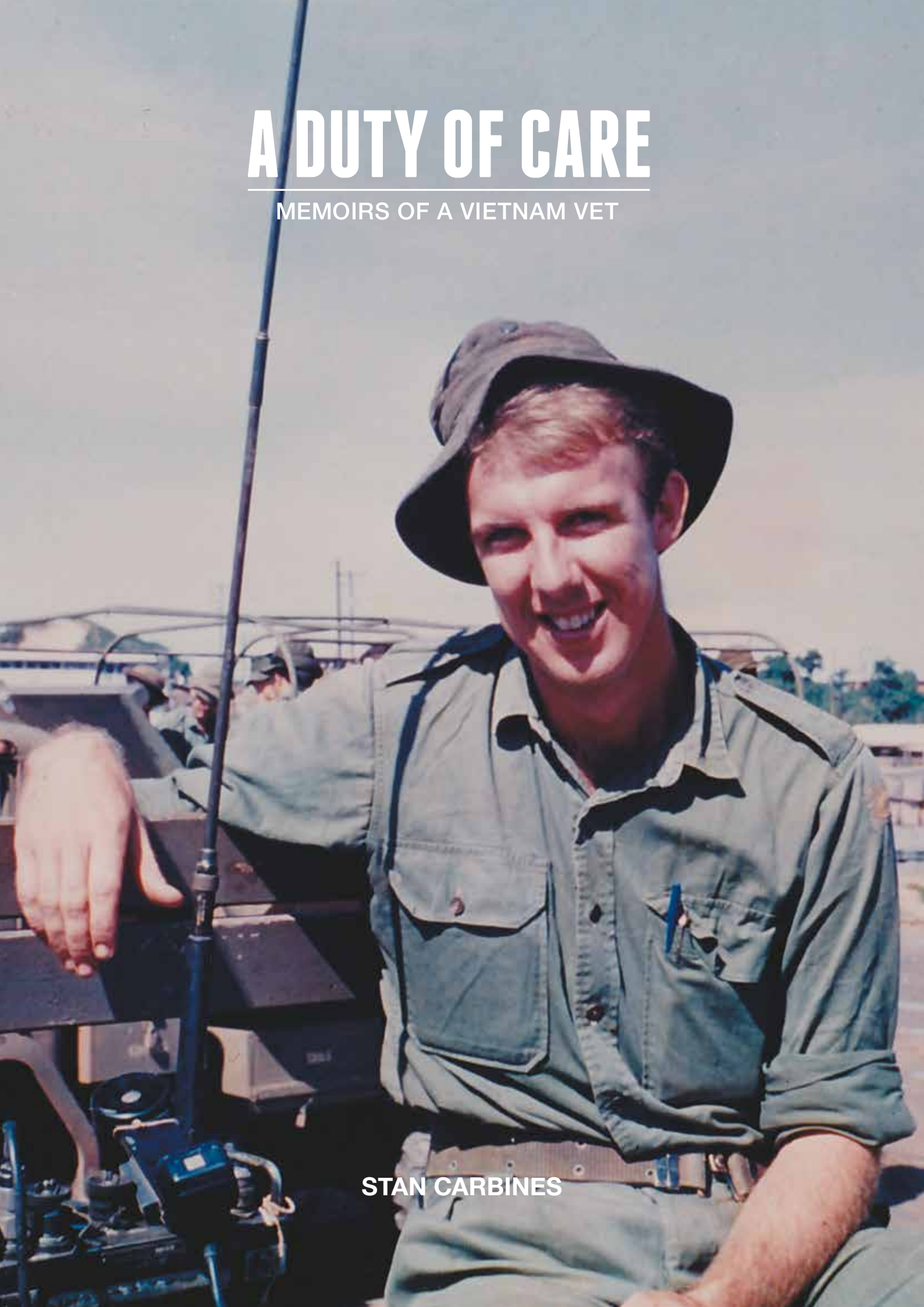
A DUTY OF CARE

MEMOIRS OF A VIETNAM VET



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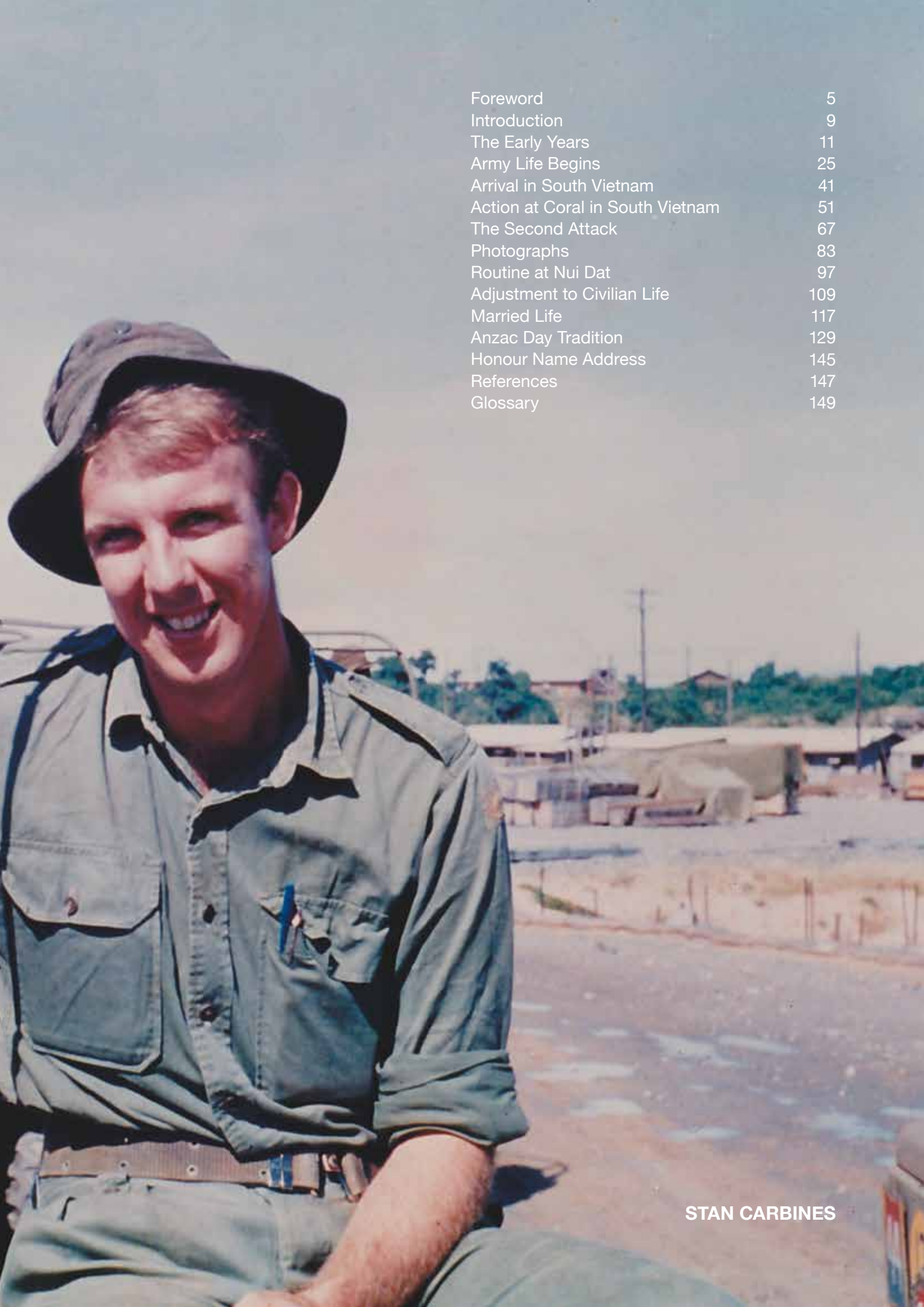


STAN CARBINES

FOREWORD

In many countries the conscription of citizens for military service is accepted as a fact of life. This has not however been the case in Australia. In Australia the conscription of men for service into the armed forces or as it is also called National Service, has been a subject of fierce contention. History though has shown that it only becomes an issue when the nation is at war or there is a threat of war.

