnam Veterans. The Government was finally going to honour all the Vietnam Veterans, something that was well overdue. The School of Artillery billeted out former artillery members at North Head. Once again Larry was happy to finally be recognised for his service and more importantly this was a time where he could

really talk with his mates and came to realise that it was not just him suffering with a few problems.

When I caught up with the blokes, some I hadn't seen since I left the Army, I realised I was not alone and there was nothing wrong with how I was feeling. A lot of the guys had, and were having the same or similar problems. I proudly lined up under the 12 Fd Regt banner, it was a wonderful day, the crowd was cheering and waving flags and this public display of thanks went a very long way to healing some old wounds.⁹⁵

The very fact that the crowd honestly cared for the Vets was a very humbling experience. It would not be long until they were together again although this time it was the disbanding of 102 Fd Bty and with that, the loss of a part of Australian Military history.



Above, at a reunion with 102 Fd Bty, Larry, second from right, second row.

⁹⁵ D'Arcy 18 September 2012.

Vietnam vets' long way home

TODAY'S Welcome Home Parade is an event of major significance not only for the Vietnam veterans involved, but for the wider community as well. It may indicate that 15 years after the last Australian troops left Vietnam, the wounds our involvement in the war produced back home have finally begun to heal. After all, it has taken nearly two years to plan this parade, and it is unlikely it could have been held without the co-operation of veterans, the RSL, and both the Federal and State Governments. It is even more unlikely the parade would have been held without the expectation of a warm and enthusiastic public response. This Welcome Home itself, then, clearly signifies that a degree of reconciliation has already occurred within the Australian community.

Above, Newspaper clip: Sydney Morning Herald, 3 October 1987.

102 Fd Bty Disbanded: 1 December 1987

Fighting unit disbands

STORY BY SGT DARRYL GALLAGHER

THE disbandment late last year of 102 Mdm Bty brought to a close 71 years of history for the Royal Australian Artillery unit.

Raised in 1916, the Battery fought on the Western Front — defined as the border between France and Belgium — and in the intervening years to its demise the unit served in light, field and medium artillery roles. More than 1000 Gunners served with the unit in its varying roles and one of the Battery's most famous actions was the role it played in the defence of Fire Support Base Coral in South Vietnam in 1968.

In response to attacks on Saigon in May, 1968, plans to intercept the enemy's withdrawal were drawn up and a task force was sent to Binh Duong Province, about 32km north-east of Bien Hoa — the Australian component's mission was to help close the enemy's resupply and withdrawal routes.

A fire support base, Coral, was to be manned by the NZ 161 Fd Bty and 102 Fd Bty to give artillery support to Australian infantry, 1RAR and 3RAR.

Maj (now Brig) Geoff Cohen, 3RAR's

The Gunner recon party headed off to find a new site as US Army Chinooks arrived with the Kiwi Battery's guns slung underneath. Because of the pressing operational requirements the Chinooks couldn't wait until the new site was selected, so the guns were dropped at a site deemed unsuitable. This meant the guns had to remain in place, at least for the night, and a company from 3RAR was assigned to defend the guns.

A new site for FSB Coral was found about 1200m away but the delays meant that the base could not be properly established before nightfall.

Attack

The new position was in a cleared area of a rubber plantation, covering a radius of about 10km with 102 Fd Bty's guns in the centre and RHO of 12 Fd Regt on the rear western flank.

By nightfall Coral was manned by about 200 Gunners and infantry. During the day an

and 12 Fd Regt RHO was also fortified. Because of the delays and confusion neither barbed wire or Claymore mines were laid in front of the base.

The Australians made their first contact with the enemy in the late afternoon when D Coy 1RAR, commanded by the recently-retired Brig (then Maj) Tony Hammett, ambushed an NVA patrol.

The infantry dug in and were hit again at night.

Maj Hammett called for artillery support and that fateful call decided the fate of FSB Coral.

Because his position was 2500m north of FSB Coral, the guns were relayed from the east to support 1RAR in the north.

At 1.45am a sentry saw about 400 enemy in front of FSB Coral and moments later the base was hit by rockets and mortars, followed by a battalion assault.

Gunners' GPO Lt (now Col) Ian Ahearn said the leading NVA soldiers swept through the position to the ramparts protecting the

a mortar and began firing against 102 Fd Bty's guns but the six rounds passed harmlessly overhead.

Mortar Platoon commander Lt Tony Jensen called for more fire onto his position and a 102 Fd Bty gun fired three Splitter rounds directly across the position, cutting a swath through the NVA attackers.

As the tide turned in favour of the Australians, Lt Ahearn decided not to try and immediately retake the captured gun.

That would have meant more casualties,

rounds a minute, arrived.

Control of the battle passed from 12 Fd Regt to the CO 1RAR, Gen Sir Phillip (then Lt-Col) Bennett and at dawn Lt Ahearn organised a counterattack to recapture the gun.

According to the Time-Life book, Lt (now Lt-Col) Bob Lowrey and 10 Gunners assaulted the positions while another group led by Lt Ahearn gave covering fire.

Recapture

Lt Lowrey's men killed three enemy in recapturing the gun and

wounded were from the mortar platoon.

The Gunners lost two killed — Gns Scott and Sawell, both of 12 Fd Regt RHO.

FSB Coral was reinforced by companies from 1RAR and more artillery but undaunted the NVA launched another battalion attack on May 16.

The enemy succeeded in occupying some of A Coy's forward pits but the main attack was stopped at the defensive perimeter.

Despite the determination of the enemy's

Later fighting at FSB Balmoral saw the end of the Task Force's contribution to the operation.

The force returned to Phuoc Tuy in early June.

The role of 102 Fd Bty remained field support until 1970 when it was designated a medium battery and in 1984 the unit took delivery of its 155mm M198 medium howitzers.

102 Mdm Bty is the third ARA artillery unit to be disbanded in the past 10 years: 106 Bty, raised as part of the Medium Gun Proj-



★ ABOVE: Guns from a battery of 12 Fd Regt fire in support of operations from FSB Pamela in SVN. Coral was not prepared to this extent when the NVA attacked.

Above, Army newspaper, 18 February, 1988

When 102 Field Battery returned home after its tour of Vietnam, the battery resumed under the banner of 12 Field Regiment at Holsworthy. It remained part of the Regiment until a decision was made in 1970 to redesignate 102 as a medium battery and was amalgamated with 8 Fd Regt, forming the 8/12 Medium Regiment. In 1987 a decision was made to retire the Battery.

For all the men who had served 102 Fd Bty with distinction, this was a somber day for many. The decision to retire 102 was one based purely on numbers and as the inter-war years did not provide adequate personnel to support the Battery. For the modern Australian Army, a Field Battery with a total range capability of approximately 10,000m was now considered inadequate. For Larry and many of those who served with 102, this was a very sad time as he, like many were willing to give their life for this Battery and some did just that. For Larry, 102 Fd Bty was an extremely large part of his life.

It seems that the decision to retire 102 was done so without careful consideration or very little research into their history. Considering that 102 had a long and distinguished history The Army was going to disband 'A' Bty, the oldest serving Regiment in the Australian Army, so in the end, room was made and 102 were removed from the Order of Battle.

*The 8th/12th Medium Regiment
Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery*



Mounted Parade

on

Tuesday, 1st December, 1987

on the occasion of

*The disbandment of the
102nd Medium Battery*

Reviewed by

Major General G. J. Fitzgerald, AO

**Left, The front page of the
official ceremony booklet**

To this day, I am still extremely proud to say I have served with not only 102 Fd Bty, but to have been associated with the men who served with it. This is why the disbanding of the battery was a difficult time for many of us. I feel that the decision to retire 102 was a poor one, with very little thought put into it. 102 were the first to do so much, but I guess to the powers that be, unfortunately that didn't really matter.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ D'Arcy, 2 October 2012.