The colonies in Australia united to become an independent country on 1 January 1901. Not long after that in 1914 our government decided to join Britain in its war in Europe against Germany. Australia was a new country with many tasks to prepare for its place on the international stage. At the time the Parliament did not even have a permanent residence in a Parliament House. It was meeting in temporary accommodation in Melbourne and the construction of Canberra was mainly at the planning stage. Even so the new nation thought that it must be involved in the war taking place on the other side of the world.

With the colossal number of casualties on the Western Front they were having difficulty raising a sufficient number of recruits to keep the five divisions at full strength. As a result the Australian Labor Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, proposed having a referendum for the introduction of conscription for eligible male subjects. This was held on the 28 October 1916. It was rejected by the people so he tried again on 20 December 1917. The second proposal was also defeated. Billy Hughes was so disenchanted with the Australian Labor Party and the referenda results, he left the Party and formed his own National Labor Party. Many large rallies were organised and the issue continued to divide the nation until the war ended.

The discussion on conscription in Australia did not happen again until 1939. In that year Australia again declared war on Germany in support of the British declaration. All unmarried men aged twenty-one had to undergo three months training with the Militia. Later, when Japan threatened our shores things became much more serious. All men aged eighteen to thirty five and all single men aged to forty five were required to join the Citizens Military Forces, commonly known as the CMF. They could be assigned by all three services in combat areas south of the equator. In fact except for a few isolated cases, when some went to Dutch New Guinea, conscripts stayed within Australia and its Territories or Protectorates. Thus they went to such places as New Guinea but did not go to the Middle East or to the campaign in Europe. At the end of the war this scheme of compulsory military service was withdrawn.

In response to the Korean War the National Service Act of 1951 was introduced. The world's political scene at the time was divided into two strong camps each armed with the atomic bomb. People had memories of the last war fresh in their minds and felt the need to be prepared for any contingency. It required eighteen-year-olds to register for three months training and two years in the CMF. There were some modifications to the scheme as it progressed and it ceased at the end of 1959.

In 1964 the Prime Minister Robert Menzies revisited the idea of conscription with the introduction of The National Service Act 1964. It required twenty-year-old males, if selected to serve in the army for a period of two years. The next year The Defence Act was amended so that conscripts could be sent to serve overseas. Then in early 1966 the new Prime Minister, Harold Holt said that National Servicemen would be sent to Vietnam with the Australian Regular Army.

The need for these actions was in response to the Indonesian Confrontation and increased commitment to the war in South Vietnam. These were two issues happening at the same time and had the potential to escalate into major conflicts.

When Malaya gained independence from Britain it was united with the British colonies in north Borneo to form the Federation of Malaysia. Indonesia's President was angry at this action as he had ambitions to claim north Borneo for Indonesia. From 1963 to 1966 the Australian forces supported the British in the cross border skirmishes that followed. It never amounted to much but it had the potential to be something very serious right on the Australian border. About a hundred and fifty National Servicemen served with 4RAR and supporting units during this confrontation.

Australia became involved with the Vietnam conflict with the sending of the Australian Army Training Team in 1962 to train and advise some South Vietnam army units. In 1965 the commitment increased with the sending of the 1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment. The Task Force by the end of 1967 had grown to three battalions with many conscripts involved. Subsequently all nine battalions were sent in turn on a staggered yearly rotation with three battalions there at one time. These battalions and their support units included thousands of soldiers who had been conscripted through the newly introduced scheme.

All twenty-year-old males had to register for the scheme and the selection of those required was determined by a ballot using their birth dates. Under the scheme over eight hundred thousand men registered with sixty three thousand being conscripted and of those nineteen thousand served in Vietnam.

This scheme differed markedly from the previous times when conscription was introduced. It had a ballot so it was not a commitment which was undertaken by everyone. So it could be argued that if the nation was in need then the sacrifices should be made by all and not just a few. Even at the height of the Second World War when Australia was attacked by Japanese forces and things were desperate the Australian government was reluctant to send conscripted soldiers outside Australia or its Territories. Yet this government was sending conscripts to a foreign country and an undeclared war which was not directly threatening our shores. Of those National Servicemen sent to South Vietnam two hundred lost their lives and over one thousand two hundred were wounded. In retrospect I would have thought that as this scheme was so different from the other schemes, it was worthy of a referendum to allow the people to have their say.

During the war fifty thousand Australian soldiers served in South Vietnam and all have a story to tell. The youngest of us are now in our mid-sixties. It is important that we have a record of as many stories as possible. They are all different and special.

I was one of the fifty thousand who went to South Vietnam and this is my story. I tell the story from the point of view of a gunner. A gunner describes a rank in the artillery. It is the bottom rank, equivalent to a private in most corps in the army.

I begin my story with the effects of the Second World War on our family and others who lived at that time. We were the first of the baby boomers, many of us the children born

to the nurses, soldiers, sailors and airmen who came home from the Second World War.

INTRODUCTION

I called this story A Duty of Care as this term indicates an important obligation in my life. It applies to my role as a parent, my experiences in the army and my work with the Department of Education. As a parent I have cared about the happy development of my children and grandchildren. As a teacher and school counsellor I have cared for the safety, welfare and best education of students. I have met men and women who have cared enough to offer their time, energy and lives for the defence of our nation. I have also seen officers and other ranks in the armed services make the best decisions for the safety and care of men under their command.

Many soldiers experience life threatening situations. On these occasions the actions of their mates often determines whether they live or die. This caring for one another in the heat of battle does not go away. As a result a bond is formed. This is something we see on Anzac Day and reunions. It is a duty of care.

THE EARLY YEARS

I was born in Sydney at Crown Street Women's Hospital, Surry Hills on the 22 May 1946. The date is significant for two reasons. Firstly it was nine months after my father had returned from Europe where he had been a prisoner of war for four years. Secondly, being born on that date meant that I was going to be conscripted for National Service in the Australian army when I reached the age of twenty. Had I been born hours earlier or later so that my birthday was on a different day I would not have been selected for National Service.

After mum left the maternity hospital she would have pushed her new baby in a pram to her mother's place in Surry Hills. There she would have shown the new born to his older brother and all the other gathered relatives. In those days children were not allowed to enter maternity wards for fear of spreading child illnesses. So this was the first opportunity for my brother and cousins to see the new baby. After the traditional cup of tea she would have caught the tram for a short ride to Daceyville. The family was living temporarily at Daceyville in an ex-army hut until more permanent accommodation could be found.

My peer group was the first of the baby boomers. During the Second World War many people had to delay marriage and children until the war had ended. So when peace came to the nation the babies born- in this rapid increase- were called the baby boomers.

We grew up in the shadow of the War and its effect on the people who lived through it. My father had been in the militia for eight years prior to the war's commencement. The militia was part of the army consisting of men who trained and went on parade in the evening and had various weekend activities. You could say that they were part-time soldiers. They went to work and lived at home with their families but were a trained body of men who in times of need could be quickly prepared for active service. When the Japanese invaded New Guinea it was the men in the militia who were mobilised to defend Australia by being the first to confront the enemy on the Kokoda Track.

So in 1939 when war was declared on Germany Dad thought it was his duty to enlist. At that time he was twenty-five. He left Australia on the first troop ship leaving Sydney and headed for an unknown future in the Middle East. He left behind my mother and my older brother who was only one month old at the time.

Australian soldiers who volunteered for overseas service were placed in the Australian Imperial Forces, commonly called the AIF. In the First World War Australia raised five army divisions. So when the Second World War commenced they continued the numerical order and named the first division raised the 6th Division. However, the battalions were named again from the 1st Battalion and so on. Dad was a Sergeant in A Company in 1st Battalion of the 6th Division.

The 6th Division stayed in Palestine for some time until Italy entered the war on the German side. When the Italian forces threatened Egypt and the Suez Canal, the Australians were called upon to remove the threat by pushing them out of Egypt and attacking the fortified ports of Libya. The Australians had amazing success. Before they had completed their task of completely routing the Italian forces, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Winston Churchill put pressure on the Australian Government to send the 6th Division to Greece.

Winston Churchill was a politician with no credentials as a war strategist. In the First World War he was partly responsible for the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign. The outcome in Greece was merely a repetition. The Greek adventure was a failure. The outcome in Greece like Gallipoli was based on a plan that was ill-conceived, ill-prepared and poorly executed. How could one Australian and one New Zealand Division plus some British units invade continental Europe when the enemy had tens of military divisions at their disposal. They sent the Australian forces with not much more than their 303 rifles to fight German forces consisting of armoured Panza divisions supported by Stuka dive bombers and fighter aircraft cover. On the other hand the Australians had virtually no armour or air support.

Despite the loss of many troops and ships most Australian troops managed to escape from mainland Greece. Some of the Australians were taken to Egypt and others to defend Crete. My father's battalion -the 2/1- was taken to Retimo in Crete to defend an airfield. They were able to inflict great damage on the paratroopers who attacked them and to contain them to a small area. However the Germans managed to get control of an airfield at the other end of the island and were then able to land many reinforcements with armour and artillery in support. The Australians still mainly armed with their 303 rifles had no other choice but to surrender to the superior force.

My mother received a letter saying that her husband was missing in action. It must have been an agonising time for her, not knowing his fate. He was taken to mainland Greece, put on a cattle train and taken to Germany. One could not imagine days on the train without sanitation, space to lie down and limited water and food. After a period of time the Germans told the Red Cross the names of those whom they had captured and the news was relayed to family and loved ones. Dad spent four harrowing years as a prisoner with many experiences of ill treatment and privation.

My mother was living with my father's family in Newtown but at some time moved with her son to live with her parents at Surry Hills. The war was ever-present. One of her sisters married a soldier who fought in New Guinea, another married a sailor and a third married an American GI while a school friend from next door was killed on the Kokoda Track in New Guinea. They all lived together with their parents supporting each other.

When the troops came home after the war accommodation and building materials were in short supply. All of the nation's energies had gone into the war effort so building houses was very low priority. The sisters did not want to leave the area of Sydney where they had lived and supported each other but they had no option but to accept Government Housing in various suburbs across the city.

When I was four years old the family moved to our new house at Narwee, Sydney in 1950. It was a fairly normal life and my sister was born in 1951. Dad had bought the house with a War Service loan and added an extra two bedrooms for the growing family. A second sister was born in 1960 not long before my older brother married and left home. Dad quite often began a sentence with either, "Before the war" or "After the war". It was almost as if he had experienced two different lives.

Before the war he worked in 1928 at the age of fourteen at a blacksmith's shop at Dawes Point, on the southern side of the bridge, making rivets for the construction

of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. He then gained an apprenticeship to be a painter and decorator with the Department of Public Works. On his return from overseas in 1945 he returned to the Department of Public Works and after some promotions he worked in the Quantity Surveying section and calculated the paint quantities for the construction of the Sydney Opera House. The State Government took on the responsibility of the construction of the Opera House from Joern Utzon after the costs went way above what was budgeted. My father is one of the very few or maybe he is the only one who could claim to have been involved in the construction of both of these famous Sydney icons.

Sydney

At school, kids would say to one another, 'What did your father do in the war'? This was because virtually every father was involved in the war. For instance in my teenage years I played in a tennis team with three other boys. One of these had a father who was at the Battle of El Alamein, one had a father who was in the Royal Australian Navy and the father of the third boy had guarded Japanese prisoners in Cowra. Some of our school bags and everyday equipment were items purchased from army surplus disposal stores which seemed to be everywhere.

The older male school teachers had also been involved in the various armed forces and had seen action. One who comes to mind was on the HMAS Perth when it was sunk by Japanese forces in the Sunda Straits. He became a prisoner of war and survived a second sinking while on a Japanese ship which was sunk by an American submarine. After surviving two ships sinking at sea he lived to tell the story and to teach us Metalwork. As I said before, our generation was raised in the shadow of the Second World War.

My father loved being at his local Returned Servicemen's Club referred to as the RSL. He went there almost every day. He loved playing snooker and billiards, the poker machines, having a beer, betting on the horse races and the friendship which the club offered. He worked hard, painting houses nearly every weekend to get some extra

money. When he received money he paid his bills, gave my mother some and spent the rest. He was generous and didn't spend all the money on himself. There was no such thing as saving to buy a special item or saving for the future. He lived for the here and now. I am sure four years as a prisoner would have contributed to the formation of this attitude.

Every Saturday my mother went to Surry Hills to visit her mother, my Nanny Murphy. Nanny had eight children and twenty five grandchildren. Mum's sisters also visited on a regular basis, so there were always cousins to play with. One of my earliest memories of Nanny Murphy's house was that it always seemed filled with people. In the front room lived an auntie and uncle with three boys, upstairs in the back room was another auntie and uncle, in the room at the top of the stairs slept a cousin and mum's youngest brother and in the front room upstairs slept my Nanny and Poppy.

The tram stop in Cleveland Street was nearby, so in the summer my cousins and I had the option of going to the beach at Coogee, Clovelly or Maroubra. We would climb into the tram with our towel over our shoulder and travel to the selected beach.

The early types of trams were called Toast Racks. They resembled toast-racks as they had about eight narrow cabins which went from one side of the tram to the other. In each cabin were two long seats one facing the front of the tram and another facing the back. Outside along the length on both sides of the tram was a running board which was used as a step by the passengers to get onto the tram and as a means for the conductor to move along to collect the fares. I can still visualise the conductor on rainy days standing at the entrance to the cabin in his rain coat and hat trying to keep his folder of tickets dry while water splashed off his body and dripped from his hat. As he was tearing off the ticket he was hanging on to the moving tram with his elbows and knees. How things have changed.

On one occasion when I was about eight I was hopping into one of these toast-rack trams carrying a bag of onions in a string bag with an auntie and my mother. As I approached the entrance to the tram I swung the bag over my shoulder. As I swung the bag a man yelled out in fright. I had hit him in the face with the onions. I do not know where the man came from or why he was behind me as there were many other entrances to the tram. The man hopped into the same section of the tram that we got in. I felt embarrassed as he continued to harp on about what I had done. Finally, a woman spoke up in my defence and told him to be quiet and leave me alone. It worked and to my relief he stopped complaining and got out at the next stop.

Later model trams had an aisle down the centre with short bench seats on either side very similar to buses. In these the conductor was inside away from the weather and the dangers associated with the toast-rack trams. The trams in Sydney were gradually phased out as they had to compete with the increasing number of cars on the narrow and congested streets. The last tram travelled from the city to La Perouse in 1961. The historic occasion made the front pages of the Sydney papers with photos of people hanging out of the crowded tram. The trams were replaced by buses. Now there are many who would love the buses to disappear and light rail to return to the streets of Sydney.