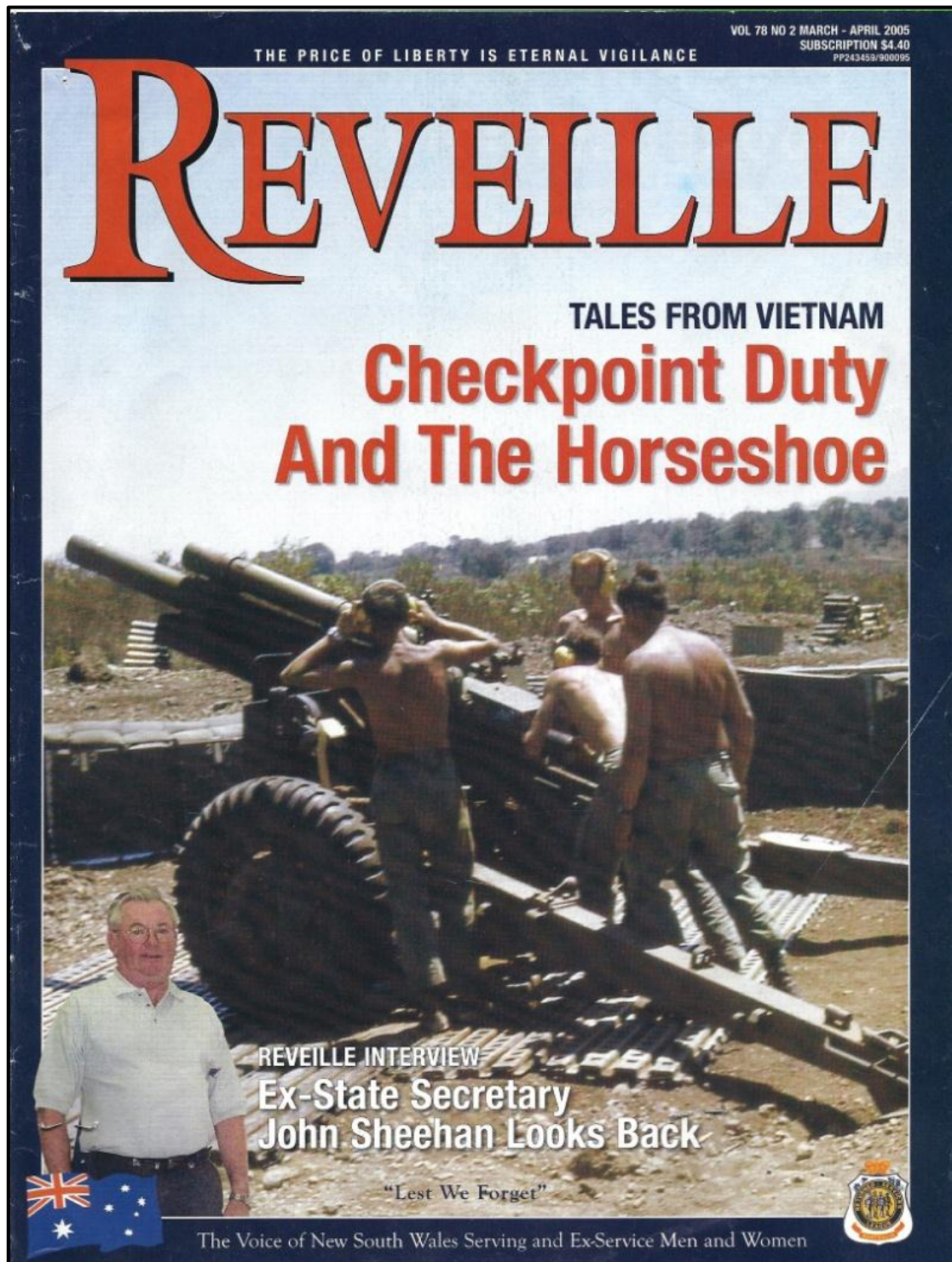
20th Anniversary and the launch of 'The Battle of CORAL'1988

The launch of the book, *'The Battle of Coral: Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral May 1968'* by Lex McAulay was held in Townsville, with the military flying all who were involved and wanted to attend from their home states to the function. From there, Larry flew back to NSW and headed to Kapooka in Wagga Wagga to join the rest of the men from 102 to commemorate the battle. The men were billeted at the barracks, which was then under command of Ian 'Scrubber' Ahearn. Larry remembers this as a great time for not only himself, but also the opportunity to catch up with his mates and engage in a bit of friendly banter. Larry was happy to be in the company of his mates and pleased to see some recognition for actions that 102 Fd Bty took in defending FSPB Coral in May/June 1968.



Above, Back left to right; Tom Carmody, Pommy, Val Barry, Larry, Tomo, Algie, Peter Geelan, Dick Grey, Cossie and Bob Bushby.

REVEILLE is the official magazine of The Returned and Service League of Australia and gracing the front page are members of Charlie gun while on operations at the Horseshoe, Vietnam 1968-69.



Above, Left to right is Gnr Tony Townsend, Bdr Larry D'Arcy at rear of gun, Cossie loading gun and Tomo looking on. Note: As with most photographs of guns being fired, they all seem to be taken from the back. I guess only a fool would stand in front of a 105mm Howitzer.

40th Anniversary of 'The Battle for Fire Support Patrol Base Coral'.



Above, Larry standing in front of the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial, Anzac Parade, Canberra.

A significant time approached for 102 Fd Bty's involvement in the Battle for FSPB Coral, South Vietnam, May-June 1968. It had been 40 years since this major battle occurred and the Australian government offered an invitation to all personnel who served at Coral. There was the commemoration at Parliament House, speeches in front of the Vietnam Memorial on ANZAC parade and a plaque unveiling at the Australian War Memorial (AWM).

The night was opened with a bit of pomp and ceremony on the evening of 12 May with a reception by Prime Minister (PM) Kevin Rudd at Parliament House. Speeches were made by the PM and other dignitaries throughout the three hour ceremony. This was followed by a dinner for all sub units at various locations around Canberra. During this time, the men from 102 were able to sit down together as a group and chat about life and old times. The following day, Tuesday 13 May was a ceremonial address by the Governor General Sir Michael Jeffery and other dignitaries and the unveiling of the commemoration plaque for 12 Field Regiment at the AWM.



Above, 12th Field Regiment Memorial Plaque that was unveiled on the 13 May 2008 at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.⁹⁷

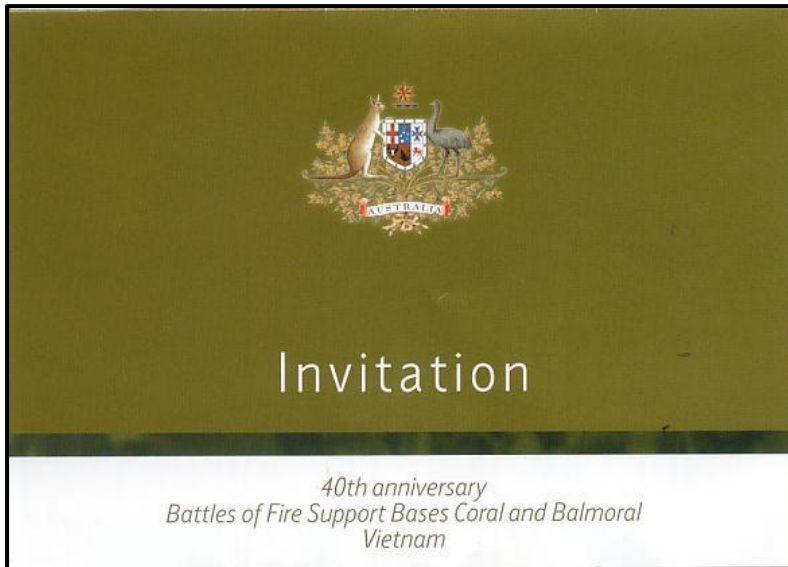
Not since the Pacific war has an Australian field gun position been as heavily engaged by enemy combatants as 102 Fd Bty at FSPB Coral in the early hours on Mother's Day, 13 May 1968. The ability of the gunners to defend their position and be ready at day break to support the infantry is a testament to their fighting ability.⁹⁸ FSPB Coral and FSPB Balmoral accounted for over 300 enemy dead over the following four weeks and were able to capture weapons and documents from the enemy. Throughout the course of fighting 26 Australian soldiers died, two from 12 Fd Regt, one from 104 Signals Squadron, 16 from 1RAR, 6 from 3RAR and one from 161 Independent Reconnaissance Squadron. Over 100 Australian soldiers were wounded.⁹⁹ One of the five battle honours for the Vietnam War was awarded to the Australian Army Regiments who were involved in this battle and the honour title was finally awarded to 102 Fd Bty who are now fittingly titled 102 'Coral' Battery.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ 12 Field Regiment, *Retail Items*, <http://12fieldregiment.com> (accessed 13 December 2012).

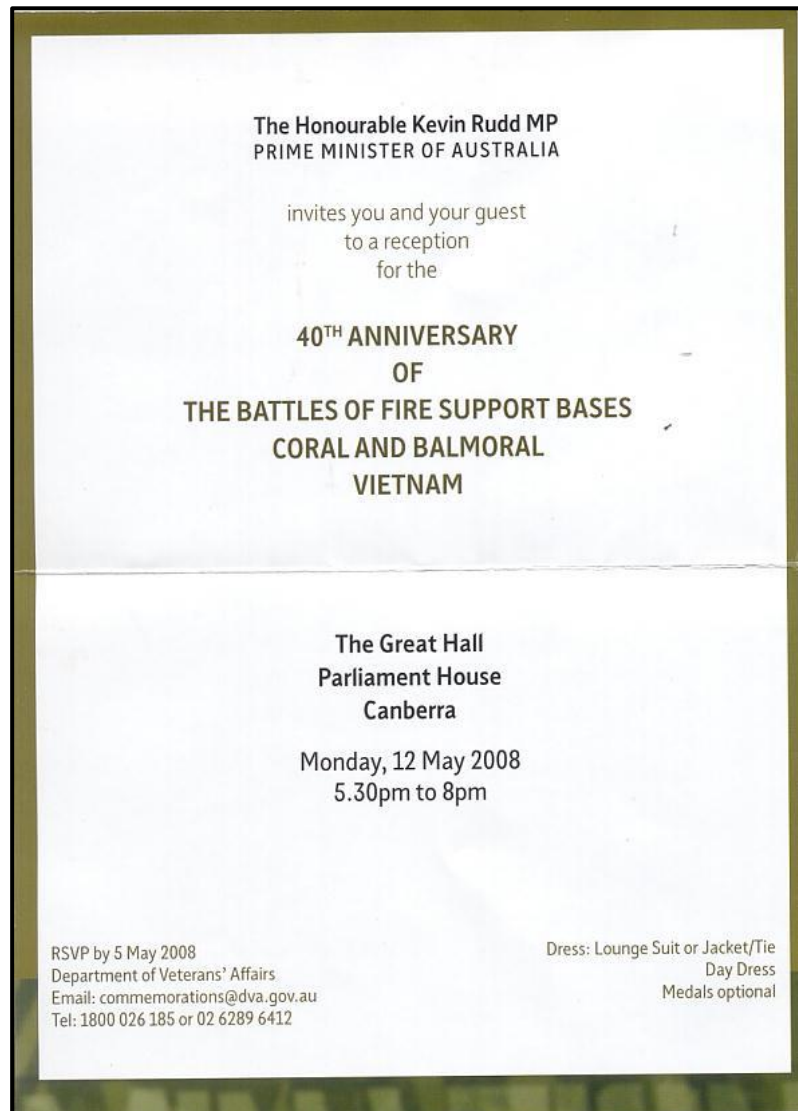
⁹⁸ Australian War Memorial, *The battle of Coral & Balmoral: May-June 1968*, <http://www.awm.gov.au> (accessed 25 April 2012).

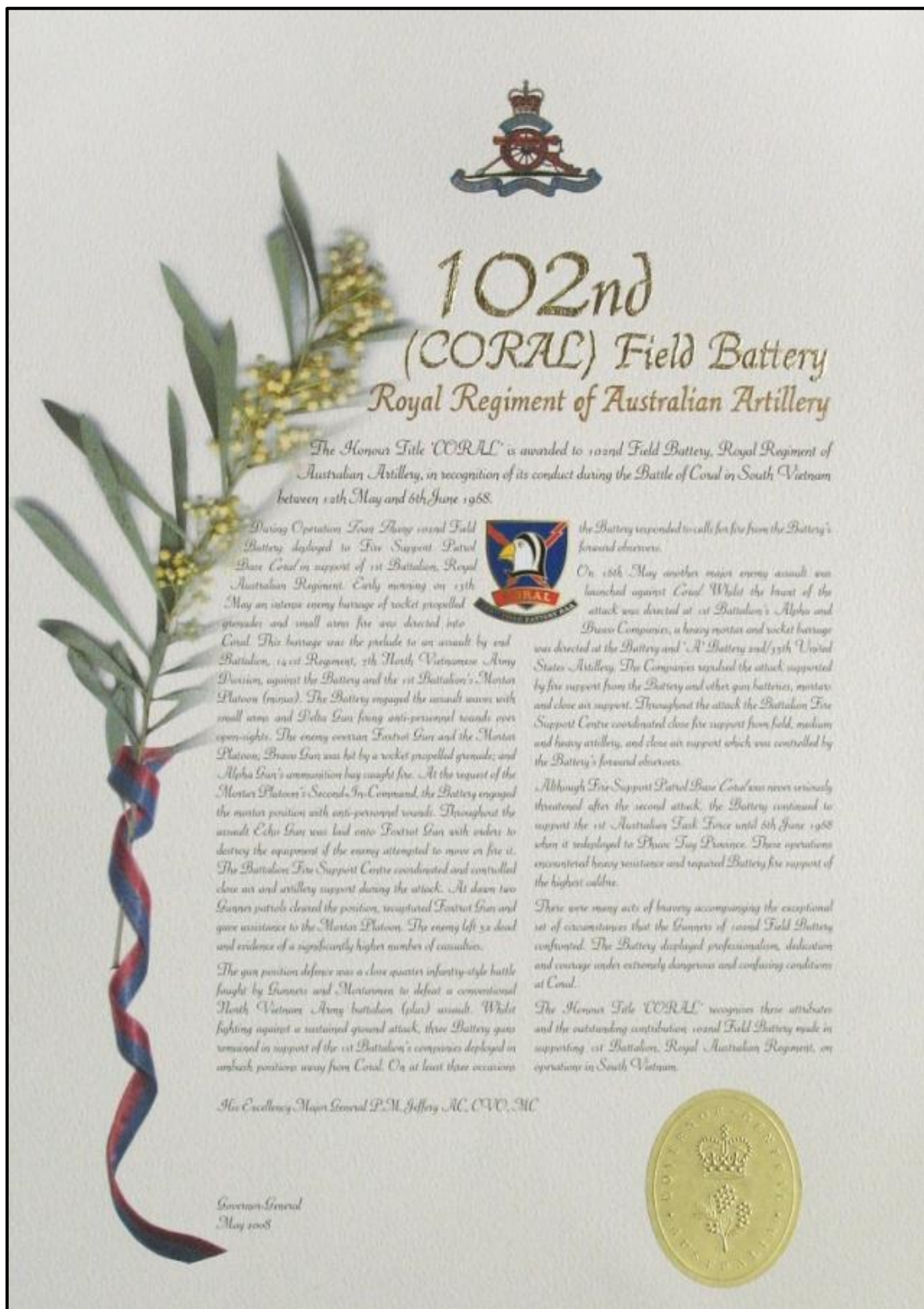
⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*