Most Saturdays we went to the Empire Theatre on the Redfern side of Cleveland Street with hundreds of other children to see the Saturday Matinee. At that time the matinee was very popular, the line of children standing to buy an entry ticket was sometimes fifty metres long. In those days the theatre patrons got far more for their money. The session began with a Movietone Newsreel, then entertaining cartoons such as Tom and Jerry or Bugs Bunny followed by a movie. Then we had interval when everybody went to the nearby shop where the crowd was eight deep to buy a coke, chips, ice cream or some sweets. When we returned to our seats it was time for the continuing serial of Rocket Man or Cowboys in which the hero did death-defying feats to outsmart the baddies or rescue the damsel in distress. Last of all we sat back to enjoy the main movie. That was value for money!

One of my older cousins liked to organise hockey games in the back lane. Nanny Murphy had a fuel copper so there was always some wood which could be used as a hockey stick and a lump of wood for a ball. We would divide into two teams. Then one from each team would hit sticks with an opposing player as we called,' hickey hockey one, hickey hockey two, hickey hockey three' before they both tried to hit the ball to begin the game. Games were fast and furious in the limited space that the lane had to offer.

However, we were not allowed to play any games in the lane when there was any horse racing. This is because one of the neighbours operated an illegal SP bookmaker's establishment. They were called SP bookmakers because they paid out to the successful punters at the starting price odds of the horse at the race course. The backyard of the house was full of men milling around looking at boards with lists of horses with their latest odds and listening to the commentary on the radio. Down at the end of the lane facing the entrance to the lane was a fat man sitting on a chair. He was the look-out. If he saw any police he had to press a button which would set off an alarm telling the gamblers to scatter and get rid of all the evidence. We believed that the local police were not a problem but those outside the district could make a raid.

Illegal SP bookmaking continued until 1964 when the Totalizator (Off-course Betting) Act was passed by the NSW State Government. After that punters could go to their local TAB and bet on the horse races legally. By making it legal the government had control and they could make every race a winner by taking their financial cut. Somehow, it seemed that the community had lost something special when the SP bookmakers closed their shops.

In the late fifties Nanny Murphy bought a television which she set up in the front room. That completely changed our activities. Bandstand compered by Brian Henderson with singers such as Col Joye, Judy Stone and Little Pattie entertained us while we sat and ate lunch bought from a local Greek fish and chip shop.

Many Greeks had come to Australia in the post war migration. Most came from rural villages and had very little education. They found managing a corner store or a take away store selling fish and chip very appealing. It was not long before every community had a corner store or a fish and chip shop run by Greeks. I stopped my regular weekend visits to Nanny Murphy at fifteen when I began playing tennis with some school friends.

When the family moved to Narwee in 1950 my mother was not happy with the move

because it was in the outer suburbs and too far from the city. Nowadays it would be considered a fairly close suburb with only a 30 minute train ride to the city.

Life was very different from that experienced at Newtown and Surry Hills. We lived about a kilometre from the train station. The local bus service was inadequate so we only used if it was raining. As a result we did lots of walking. All the roads in the neighbourhood were made from dirt and gravel with no constructed gutters. Rainwater from the houses went onto the street and formed pools and then slowly found its way down the road. Water from the kitchen sink went into a grease trap which was designed to catch the fat and other waste materials before the water flowed with our bath water into a sullage pit in the middle of the front lawn. The pit was covered with corrugated iron and soil so the grass grew over it. The smelly job of cleaning the grease trap had to be done on a regular basis.

Most of the houses in the street were either new or a couple of years old. So you could say that the surrounding district was equivalent to what we nowadays call a new housing estate. However it was far different with no asphalt roads, no street gutters, no sewer, no house driveways, no rotary clothes lines and no roll down turf. There were virtually no cars travelling along the streets. This meant that the kids could safely put the garbage bin on the road to use as a wicket and play street cricket. I guess suburbs like this in 1950 were a result of the huge demand for housing after the war but also the lack of infrastructure as a result of the war.

There were no local corner shops and we had no car so as many things as possible had to be delivered. Each night the billy was put on the front verandah for the milk man to measure and leave our required amount of milk. He measured the pints required with a metal ladle and poured it into our billy. Later on the billy was not needed as the milkman would deliver milk in glass bottles. When the silver cap was taken off there was always a depth of cream as the milk at that time was not homogenised.

Also in the morning a tin was put out for the baker to deliver our bread. He ran from house to house with a basket full of bread. He would take a short cut by jumping hedges and fences if they were in his way. We received a loaf and a half each day. When the baker broke the loaf in half there was usually a concave or a convex end to the half loaf. If it was convex you could tear off the extra bread and it always tasted delicious. Sometimes the bread came straight from the bakery and the soft warm bread was great to eat with no spread. These deliveries were done by a horse drawn cart. The delivery man would give a whistle and the horse would trot along to where it was needed.

Our groceries were delivered by van. My mother would receive and pay for her order and give the delivery man the list of groceries required for next week. One of these items I can remember was a packet of tobacco either Log Cabin or Havelock. It was the era of roll your own cigarettes. The fruiterer drove a truck and parked outside giving a call to signal to all the neighbours that he had arrived and for them to come out and select their fruit and vegetables.

At some point a corner store opened nearby bringing many changes to our shopping behaviour. The corner store was built on a corner block of land about two hundred metres from our place. The family lived in a garage while their home and the shop

were built. It would have been opened in the mid-fifties when grocery stores were very different from today. The shopkeeper stood behind a long counter and would collect the items which were requested by the customer. There was no serve yourself. Many items such as sugar, biscuits and vegetables had to be weighed by the shopkeeper and put in brown paper bags before being given to the customer. Shopping took a lot longer and people were served in the order in which they entered the shop.

At this time our money was in pounds, shillings and pence, two halfpennies made a penny, twelve pennies made a shilling, twenty shillings made a pound and then there was the guinea which was one pound and one shilling. The decimal currency was introduced in Australia on the 14 February 1966. With decimal currency based on ten the same as our counting system it made calculations of money so much simpler. As a consequence the calculation of division and multiplication with money was no different from other ways of calculating.

The corner store enabled us to buy our groceries, milk, bread, fruit and vegetables at any time that was convenient. Because we did not have a car and supermarkets were not around we tended to buy our shopping needs a little each day. Nearly every day after school I had to go to the shop to buy a couple of items for Mum.

After a couple of years the shop was sold to a Greek family called Kolletti. The husband knew some English but his wife had just arrived from Cyprus and her language was very limited. However, they learnt the language and the money aspects of the job very quickly. My mother would send me to the shop with a note listing the items I was to buy. It was not long before Mrs Kolletti was grabbing the note out of my hand and getting the items in the order that suited her. This enabled her to get multiple items when she went down to one end of the shop.

Then there were the collections that went away from our neighbourhood. The garbage truck came down the street with a team of four men. There were two, one on either side of the street running along throwing or lifting the full bins to a man who stood on the back of the open truck. When the bin was passed to the man on the truck he emptied it and threw it back to the man on the road. There was no separation of items for recycling. Everything went into a heap in the back of the truck and the garbo stomped it down as he emptied the bins. The bin was then returned to its original position as the team kept moving along. The fourth member of the team was the truck driver who had to keep the truck moving at the right speed.

The other collection was the dunny can. We called the man who took the full can and replaced it with an empty can the Dunny Man. His job was not a desirable one. All of the toilets were in the backyard so the Dunny Man had to be friendly with all the dogs and be able to dodge scooters and bikes that were left on the paths. Both these jobs required men who were fit enough to keep running and strong enough to repeatedly lift heavy loads. There was no need of gym work for these men.

There was a family nearby that had five children, three boys and two girls. Things got a little embarrassing as they managed to fill their dunny can before it was due for replacement. So they made it a rule that all the boys had to urinate at the back fence near the chook run. This also applied to any visiting boys who came to play. That was one way of solving the problem.