Left is the invitation for the dinner and below is the same invitation now opened to display what was written inside.





¹⁰¹ Australian Artillery Association, '102nd (CORAL) Field Battery', <http://australianartilleryassociation.com> (accessed 18 August 2012).

102nd (CORAL) Field Battery: Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery

The Honour Title 'CORAL' is awarded to the 102nd Field Battery, Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery, in recognition of its conduct during the Battle of Coral in South Vietnam between 12th May and 6th June 1968.

During operation *Toan Thang* 102nd field battery deployed to Fire Support patrol base *Coral* in support of 1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment. Early morning on 13th May an intense enemy barrage of rocket propelled grenades and small arms fire was directed into Coral. This barrage was the prelude to an assault by 2nd Battalion, 141st Regiment, 7th North Vietnamese Army Division against the Battery and the 1st Battalion's Mortar Platoon (Minus). The Battery engaged the assault waves with small arms and Delta Gun firing anti-personnel rounds over open sights. The enemy overran Foxtrot Gun and the Mortar Platoon, Bravo Gun was hit by a rocket propelled grenade, and Alpha Gun's ammunition bay caught fire. At the request of the Mortar Platoon's Second In-Command, the Battery engaged the Mortar position with anti-personnel rounds. Throughout the assault Echo Gun was laid onto Foxtrot Gun with orders to destroy the equipment if the enemy attempted to move or fire it. The Battalion Fire Support Centre coordinated and controlled close air and artillery support during the attack. At dawn two Gunner patrols cleared the position, recaptured Foxtrot Gun and gave assistance to the Mortar Platoon. The enemy left 30 dead and evidence of a significantly higher number of casualties.

The gun position defence was a close quarter's infantry-styled battle fought by Gunners and Mortarmen to defend a conventional North Vietnam Army battalion (plus) assault. Whilst fighting against a sustained ground attack, three Battery guns remained in support of the 1st Battalion Companies deployed in ambush positions away from Coral. On at least three occasions The Battery responded to calls for fire from the Battery's forward observers.

On the 16th May another major enemy assault was launched against *Coral*. Whilst the brunt of the attack was directed against 1st Battalion's Alpha and Bravo Companies, a heavy mortar and rocket barrage was directed at the Battery and 'A' Battery and 2nd/35th United States Artillery. The companies repulsed the attack supported by fire support from the Battery and other gun batteries, mortars and close air support. Throughout the attack the Battalion Fire Support Centre coordinated close fire support from field, medium and heavy artillery, and close air support which was controlled by the Battery's forward observers.

Although Fire Support Patrol base *Coral* was never seriously threatened after the second attack, the Battery continued to support the 1st Australian Task Force until 6th June 1968 when it redeployed to Phuoc Tuy Province. These operations encountered heavy resistance and required Battery fire support of the highest caliber.

There were many acts of bravery accompanying the exceptional set of circumstances that the Gunners of 102nd Field Battery confronted. The Battery displayed professionalism, dedication and courage under extremely dangerous and confusing conditions at Coral.

The Honour Title 'CORAL' recognises these attributes and the outstanding contribution 102nd Field Battery made in supporting 1st battalion Royal Australian Regiment on operation in South Vietnam.

His Excellency Major General P.M. Jeffery AC. CVO. MC

Puckapunyal Vietnam Veterans Commemorative Walk

This will become a new Vietnam Veterans Memorial and will honour all 62,100 Australians who served in the Vietnam War. The memorial is to be in the town of Seymour, Puckapunyal and will link with the town's historical Army Tank Museum. The plan of the memorial is to have a meandering walkway along a red path incorporating a landscape that is reminiscent of the rice paddies and rubber trees that are common in Vietnam. With the names of all personnel who served etched into stainless steel along the walkway, the memorial will serve as a timeless reminder to many.



Left, Inchy, Larry, Pommy and Cossie at the opening of the first stage of the Commemorative Walk.

Larry headed down to Puckapunyal where he was accompanied by Cossie, Pommy, and Ian 'Inchy' Warren to look at the beginnings of a new memorial. Ian Warren being a committee member has had a big involvement in getting this proposal moving forward along with the Mitchell Shire Council and the Mitchell Vietnam Veterans Association.

102 'Coral' Battery reraised

An announcement made in 2010 informing past members that 102 'Coral' Battery would be reraised in the not too distant future. The raising of 8/12 Regiment would incorporate 102 and would be housed at Edinburgh barracks in South Australia. The ceremony was held on December 2011, and the reraising of 102 was an important day for a lot of the past members as it signified the contribution of service to the RAA. The Battery was reclassified as a medium battery and will now operate the new towed 155mm guns and is now on the order of battle for the Australian Army. The day was one of importance for all who attended especially for the past members of 102 who were able to offer the new gunners an insight into what 102 is all about. An important message was relayed that 102 is not a new Battery, but in fact a very old Battery with a rich and unique culture, highly decorated and the only unit to have been awarded an Honour Title.



Left to right, standing in front of a M2A2 105mm Howitzer are Dick Creek (Command Post Sergeant), Jim Holland (Battery Officer), Peter Geelan (Charlie Gun), Larry D'Arcy (Bombardier Charlie Gun), Trevor Bryant (Command Post Operator) and Les Partridge (Regimental Sergeant Major).

Captain Don Tait gave a speech of the battery's firsthand account of Coral and spoke on behalf of all members of the unit. This was well received by the new Battery gunners who were equally enthusiastic about the history of the Battery and understood the significance of the 'Coral' title. For Larry, the reraising of the Battery was highly significant as it reestablished the history, courage and the bravery of the Australian gunners who served with 102. The Australian Army has acquired the M777 Howitzers which replaced the 105mm howitzer used by the 1Regt, RAA and the 4Regt, RAA. The guns are equipped with the Digital Gun Management System (DGMS), which greatly improved accuracy and led to these guns being used for Short Range Close Support. 102 'Coral' Bty is being equipped with the self-propelled version and this offers the new Artillery gunners the latest technology and an opportunity for future deployments.



Left, Trevor Bryant and Larry standing in front of a current 155mm gun.



A short chat with a few Gunners

Sergeant: John Harms (Retd)

Australian Army, 1963 to 1971. Bombardier: 12 Field Regiment, RAA, South Vietnam: 3 March 1968 to 4 February 1969.