The sewer came to our neighbourhood in 1957 so we no longer needed a torch to go to the toilet at night as the toilet had moved to the centre of the house. We also had no need of the smelly kitchen grease trap and the job of cleaning it was no more. The sullage pit could be filled in as it was no longer required.

On one occasion when I was aged about nine years some older boys from across the road started throwing stones at me. It was one of the things boys did in those days. One of the stones hit me in the face very close to my eye. Normally I would not have said anything to my mother but as I was returning with items from the shop she saw the wound and blood. When my father came home my mother told him about the incident. He went straight over to the house of one of the boys and demanded that the father come out to see the wound on my face and to discuss the incident with him. The man refused to come out of his house. I think he was a little frightened. From then on no one threw stones at me. I guess the incident forced the father to take some responsibility for his child's behaviour. It is a pity not more of it is done nowadays.

As my brother had taken a carpentry apprenticeship he sometimes went with Dad to help him with his weekend work. On one occasion at the end of the day they went into a hotel to have a drink. It was a hotel near a bus depot so many of its clientele were bus drivers and conductors. One of the younger men picked up Dad's glass and had a drink. Dad told him that he had drunk out of his glass. The man gave some smart answer which Dad found offensive. He gave the man one punch which left him flat on the floor. As there were many bus employees there Dad quickly grabbed my brother and vacated the premises. Dad like many in his generation had done a lot of boxing in gymnasiums in his youth and knew how to handle himself.

When my brother became old enough to get a driver's licence he wanted to buy a car. As he did not have enough money he and Dad decided to buy a car together. This was the first car that the family owned. They planned to share the cost and the use of the car. They bought the car from a second hand car dealer at Hurstville. It was a two toned Ford Zephyr with lots of rust. In those days it was very much buyer-beware. The dealer had very cleverly covered the rusty places with either paint or paper and spray painted over it. It is a wonder that the engine managed to stay in the car. It took some time to realise what had happened. In those days there was no consumer protection.

The sharing of the car was a failure. For instance one of the arrangements was that Dad could have the car on Saturdays but he was to bring it home for my brother to go out on the Saturday night. However, Dad would get caught in a shout of drinks or a game of snooker and forget about my brother waiting at home. My brother would get angry and my father could not understand why he could not just go out later in the night. As a result it was not long before my brother bought himself a new white Ford Falcon utility.

I went to Narwee Primary School and at the completion of 6th Class I went to Narwee Boys' High School. It was a fairly new school with my year being only the second to commence. In my first year the classes went from A to M with about forty students in each class. For some reason there was no class with the letter I. I guess to be in 1I or 2I would be a bit peculiar. So there would have been well over four hundred boys in first year alone. You could just imagine the river of boys flowing to and from the railway station and school each morning and afternoon. With so many active and boisterous

boys in such a confined place one had to learn how to cope in such an environment. When I was in my second year, Sir Joseph Banks High School was opened a couple of stations away and took some of the strain off our school.

At school I was taught the imperial scale of weights and measures. For example I measured in inches, yards and miles and weighed in ounces, pounds and stones. Later in my life the official weights and measures changed to metric. As a result my generation tended to use both systems of measurement. We used what we felt was most appropriate. We wanted a new born baby's weight in pounds and ounces and the length in inches, yet we were happy to buy a kilogram of sugar and a metre of fabric. We sometimes gave our weight in kilograms yet our height in feet and inches. If I did major building work I would use metric measurement but if I was measuring to do some formwork for concreting I would revert to imperial. So in this book if I revert to imperial measurement it is not a mistake. It is what our generation does.

Even though metric measurements became legal in 1947 it was only used in isolated areas such as certain imports and exports. It was not until the 1970's that the Commonwealth Government introduced the complete changeover. In 1970 the Metric Conversion Board was established to supervise the conversion of all the economy and business to the metric system of measurement. Until then imperial measurement was still the main system of measurement. Primary schools began teaching metric measurement in 1972, secondary schools by 1973 and most industries applied it by 1974. The Board had supervised and completed the full conversion by 1988.

At that time school discipline was enforced with the threat and use of corporal punishment. All male teachers seemed to have a thin length of cane about a metre long which was issued to them as a pointer but I only saw them being used to threaten or inflict pain. Teachers would walk into the room at the beginning of a lesson with a book, a box of chalk and a cane. Virtually everyone was caned at some stage. The cane punishment was inflicted as one, two, four or six cuts of the cane. However, if the cane only touched the tip of the fingers or the pupil moved his hand away another stroke was added.

There was a lot of bad luck associated with getting the cane. I was reasonably well behaved but still received the cane on many occasions. Sometimes you were punished for being in the wrong place at the wrong time or with the wrong person. Some teachers used it regularly and others rarely.

On one occasion I was playing handball with some friends in an area which was designated as out of bounds. We decided to play in that area as there was no space available on the limited amount of asphalt in the play area. It was out of bounds because it was out of sight of the teacher on duty. We were not in threat of physical danger or damaging any property. We were just having some harmless fun.

A teacher caught us playing in the wrong area and sent us to the Deputy Headmaster to be dealt with. As it was lunch time I continued to eat my apple. When the Deputy came out of his office and saw me eating an apple he was furious. I had to put out my hand and get the cane straight away. As I said you did not have to do much and you received the cane. Just eat an apple at the wrong place and time and you could get the cane. Other than lose their play time the other boys had no extra punishment.

Nobody told their parents that they were caned at school as our parents would not display any sympathy. Instead they were more likely to admonish our behaviour and back the teacher.

It seemed difficult to draw a line between the use of corporal punishment and child abuse so in 1990 the Education Act in NSW banned the use of corporal punishment in government schools. In 1997 the ban was extended to non-government schools. Another complicating factor was that girls were not caned so caning only boys did not fit into the philosophy of equal treatment for all.

Most of us who experienced corporal punishment accepted it and thought that if applied correctly it had a lot of merit. For instance the punishment was immediate and the debt paid so you could continue with life without a lengthy sanction. It also had success as there is no way I would eat an apple again outside the Deputy's Office.

At high school I met boys who went to a local church and they seemed to have lots of fun filled social activities. They invited me and some other friends to join them. So we went along to the church and its youth group and enjoyed their companionship, social activities, going on camps and playing in the soccer team. I also felt very comfortable with the Christian philosophy and their attitude to life and caring for other people.

At school I developed a love of history. It was a subject I enjoyed studying and I received a bonus by gaining good results. I have always kept it as an interest rather than as a subject to study in depth. In particular I have been interested in European and Australian history. As a result I have read many articles and books relating to Australia's involvement in past wars. It is an interest which has made writing these memoirs more satisfying and enjoyable.

At the completion of my final year at school I applied for several jobs with career opportunities. I received three offers which were each given serious considerations. The first was an invitation to work with the State Public Service, the second to be employed by the Commonwealth Bank and the final one to be trained in Sydney as a high school commerce teacher. As I liked studying Economics at school and the bank offered to support university studies I chose to work in the Bank. At the same time I enrolled at the University of NSW and began a Commerce Degree.

I was appointed to a bank in King Street in Sydney. I enjoyed the tempo of working in a big city. It had a buzz. I would walk about a kilometre to Narwee Station to catch the train to St James Station each working day. Then three nights a week after work I would catch a bus to Kensington to attend night lectures at the University. Coming home from the University would entail a bus ride to Central railway station, a train to Narwee and then the walk home. I can remember that the saucepan star constellation in the night sky pointed the direction to home.

After a year of working in the bank I wanted a change. There was nothing wrong with the people or the work. I was frustrated with one aspect of the work. I wanted to complete all of my allotted work each day. In other words empty the in-tray. It was impossible to accomplish this as work was passed from one person to another and it was often held-up at someone else's desk. I have realised since that no one empties their in-tray.