I left school 1960 and started working as a jackaroo on a 1.1/4 million acres station. In 1963 I joined the Australian Army and posted to 1 Field Regiment RAA. In 1965, I was posted to Malaysia and in 1968 was posted to South Vietnam with 102 Field Battery RAA, firstly with 7RAR then 1RAR until (WIA).

My operational experience began after about a week or so on landing in country i.e. Vietnam, when as the Battery Commander Driver/Operator we went out on operations with 7RAR. It was a rude awakening as on our first night a “flock” I’ll call them that name, they were from memory three American Huey gunships, decided the hill we had harboured up on for the night looked easier than the one that they were supposed to strafe and rocket. After some frantic radio calls somebody got through to them that they were strafing the wrong hill obviously to everyone’s immense relief. That was my introduction to

operations in Vietnam.

After the operations at FSPB Coral, I was transferred to A Coy 1RAR as the 2ic FO Party. It was a complete change as this role meant you operated as an infantry soldier, with your primary role being Artillery fire support when the infantry came into contact with the enemy by supplying the relevant information to the guns. Generally 102 Battery could be anything from five to eight km’s from you. They would fire and drop rounds where you

indicated through radio contact. Before the first rounds hit the ground it was always a tense wait, but once they dropped where you ordered them, it was immensely satisfying knowing your navigation and grid references had been correct and the job was done right. Our method was unbelievably crude, counting your steps all day and continuous compass shots, but it did the job.

There were many operations some of which I remember and many more that I have little memory of. The worst was lying in the one ambush position for five days and nights, it seemed more like five months and became worse with each passing moment. It was on a large enemy bunker system and when we finally moved out and called in artillery fire, it was a huge relief. On operations when a contact occurred with the enemy, it was, I felt quite exciting, remember at 23 years of age you are bullet proof and it never occurs to you that you could be next. During one large contact as we approached the enemy bunker system there was this small monkey sitting in the dust and dirt obviously terrified, with six or so scrawny chickens at his/her feet and as a chicken wandered nearly out of the monkey's reach it would stretch out grasp and pull it back closer to itself, it must have been comforting to it, strange sight.

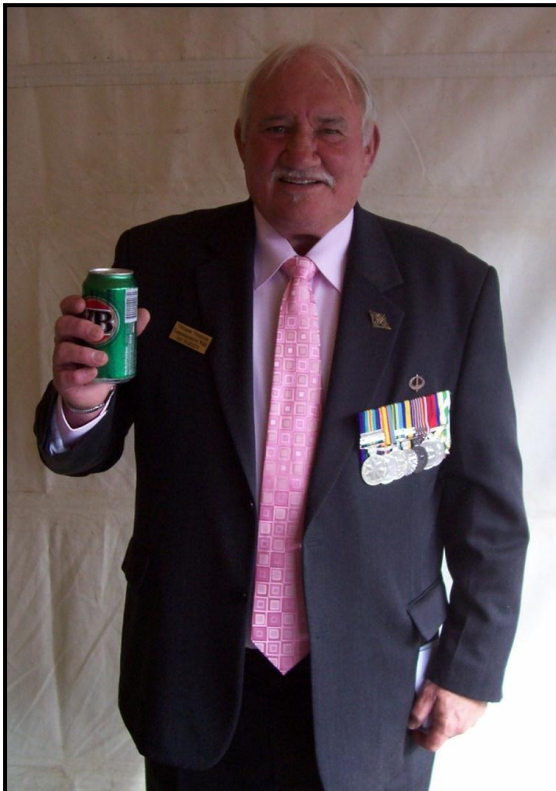
That wonderful feeling during a contact of invulnerability disappeared in an explosive flash of red black and a huge cloud of red dust and dirt with me landing flat on my back, winded, confused, and trying to work out what the hell had happened. I then realised I was being used as target practice and to say extremely uncomfortable is an understatement of what was occurring. While still on the ground I looked around for my weapon and it was gone obviously blown out of my hands. It was then as I tried to get up off the ground and found my left leg wouldn't function and noticed a fair amount of blood and then the pain. I later found out the source of my discomfort was in fact a Chinese Communist supplied anti-personnel command detonated mine.

Some time passed before a RAAF helicopter was hovering above the treetops however he smartly withdrew radioing he was being shot at and disappeared. More time passed then another helicopter came in hovering above the trees which I am guesstimating were 80 to 100 meters high, and this time a winch came crashing down through the canopy and the extraction process of removing the dead and wounded began. The helicopter and pilots were Americans. I was the lucky last to go and as I was being winched up, above the noise of the helicopter I could hear small arms fire cracking and ripping through the canopy presumably directed at the chopper. Next I felt myself moving not only straight up but also forward through the trees, the helicopter was going up and forward. My relief was immense when I was finally pulled into the helicopter and off to a five week stay at Australia's 1 Field Hospital at Vung Tau. After being released from hospital, rejoined 102 Field Battery until their return home in 1969 where he was promoted to Sergeant and posted to 16 Air Defence Regt RAA then to 1 RTB at Kapooka.

I Married in 1969, and took my discharge in 1971 and spent a short period of time working in the spray painting business with my father in law. I Joined the NSW Corrective Service in 1978 and after a successful 16 year career, retired as an A/Superintendent. Larry remembers John was always immaculately dressed and 'stick picquet' was awarded to those that were best presented (best dressed and polished). John won more than his fair share of stick piquet and would also sell his position or hire his uniform out for a few bucks which gave him the night off guard duty.

Warrant Officer: Ian 'Inchy' Warren (Retd)

Australian Army 1963-1988. Bombardier: 12 Field Regiment, RAA, South Vietnam: 4 March 1968 to 4 February 1969.



Ian served in Malaya with 'A' Battery and later in Vietnam with 102 Field Battery forming a good friendship with Larry during these years.

While in Malaya, Ian received the nickname of 'Inchy' meaning Sir in Malay. This came about in his words a young know it all gunner constantly advising the young FO Officer how to do things.

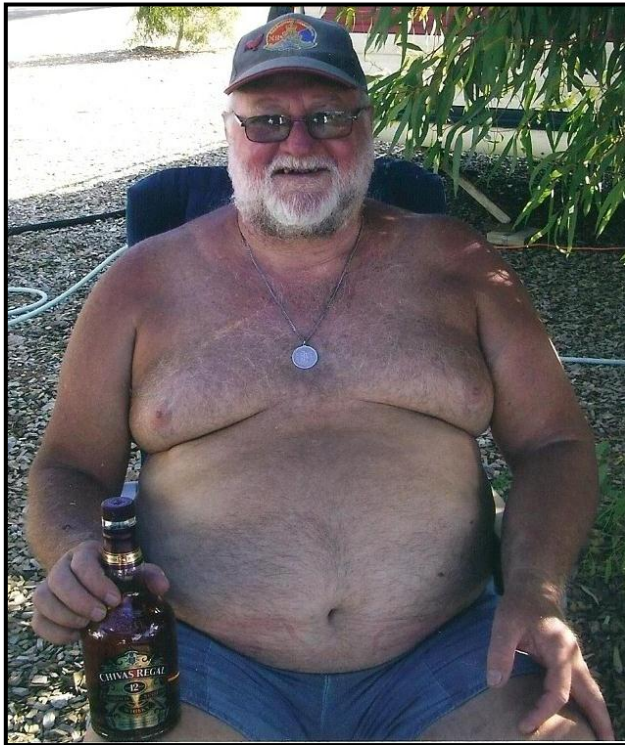
In all good Army humour the FO continued to take the advice from Ian, but returned with the name of 'Inchy' or Sir, much to the delight of the other soldiers. The name stuck and throughout Vietnam to the present day 'Inchy' is how his mates refer to him.