There is always something more to do. I reapplied to be trained as a school teacher and I was offered a position to be trained as a primary school teacher at Wollongong Teachers' College.

While at Teachers' College I managed to scrape together a few hundred dollars to purchase a grey second-hand Morris Minor 850 car. You might say I bought a bomb. It was good though to stand in the driveway in front of the house and proudly present my first car to the neighbours and friends. I even painted its wheels a distinctive yellow.

It had a floor gear change with a long gear stick and it did not take long to discover that at times the gear stick jumped out of the gear box. When this happened I had to wait on the road side until the NRMA mechanic came to the rescue. After a while I learnt with the aid of a screw driver how to lever the mechanism out of gear so the gear stick could go back to its rightful position.

As the rings and bearings in the engine needed replacing it did not have much power to climb steep hills. It needed to have a good run up to climb the hills but it would quickly fade and get slower and slower and just struggle to get over the top. My older brother and his friend changed the rings which improved things greatly. However, the improved rings were then adding excessive pressure to the worn bearings. On the way home from Wollongong Teachers' College there was a steep dip at Blakehurst where the only way out in all directions was up a steep hill. You guessed it! The Morris Minor died that day and was towed home to be sold for scrap. Everyone remembers with fondness the first car they owned. It was with some sadness that we parted ways.

I boarded with an elderly couple through the week in Wollongong and came home on the weekends. I very much enjoyed my experiences at Teachers' College. There were hundreds of students from all over New South Wales with many like myself living away from home. We were on scholarships with bonds so our future employment as school teachers was assured. We also had no course fees and we received an allowance which covered our accommodation and food expenses. So we were fairly relaxed and contented about life and our future. For me this relaxed predictable life was going to change to the unpredictable.

As I was nearing my twentieth birthday I had to register for National Service. This would have been done by filling out a form and mailing all the relevant information to the Commonwealth agency. Candidates for National Service were selected at random by drawing birth dates from a barrel. Being selected for National Service meant more than two years in the army, it also meant that I could be sent to a war zone and in particular, Vietnam.

The draw for the six months which included my birth date was held on 11 March 1966. I was informed by letter that I was selected and had to attend a medical examination on a Friday evening in the Grace Building in York Street Sydney. So at the end of the Friday's lectures I caught a train to Sydney to attend the appointment. As I played tennis at a weekend I walked into the medical carrying my tennis racquet. I probably should have been advised to carry a walking stick instead.

I then received a letter informing me that I had passed the medical and that I had to now

fulfil my obligation of two years in the Australian Army. It was not received as a joyous event as it was not something I had planned doing and it meant more of an unknown future. It was also a future in which I had far less control. The most obvious unknown was that I could be sent overseas to see action and be killed. I did not meet anyone who was glad to be conscripted, although at Corps Training I did meet a guy who had volunteered for National Service. He said that he had broken up with his girlfriend and wanted a change of scenery.

As I was halfway through my final year I was allowed to defer my enrolment in the army until January 1967 when the 7th intake was mustered. Up to this point with some direction from my parents I had controlled life's decisions. My plans to teach in a school in 1967 would not happen. Little did I realise at the time that this change in direction in my life was to take me on many adventures, some enjoyable, some rewarding, some humorous, some dangerous and some unpleasant, but combining to provide experiences I would not forget and for the most part cherish.

The other alternative for me, as I was trained in Small Schools was to be appointed by the NSW Department of Education to a small primary school in a quiet, probably isolated, place in outback NSW. Small Schools were schools staffed by one teacher. All the grades from kinder to Year 6 were all taught in the same class room. The schools usually had about fifteen students enrolled. However there was no luxury of choice. How different army life was to be!

Being called up for National Service did make a difference to my attitude towards my studies and preparations to be a teacher. It was not something I consciously planned. I guess I was feeling let down by the situation. I slackened off in my studies as they were no longer relevant to my immediate future. For example towards the end of our course we did a Life Saving Course. I remember that I completed the practical part of the course such as learning to resuscitate and swim ten laps of the pool with ease. When it came to the theory examination even though I had done some study I could not be bothered attending. If I was to be appointed to a school the next year I definitely would have completed the course.

My parents spoke little about me being conscripted but it must have kindled a lot of emotion for them. The only comment I can remember was my father saying, 'When you are in the army do not volunteer for anything'. I think his advice was based on the premise that the job must be very dangerous if they are asking for volunteers. He had in the past spoken of soldiers who had volunteered for dangerous assignments and had died as a consequence. My conscription must have brought back memories to both of them of when Dad went overseas.

My conscription was treated by the family as a fact of life. I guess because my father had volunteered so quickly to serve overseas it was expected by all of us that I would follow in his footsteps. In addition the Department of Education was going to appoint me to an unknown place in the country so the army sending me to unknown places was not too much different.

My parents were Australian Labor Party supporters and the Australian Labor Party was only lukewarm to conscription and involvement in the Vietnam conflict. When the

Australian Labor Party was eventually elected into government in 1972 one of the first things they did was to stop conscription and withdraw from the Vietnamese conflict. What seemed a little unusual was that the community did not feel that there was an immediate threat to the nation. In addition Australia was not involved in any declared war. To only call up some of the twenty year olds and not others did not seem fair. In our church group there were eight males turning twenty in 1966 and I was the only one to be called up for National Service.

As there was no immediate threat to the nation and no declared war it did not appear that the introduction of National Service to do service in foreign lands was necessary. It could be claimed that the Government was making rules to suit itself on how to fill the perceived shortfall in military strength which they required.

ARMY LIFE BEGINS

On my first day in the army I had to report to the Army Personnel Depot at Marrickville in Sydney. It seemed strange taking no luggage or personal belongings for an excursion that we expected to last two years. From memory it was a fine, warm day. On the footpath outside the building was a group of elderly ladies waving banners with the letters SOS written on them. The SOS stood for Save Our Sons. The group was there to protest against conscription. We found them a little amusing but just ignored them and took them for mad Communists.

After reporting in I was informed that I was part of a group that were destined for a training camp at Puckapunyal in Victoria. Most of us were fairly excited and concerned about what was happening. Some of the guys had done things to themselves so that they would fail the medical. One guy of Italian extraction wanted to stay working in the family business so had soaked his feet continually to cause skin problems. He failed the medical and I think was discharged.

It seems that to ensure that they had fifty going to Puckapunyal they had an extra ten recruits allotted to cover any who did not turn up or failed to pass the medical. As the last name accepted in alphabetical order was in the Bs and my name began with a C I missed out on being sent to Puckapunyal. The leftover recruits were now destined for Kapooka army training camp near Wagga Wagga. We had to wait until there was a bus load of other leftover recruits before we departed. All the other groups who arrived at Marrickville had their medical and left for Kapooka almost straight away.

Even though I was in the first group to arrive at Marrickville I had to wait and was in the last group to leave. As a result our group arrived at Kapooka last and in the dark. We were then added to other left over groups to make a platoon of forty recruits. It was a most unpleasant day to begin my adventure.

At this stage my parents did not know where I was. I can't remember if I went to Marrickville by public transport or whether someone gave me a lift. At the time my parents did not have a car and as it was a work day they were committed to their usual routine. My father would have gone to work and my mother probably to visit her sister in a nearby suburb and my two sisters would have been at school. I would have farewelled Dad after breakfast and my mother as I left home.

When I entered the Personnel Depot I had no idea where the army were going to send me. As my parents did not have a phone they would not have known where the army had sent me. Mail was my only means of communication so they would not have known where I was until they received a letter from me. It probably would have taken a week or more before they received the letter saying that I was safe and at an army base called Kapooka near Wagga Wagga.