Upon returning from Vietnam, Ian was promoted to Sergeant and was then posted to 16 Air Defence Regt RAA. Ian then received a posting to England to be trained on the new artillery guns that the Australian Army was being issued.

This role was a privileged posting and one that a lot of gunners would have grabbed with both hands. The cadre course is designed to create instructors and for them to impart this new knowledge onto the Australian gunners. Today, Ian is heavily involved in the Vietnam Veterans Commemorative Walk in Seymour, Victoria and finds this an important memorial for all Vietnam Veterans.

Gunner: David 'Tomo' Thomas (Retd)

12 Field Regiment, RAA, 102 Field Battery, Charlie Gun, National Service (NASHO). South Vietnam: 4 March 1968 to 4 February 1969.



David married Lyn in January 1967 and has two daughters, Rachel born in 1974 and Cara born in 1975.

Prior to my service in Vietnam, I was a bricklayer and after being discharged from the Army returned to running a bricklaying business in Sydney, North Rocks before moving to Gum Scrub in 1979 where I continue bricklaying.

I was a gun number on number three gun, Charlie gun and 95% of the time I was on the gun sights, I was the number three on the gun. I remember at Coral, I went to bed and in some time through the night all the whizz bangs and all the rest just started and that was it. When

they first hit, I was under my hootchie and it was mortars and rockets and we didn't think it would be on the scale that it turned out to be, we just thought someone was going to have a few shots at us, but it just got worse and worse. We were running our rounds up to Stephos gun and Robbo's gun because they were just firing them straight over the top of the bunds. Then we got a fire mission on number three gun, we were firing in support of 3 RAR as they had a contact. We did all that while the bullet and rockets were going all around us and all this was at night.

I retired in 1994 and these days I enjoy spending time caravanning with wife Lyn and visiting the grandchildren.

Larry remembers Tomo being a bit of a character especially around shower time, something Pommy Fisher can agree with. Pommy was caught out on a few occasions when all soaped up and unable to see, Tomo would enter and drag Pommy out and back into the dirt, with much laughter and encouragement from his mates. Prior to discharge Tomo was promoted to the rank of Lance Bombardier. The RAA hoped this new promotion would persuade him to staying in and continue a life in the Army, but once a bricklayer always a bricklayer.

Gunner: Robert 'Cossie' Costello (Retd)

12 Field Regiment, RAA, 102 Field Battery, Charlie Gun, National Service (NASHO). South Vietnam 4 March 1968 to 4 February 1969.



Prior to leaving for Vietnam, Rob worked in the coke ovens at the Newcastle steelworks and upon leaving the Army he bought his beloved red MG, married Kathryn on 7 August 1971 and has two daughters, Kirsty Louise 16 and Rebecca Jane.

Cossie also had another nickname called the 'little shit' given to him on a day early in the tour when Charlie gun were preparing an area. Working in the mud and monsoon rain the men were surprised to see Cossie dry and warm under a shelter, to which Gun Sgt 'Algie' questioned what he was doing and before Cossie could answer the rest of the gun crew grabbed Cossie and proceeded to drag him through the mud so he was now as wet and muddy as they were. 'Welcome to Charlie Gun'.

The morning of Mother's Day, 12 May had dawned at **Fire Support Patrol Base Harrison**, we were there for around a week or so after our movement out of Nui Dat to start a new operation in support of 1 Battalion RAR. We were told on the evening of 11 May that we would be moving to a new **FSPB** in early morning of 12 May. For a Battery of Artillery to leave its existing position requires a lot of work for all involved as it does in setting up on arrival. All the Gunners pitched in as usual for our departure from FSPB Harrison and all was ready for our airlift out by Chinook helicopters in the early morning on the eve of Mother's Day 1968. As it was in them times in the Army we were in a hurry up and wait mode, we hurried, waited and waited and waited some more for the choppers to come and move us to our new position, FSPB Coral.

The day grew on and at last we seen the choppers coming at around 1530hrs (3.30PM) in the afternoon, very late in the day for a transfer of an Artillery battery to a new position given the duties to be done by all concerned of the Battery prior to Stand To on the night of arrival to a new position. There were many and varied tasks to be done **by all Gunners** to make the Battery position secure before nightfall on the 12th. The Gunners were required to set up the Guns, establish a covered Ammunition bay for their gun, set up a shelter for the Gun numbers, start a personal sleeping pit and shelter, establish defences around the position, including machine Gun pits and Barbed wire around the Gun position. The major

task for those of the Guns Command post was to set up a fully sandbag covered position deep into the ground as well as to dig in their own shell scrapes for sleeping and their personal protection in case of attack.

Needless to say the unit had not completed all required tasks prior to dusk and stand to was called. Our Battery and 1RAR Infantry Mortar men and elements of 3RAR to our rear who was our support, we were indeed vulnerable and open to attack from the enemy as the sun went down on the eve of the 12th of May 1968.

At around 0245 in the morning the enemy hit us hard from our Batteries front and left front with heavy Rocket and Mortar fire with infantry support. This was the first time and only time in our tour of Vietnam that we had come under fire as intense as this and that of any time thereafter.

All men ran to their shell scrape as meagre as it was some had dug only 4 Hundred Mil under ground level. Rockets, Mortar shells and small arms fire were falling around our position; fortunately most of the rockets were falling to the rear. I remember very vividly of letting my airbed down to gain greater depth in my sleeping pit. All of a sudden our Command Post Sergeant, Dick Creek called Fire Mission Battery over the Tannoy (**Urgently**) around three or four times, it appeared that most Guns had not acknowledged his call. On the most part they were, however but it became evident that our wired communication lines from the Command post had been damaged by the incoming ordinance from the enemy.

At first, I was very loath to move from what I seen as a relatively safe spot, as were all of our Gunners. We answered the call of our Sergeant, Lindsay (Algie) Elgar, Sgt Dick Creek became more urgent in his call, I do remember the Gun Position Officer Lieutenant Ian Ahearn positioning himself on the top of the CP relaying fire orders to all Guns by voice alone as relayed by Dick Creek in the Command post. The Battery was still under intense enemy Mortar and Rocket fire during this time.

Gunners from most Guns will remember the resupply of ammunition carried out by the Transport Bombardier Peter Riley in a Land Rover, headlights blazing, packed to the hilt with 105 Artillery rounds in the rear. Bombardier Riley carried out this task whilst our position was under heavy attack and delivered ordinance to all Guns who was in need. Peter Riley with his actions should have received some sort of commendation as was the case in many other acts of Bravery on that night.

Gunner: Phil Haynes (Retd)

*12 Field Regiment, RAA, 'A' Battery, Echo Gun, National Service (NASHO).
South Vietnam, 5 February 1971 to 20 October 1971.*

Phil is the younger of two boys born to Hugh and Isabel Haynes, brother Daryl was 4 years older. Isabel tragically died of asthma when I was 4 years of age. Both Daryl and I were educated at Marist Brothers College. Daryl joined the Navy not long after leaving School and subsequently did 2 tours of Vietnam on the HMAS Perth. I had full intention to join the Navy myself, but on advice elected to finish my Apprenticeship prior to registering for National Service.