At recruit training we learnt, or rather we were force-fed the ways of being a soldier. The unrelenting punishing hot, dusty and dry days were unforgettable. We had lots of marching, shooting, shouting saluting, polishing, and physical fitness activities. I was in 8 Platoon, B Company. We were told that in a previous intake Doug Walters the famous cricket player was in the same platoon. The platoon consisted of forty guys from various parts of New South Wales. It was great being in a team of men from farms, towns, cities all with a differing occupations, such as steel workers, farmers, plant operators, accountants, carpenters and even a grave digger.

Recruit training was a programme designed to change us from civilians to soldiers. On arrival our civilian clothes were taken and we did not see them again until our recruit training was completed. Then we were all issued with the same drab green clothes and had our heads shaven. Questioning by us of what was happening or arguing that things should be different was not allowed. This was the army and this was the way it was done. To be fair many of these rules and procedures were for our own safety and maybe survival. I guess the programme had been implemented and honed for hundreds of years to develop the soldier. No longer was one only concerned about oneself but it was instilled that the team was also important for success and survival.

A usual day's programme would unfold like this. We were woken by an announcement through speakers in our dormitory at about 5.30am. Quite often the duty officer said, 'Wakey, wakey hand off snakey'. We all rose from our beds to have a shower in the bathroom at the end of the hall and get dressed into our greens. Then we made our bed and made sure that there were no creases and the hospital corners on the sheeting were perfect. Next, we went to the mess to have breakfast. On entry a duty NCO inspected our dress and checked to see if our finger nails were clean. If he was not satisfied we had to return to our room and fix the problem. In the mess we walked along in front of the cooks as they placed food on our plates. If someone dropped a plate or glass which echoed throughout the mess hall everybody in the mess called out,'Oo arr shit' and the embarrassed culprit crawled around to clean up the damage.

After eating it was back to the room to polish the floor, clean the window- outside as well as inside, clean and strip the self-loading rifle [SLR] for inspection, make sure that the clothes in the cupboard were folded exactly to requirements, check that the boots were shiny and that the uniform was presentable. When it was time for inspection we had to stand to attention by our bed while the duty officer checked everything. Sometimes he wore white gloves to rub on the window ledge trying to find signs of dust or dirt. If something was not to his liking he pulled the bed apart or dragged everything from the cupboard and ordered it to be redone properly. It was not uncommon to hear that the inspecting officer had thrown the bedding out of the window. To the people below it must have seemed strange seeing bedding floating down from the third floor.

Then we assembled outside and marched off to the various planned activities. One of these could be the rifle range where we were taught the correct and safe way to handle fire arms. They taught us the various positions for shooting and let us practice shooting at targets to improve our accuracy.

Then we marched off to another activity which could be a mile away. It could be the instruction of marching skills. Junior NCOs taught us how to swing our arms, march in step, how to come to a halt, do all the turns and wheels, mark time etc. Sometimes they left us balancing with one leg off the ground while they went around to everyone making sure that their foot was at the correct angle. It was really a way of being a bit nasty. Then we went back to our rooms to freshen up and have lunch.

After lunch we might have physical training. We changed into our PT uniform, paraded outside and marched to the fixed equipment which had been erected for our training. There we did lots of chin-ups, push ups, rope climbing, forward rolls and running. After this we returned to the barracks to change back into our greens. The next activity could

be map reading. We learnt to estimate distances on the ground so that when we needed to fire our rifle we could adjust the sights to the correct setting. We were introduced to contour lines and had some understanding of the type of country displayed on a survey map. Then it was a march back to the barracks to have some free time before getting ready for dinner. If there was no activity after dinner there was always something to clean or polish. Maybe there was time to write a letter to the people at home.

Two memorable activities at recruit training were bayonet training and live grenade throwing. With bayonet training we had to line up and have turns running at and stabbing suspended potato bags full of straw. As we ran with the bayonet fixed to the end of the rifle we were instructed to scream 'Arrrr' out loud and as we did the stabbing action we had to yell out, 'In…Twist…Out', and then repeat while running to the next suspended bag. It was a lot of fun and would have been hilarious to watch these grown men yelling, screaming and stabbing potato bags full of straw.

Throwing live grenades was very different. It was far more serious as one silly act could kill someone. Individually we had turns standing behind a low wall with a trainer. We practiced pulling the pin from an unarmed grenade, waiting a couple of seconds, yelling out "Grenade' and chucking it before diving behind the low brick wall. We were told that some people had frozen or dropped the live grenade when the pin was pulled resulting in soldiers being injured and in some cases killed. After the practice we performed the real task of throwing a live grenade yelling out 'Grenade' and ducking for cover as it exploded. The exercise was a very intense and dangerous activity. Everyone in my group accomplished the task without any incident. The trainers earned their pay that day.

Even though we came from different strata of society, and different locations and were cramped into a small area with no personal space and placed under stress we tolerated and made friends with each other.

There were only two men who I did not warm to. Both of these men were conscripts who had been selected to do officer training at Scheyville. One had failed the course so he was given the rank of corporal and sent to a Recruit Training Battalion. He would not have been liked by the other corporals who had earned their stripes the hard way and his aloofness and bitter demeanour made him unpopular with the recruits. The other had graduated from Scheyville and was our platoon commander. I think that we must have been his first training platoon. He was pompous. He strutted around with his swagger stick in his hand or up his armpit. He bought himself a new sports car which he drove around to the various activities while we marched. On occasions he sent his corporal to walk back to the barracks to return with the car so that he could drive back, leaving the corporal to accompany us on another walk back to the barracks.

Towards the end of the course we were taken by bus to a secluded place on the Murrumbidgee River to have a barbeque and swim. The lieutenant must have had no idea what the recruits thought of him because he dived into the river to join in the fun. A couple of recruits grabbed him and kept pushing him under the water and generally manhandling him. It was obvious that the lieutenant was getting upset but they continued making out that it was a game. Finally they let him go and he ran off in distress to his sports car and sped off. The bus to collect us did not come until after the

sun had set and we were in the dark getting cold and a little concerned. It must have been his retaliation. After that we saw less of our lieutenant, his swagger stick and that sports car. I was to meet many more Scheyville graduates during my term in the army and I had only admiration for them.

It was approaching the time of year for preseason rugby matches. I went along to some training sessions as I had played in the first fifteen at school. I was not a good player but I could plod along. I was selected for the seconds and both teams went by coach to play in a gala day at West Wyalong, a place I had never heard of before. It was an excellent day to be absent from the camp as my platoon were doing their twenty kilometre route march that day and I missed it.

We won some matches and lost some matches. The results did not matter much as we would not be around when the proper competition started. We were destined for other places. Personnel in the army rugby teams would have been constantly changing throughout the season as the 8th intake would have begun the competition and then the 9th would have continued. The only constant players were the staff members in the teams.

At the end of the football gala the staff members went into town to interact with the other teams, have the presentations and speeches and enjoy a few beers. We recruits were not allowed such luxuries. We were told to wait at the bus till they returned and then the coach would return to Wagga Wagga. A couple of the guys thought it was a good opportunity to go over to the nurses' quarters of the hospital and have a bit of fun. About half a dozen of us sat in the reception room and talked to the nurses who were a bit bemused by the attention given to them.

After a couple of hours we strode back to the coach in the dark and waited for the return journey to Kapooka. The day was a much welcomed experience, an escape from the strict, unsympathetic atmosphere of the recruit camp.

We had medical and dental checks with teeth extracted or filled where necessary. The army medical corps loved to give vaccinations. Half way through our course we were granted a few days leave to go home. Before we left they gave us many jabs in the arm and on one occasion I was getting needles in both arms at the same time. Some of the guys experienced a bad reaction to the needles and spent their leave feeling sick and out of sorts recovering at home. Maybe that is why they gave us the leave so that we could be nursed by family members and return fit and ready to continue.