My marble came up and I was due to engage in the 4/69 intake, but due to a motor vehicle accident in August 1969, my enlistment was put off until 28 January 1970 the day my whole life changed... for the better. After completing basic training at 2 RTB Puckapunyal (Pucka) the rookies had three choices of which Corps they wished to apply for. I applied for, 1. Engineers, 2. Artillery and 3 Armoured. Dad was an Engineer during World War Two (WWII) and I thought I would keep the tradition going. It was always my intention to get to Vietnam, probably the boyhood adventure...I thought the only way to get there was to join a fighting Corps and hence the above choices. Fortunately one of my instructors at Pucka was an Artillery Sergeant and after his gentle persuasion I was lucky enough to get into the Artillery. What's meant to be...

After 6 weeks intensive Training as a Gun Number at 123 Training Battery Holsworthy I was posted to 'A' Battery 12 Fd Regt, Lavarack Barracks Townsville where the Battery was preparing for service in Vietnam. On arrival at the Battery I was put with Larry D'Arcy's Echo Gun. As Larry was one of the youngest Sergeants in the Battery and had recently returned from Vietnam, everybody was trying to get on to Larry's Gun which was a very envied position. Larry is a man's man and would bend over backwards for his troops. He knew how to handle men and the way to get the best out of them; his boys loved him for the way he looked after them and that was reciprocated.

The first Exercise I went on was 'Hi-Fi up at High Range, this exercise was named after a salubrious Coffee lounge in Liverpool NSW, the reason behind the naming rights should be obtained from one 'Crash' Kennedy Jnr and is a very interesting story. Larry molded a fine Gun crew together whilst we were in Townville and numerous Exercises were conducted at High Range, Tully, Shoalwater Bay and of course who could forget Exercise 'Iron Maiden' in the heart of winter on the Pucka Tank Range, absolutely freezing, *'if you weren't wearing three sets of clothes there was something wrong with you and you could almost hear the brass balls dropping off, man it was cold'*. One will never forget the last night of the exercise, we were privileged to have a BBQ put on by the Battery, together with a few beers and this rounded off a pretty intense Exercise. Great night had by all, got a bit giggly... everybody was knackered as a result of the exercise and an early night was in order as we were leaving

at sparrow fart in the morning. Seemed like no sooner than we had gotten to bed, we were rousted out of bed and 'On Parade'. Apparently one of the diggers, who shall remain nameless, tried to burn down the boss' tent. There we were freezing cold on parade marching up and down this bloody dirt track for what seemed like hours, until the culprit put his hand up to the deed. Nameless digger eventually owned up and was marched off never to be seen again. The troops will never forget the person who took great delight in giving this punishment!

The Battery arrived in South Vietnam in late January 1971 to support 3RAR. Our first trip out bush was our in country acclimatization period, our three gun section went out and built FSB Marj. This was supposed to be a five day Exercise but lasted about five weeks due to 3RAR getting in the shit. They too were on their in country acclimatization period, patrolling at the back of Nui Dat 2, where they encountered unfriendly forces. Nobody told them that was also the enemy's training ground as well. Unfortunately 3RAR got hit pretty hard having a couple of Officers killed and several diggers wounded. Not a good way to start their tour.

Many operations were to follow on from FSB Marj including FSB's Ziggy, Jane, Lindy etc, but unfortunately Larry or 'Cuddles' as he was known to his boys didn't remain with 'A' Bty for his full tour. I remember that in about May '71 the Battery was still working out of the old 106 Gun Position in Nui Dat, the Gun Crew were cleaning the Gun, as was the thing to do most mornings. Larry was talking to a nameless Officer who seemed to think he knew more about warfare than a Sgt who had spent two years in Malaya and was on his second tour of Vietnam, which included the Battle of Coral, which was one of the biggest Battles seen in Vietnam. This talk of Larry's soon developed into an argument, then Larry hung one on him. Not a good way to start the day! We didn't see a lot of Larry after that.

Not long after this incident the gun crew was split up, I went to work with the Military Police (MP) and I think Larry went over to Task Force Headquarters. I did make contact with Larry whilst I was with the MP's and that was on a weekend when there was a closed camp in Nui Dat. I rang Larry as I was trying to get hold of some spirits, namely a 40 oz bottle of Bacardi. The diggers mess wasn't allowed to have spirits but the Sgt's mess was the place to get it if you could. Larry was most obliging and as I was getting away with it Sgt Normie Mills gives chase, this digger goes into camouflage mode and hides in some bushes. Normies half pissed screaming he's gonna get me and all the rest of it! Luckily nothing becomes of it and I went back to the MP lines and did the business. As I said earlier Larry would do anything for his boys and he was loved for it. I just hope his boys were not to his detriment. Anybody who knows Larry and reads his book will understand exactly what I mean.

On behalf of the Echo Gun Crew, Stallion, Abdul, Otis, Bunny, O'Rourke and Rags I wish Larry/Cuddles good luck, good fortune, and good health. You deserve it.

Bombardier: Paul 'Crash' Kennedy (Retd)

12 Field Regiment, RAA, 'A' Battery, Alpha Gun. South Vietnam, 5 February 1971 to 28 October 1971.



Left, Mark Donaldson (VC) with Crash in his shed (2011).

I met up with Darc (Larry) back in 1971, I was the L/Bdr (promoted the next week for being in the slot for the Hi Fi incident on Sgt Bill Lowe's gun. On weekends when we were not training at the High Range, Larry was often down with the gunners having a chat and the occasional sip with the boys. He had been there, done that, (Vietnam, Coral 1968) and all. All wanted to be on Larry's gun, including myself, but unfortunately 42 don't go into seven, so when we were dispatched to the funny farm, me and the others went to Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta and Foxtrot, Larry was in charge of Echo gun.

Me, first part of tour with Alpha, Sgt. 'Sandbag Smith' then over as Kev 'Bex' Tucker's Bombardier. After four months we had our first couple of days off and headed to Vung Tau (Vungas). Along for the ride was Paul 'Stallion' Walsh, Reggie McGorey, myself and Watto (youngest, strongest and best looking). Darc informed us about the Do's and the double do's, where to go and who to avoid. Well what happens in Vungas stays in Vungas, but I reckon his advice was spot on as we all got in the shit one way or another. Thanks mate.

Larry, through no fault of his own, left the gun line a bit early in the tour, but his experience and coolness under stressful fire missions and all over respect he had for his men, I believe was a big influence in many of the gunners of 'A' Bty stepping up that notch when the pressure was on. (Not taking anything away from the other gun Sgt's of the 71 tour, all have my greatest respect and brotherhood). Since Vietnam I have had a beer and a tear with Darc on a few occasions, none better than last month (September 2012) in my shed.

Hats off to Larry, True Blue Soldier, True Blue Mate.



Khe Sanh



Left, 102 Field Battery gun being moved by an Army Chinook, Vietnam 1968-69.

The song 'Khe Sanh' is an Australian pub rock song released in May 1978, and named after the Battle of Khe Sanh (1968) during the Vietnam War.

The song, performed by Cold Chisel is about a disillusioned and lost Australian Vietnam Veteran who comes home, but is unable to adapt or accept suburban life again. This could well be true for many returned soldiers no matter what era or war that they were engaged in. Many were able to pick up where they left off before heading to Vietnam, for others it was not that easy and life became a bit of a roller coaster.

Although no Australian ground units were involved in the Battle of Khe Sanh which was fought between the United States Marines and the North Vietnamese Army, the United States Marines were supported by the crews of Canberra bombers operated by 2 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force, who flew close air support missions in the area.

For Larry, the lyrics are very real and are what he considers 'his Vietnam'.

KHE SANH

I left my heart to the sappers 'round Khe Sanh,
And my soul was sold with my cigarettes to the black market man.
I've had the Vietnam cold turkey from the ocean to the Silver City.
And it's only other vets could understand.
'Bout the long forgotten dockside guarantees,
How there were no V-Day heroes in nineteen seventy-three.
How we sailed into Sydney Harbour,
Saw an old friend but couldn't kiss her, She was lined,
And I was home to the lucky land.
She was like so many more from that time on,
Their lives were all so empty, Till they'd found their chosen one,
And their legs were often open, But their minds always closed,
And their hearts were held in fast suburban chains.
And the legal pad were yellow, Hours long, pay packets lean,
And the telex writers clattered, Where the gunships once had been;
But the carparks made me jumpy, And I never stopped the dreams,
Or the growing need for speed or novacane.
So I worked across the country from end to end,
Tried to find a place to settle down, Where my mixed-up life could mend,
Held a job on an oil-rig, Flying choppers when I could,
But the night-life nearly drove me 'round the bend.
And I've travelled 'round the world from year to year,
And each one found me aimless, One more year the worse for wear,
I've been back to South East Asia, But you know the answer sure ain't there,
But I'm drifting North, To check things out again.
Well the last plane out of Sydney's almost gone,
And only seven flying hours, And I'll landing in Hong Kong,
And there ain't nothin' like kisses from a jaded Chinese Princess,
I'm gonna hit some Hong Kong mattress all night long.
Well the last plane out of Sydney's almost gone,
You know the last plane out of Sydney's almost gone,
And it's got me worried, I'm goin' nowhere and I'm in a hurry,
You know the last plane out of Sydney's almost gone.
Well the last plane out of Sydney's almost gone.
Well the last plane out of Sydney's almost gone.
It's really got me worried, I'm goin' nowhere and I'm in a hurry,
You know the last plane out of Sydney's almost gone.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Cold Chisel, *Khe Sanh*, (2011), <http://www.coldchisel.com> (accessed 22 August 2012).



SERVING THE NATION

Certificate of Service

2274821 / 215649
Bombardier (Temporary Sergeant)
Laurence Gilbert D'ARCY

Served with

Citizen Military Forces
Australian Regular Army

From

20 June 1962
18 February 1964

To

12 February 1964
17 February 1973

Decorations, Medals and Commendations

Australian Active Service Medal 1945-75 with Clasps Malaysia & Vietnam
Vietnam Medal
Australian Service Medal 1945-75 with Clasp SE Asia
Australian Defence Medal
Vietnamese Campaign Medal
Pingat Jasa Malaysia
Returned from Active Service Badge

A.D.I. Gallaway

Colonel
for Chief of Army

23 February 2012



*A grateful nation
expresses its thanks to*
LAURENCE DARCY

3 Years, 123 days served overseas

*for contributing to
Australia's effort in
the Vietnam War*



John Howard
.....
Prime Minister
Hon John Howard MP

Leslie Molles
.....
Federal Member

Bruce Scott
.....
Minister for Veterans' Affairs
Hon Bruce Scott MP

Larry's Medals



From left to right the medals are:

Australian Active Service Medal 1945-1975 with Clasps Malaysia & Vietnam, Vietnam Medal, Australian Service Medal 1945-1975 with Clasp SE Asia, Australian Defence Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, Pingat Jasa Malaysia and on the top is the Australian Combat Badge.

In Memory: Coral/Balmoral



Gnr	C.J. Sawtell	12 Fd Regt	13 May 1968
Gnr	I.J. Scott	12 Fd Regt	13 May 1968
Pte	E.J. Bailey	1RAR	13 May 1968
Cpl	R.B. Hickey	1RAR	13 May 1968
Pte	R.L. McNab	1RAR	13 May 1968
Pte	J.A. O'Brien	1RAR	13 May 1968
Pte	L.R. Sheppard	1RAR	13 May 1968
Pte	B.M. Trimble	1RAR	13 May 1968
Pte	R.C. Watson	1RAR	13 May 1968
Pte	H.W. White	1RAR	13 May 1968
Cpl	J.H. Whitton	1RAR	13 May 1968
Sgt	P.E. Lewis	3RAR	13 May 1968
Cpl	I.K. Dawson	1RAR	14 May 1968
Pte	C.R. Nisbet	1RAR	14 May 1968
Cpl	J.G. Pearce	1RAR	14 May 1968
LCpl	W.H. Martin	1RAR	16 May 1968
Pte	A.J. Wallis	1RAR	16 May 1968
Pte	B.T. Young	1RAR	16 May 1968
Sig	A.H. Young	104 Sig Sqn	16 May 1968
Maj	G.A. Constable	161 Indep Recce Flt	23 May 1968
Pte	J.W. Desnoy	3RAR	26 May 1968
Pte	L.N. Brown	3RAR	26 May 1968
Pte	A.J. Cooper	3RAR	26 May 1968
Pte	W.M. Thomas	3RAR	26 May 1968
Pte	J.T. Worle	3RAR	28 May 1968
Pte	D.E. Abbott	1RAR	30 May 1968

Glossary

AATTV: Australian Army Training Team Vietnam.

ALGS: Australian Logistic Support Group Vietnam

AO: Area of Operations.

APC: Armoured Personnel Carrier.

ARVN: Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

1ATF: 1st Australian Task Force.

Battery: Artillery gun complement comprising six howitzers.

Bn: Battalion is a military unit of around 300–1,200 soldiers

Bn HQ: Battalion Head Quarters.

Bombardier/Bdr: Rank used in the Royal Australian Artillery.

CFM: Citizen Military Forces.

Coy: Company

Fd Bty: Field Battery.

FSPB: Fire Support Patrol Base.

Gunner: An Artillery Gunner (no rank)

Huey: Bell UH-1 Iroquois Helicopter.

Khe Sanh: is an Australian song, released in May 1978, and named after the Battle of Khe Sanh (1968).

MPC: Military Payment Certificates which was the currency while in Vietnam.

NASHO: A National Service Soldier (non regular).

NVA: North Vietnamese Army.

'OPS': an abbreviation for Military operations.

OR: Other Ranks.

POGO: Posted on Garrison duty only (no field duty).

R&C: Rest in Country.

R&R: Rest and Recreation.

RAA: Royal Australian Artillery.

RAR: Royal Australian Regiment.

RNZA: Royal New Zealand Artillery.

1RTB: First Recruit Training battalion (Kapooka).

RPG: Rocket Propelled Grenade.

Snoopy/Spooky: Douglas AC-47 gunship developed by the United States Air Force.

Sorties: a term for deployment or dispatch of one military unit, be it an aircraft, ship, or troops.

Tannoy: Each gun was connected to the Command Post by communication wires. The acknowledgement of orders by the gun(s) would be registered in the Command Post, hence '*a light on the tannoy*', indicating the guns acknowledgement.

'The Dat': Australian slang for Nui Dat.

'The J': Australian slang for jungle.

Through the wire: heading out to do a perimeter check and sweep the area for enemy.

TOAR: Tactical Area of Responsibility.

US: United States.

VC: Viet Cong.

Vungas: Coastal retreat for Australian soldiers at Vung Tau, South Vietnam.

WIA: Wounded in Action.

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Photographs and Stories

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All other photographs have been provided by Larry D'Arcy, either from his own personal collection or being passed to him from friends. I hope to have credited all sources correctly and if for some reason this has not been done, it was not intentional and I offer my sincerest apologies to those.

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The Vietnam Veterans Memorial was the first in Australia dedicated to Australian service personnel. The plaques are inscribed with those killed in action.