To make life interesting the army instigated various inter-platoon competitions. Because we could do more chin ups, push ups and run further and faster than the others we won the physical fitness competition. However we needed remedial work for marching. We were told in no uncertain terms that we were hopeless. We thought that we were good but we were outranked in the argument. As a consequence we had to spend extra lessons with a very loud, irate Regimental Sergeant Major who kept berating our efforts and getting us to repeat marching drills up and down the parade ground. We must have reached an acceptable standard, or maybe he just wanted to get rid of us, as we were allowed to be at the final march-out parade.

It was good to see our time at Kapooka completed as we were denied many basic freedoms. We were told what to wear, when to eat, where to go and what to do. In many ways our life was similar to gaol inmates. We were allocated to different corps for specialised training and I was off to the Royal Australian Artillery Corps. I was relatively happy with the allocation as it was my second choice. We were told, by members of the Corps that it was the gentlemen's Corps. I guess historically the artillery had to move with horses and later with trucks and helicopters and so they did not have to march and arrived at battles relatively clean and tidy.

From my room one recruit, who was a university graduate engineer, was destined for the Engineering Corps, another got his first choice the Signal Corps and the last one spent long periods in hospital after an abdominal operation and had to begin the recruit training course again with the next intake.

Those going to army bases north of Wagga Wagga to such places as Sydney went by a special train that only carried soldiers. Like my trip to Kapooka my trip away from Kapooka was also very unpleasant. I am not sure if it was diesel or steam but it was slow and gave way to all other trains. The inside of the carriage had a hallway down one side with doors that opened to rooms which seated eight people with four on each side. Four were facing the direction the train was travelling and the other four facing the back. That was fine until people wanted to sleep.

Why are soldiers always moved during the night? What do you do to get comfortable? One short guy climbed up to a small basket-like luggage rack and curled up with his great coat over him. I moved out to lie in the corridor. Things were fine for a couple of hours until an officer came along the corridor to check on the recruits. When he stumbled over my body stretched out on the floor he got a fright and told me to return to my compartment. Mind you I think I received a greater fright then he did. I staggered into the compartment, regained my seat and we all continued the long journey to Sydney with our legs curled up and sitting upright.

My next adventure was at North Head in Sydney where the Artillery Training School was established. It was a lovely scenic spot on the cliff tops on the northern side of the harbour entrance. It was positioned on top of a hill just walking distance from the Manly wharf. From the army base panoramic views of the harbour and the city sky line were revealed. In our free time we could catch the Manly Ferry to the city to experience all it had to offer or go to the nearby scenic beaches. It was fantastic.

One night a group of us went to the Sydney Stadium to see Peter, Paul and Mary, a famous American folk singing trio. The Stadium was originally constructed as a temporary building in 1908 for the Burns versus Johnson World Heavyweight Championship. We sat and enjoyed the entertainment of the trio as they played their guitars and sang from the central boxing ring such popular songs as 'Puff the Magic Dragon' and 'Blowin' in the Wind'.

After several weeks of the gunnery course I was fortunate to be selected to undergo survey training to be a battery surveyor. This meant that I could stay at North Head for a longer period. Our class spent many a day working with our theodolites right on North Head having a magnificent view of the harbour. On one occasion we had the best

position in Sydney to watch the American aircraft carrier USS Enterprise come through the heads and proceed down the harbour towards the Bridge.

Early in the gunnery course the army had arranged for Life Assurance representatives to give an address on the benefits of Life Assurance. They did this before we knew if we were going to be appointed to a unit going to Vietnam. They explained that we would be still covered if we died at war. It seemed a fairly good option so I signed up for a policy. The Education Department was paying me a small fortnightly sum to cover the difference between my army pay and what I would have received had I gone teaching so I arranged for them to pay for the policy. Thinking back on the occasion I think that someone on the base must have received a nice kick-back from the presenters as quite a number of Life Assurance policies were sold.

While at North Head I turned twenty one. My friends and family had organised a party at the hall at my local church. And guess what - I was allocated guard duty for the following morning. So after the party I was delivered in the early hours of the morning by friends to the gate at the army base so I could present myself on parade looking spick and span in a few more hours. I was very unlucky with guard duty as I also had to work on Anzac Day. While in uniform I would have loved to have spent the day with my father who was a war veteran but that was not to be the case.

There was one event which occurred at North Head which was not very pleasant. A guy from my room, I'll call him Ben, was at a loose end one weekend so he went down the hill to a gun shop at Manly and bought a rifle. He then returned to the edge of the cliff in the army barracks at North Head and aimed at a rock fisherman. He pulled the trigger and sadly the fisherman became a paraplegic.

On the Sunday of the shooting I arrived back to the barracks late in the day and was planning to attend a local church service. I asked Ben if he wanted to come. At the time I knew nothing of the shooting and Ben gave no indication that he had done something so serious. He seemed his usual self as we went to church and returned to the base.

The next morning all the soldiers at North Head had to attend a special parade. At the parade all the soldiers who came from Melbourne had to stay while the rest were dismissed. We found out later that a soldier on guard at the gate on Sunday noticed a package which could have been a rifle under the arm of a person entering the camp. The item was wrapped in a Melbourne newspaper. So the investigating police must have assumed that the person came from Melbourne. The guard would have identified Ben as the person with the package from the line up of the remaining soldiers from Melbourne.

In retrospect Ben did display some worrying behaviours. None of these behaviours though indicated that he wanted to inflict harm on other people. In lessons he sometimes asked the teacher if he could stand up because he was not paying attention and that he felt like falling asleep. Who asks a teacher if you can stand up so as to keep focussed on a lesson? He wore glasses and resembled Clark Kent so he was nicknamed Superman. So on many occasions with an audience watching he would tie a towel around his neck and jump off the second storey pretending to fly. It was an act which was very dangerous. He also used to practise his marching in our room.

He would go through the full routine, marching up and down the room performing an about-turn, a left wheel, a right turn or a slow march. He made sure he came to a loud halt and clicked the heels when coming to attention. Apart from Ben, it was an activity I never saw anyone else perform. The behaviours were not too outrageous but they did indicate that he was different.

I am sure he did not intend to inflict any harm on the unfortunate fisherman. He was not a violent man and there were no signs of anger or wishing people harm. I think that when he looked down the sights of the rifle he became a soldier in a war zone of fantasy and was not in the real world. He was taken away by the police for psychiatric assessment and to face the law courts.

The army base was now full of soldiers doing various courses and the next intake of trainees was due to arrive. So the powers in charge decided in all their wisdom to put up a large marquee decked out with furniture and beds to house the incoming troops. However, they stupidly placed the marquee at the base of our two storey barracks building. There were lots of smokers on the many training courses and they all flicked their butts out the window to the lawn below. So it did not take long before the marquee was ablaze and people were running around in a hopeless attempt to extinguish the fire. It was spectacular and dangerously close to our building. In a way it was a relief to see it burn in the day time when there was no one in it. Had the fire been at night time the consequences could have been fatal.

When the culprit for the fire was asked to stand forward on parade everyone was motionless. The guilty person probably would not have known they were responsible as a smouldering butt would take some time to create a fire. Who knows, it may have been the result of an unknown arsonist or an electrical fault and not a smoker.

Corps Training was a time for pranks and jokes. Often a bed was picked up with its occupant asleep and the bed moved to another part of the building. So many a soldier would wake up in bed in a strange place. The shower room was a popular spot. Another trick was to remove the clips from the springs on the bed and when the occupant dived on the bed they and the mattress went to the floor.

The funniest incident I can remember happening was when someone from my room drove his car into the army camp at high speed with tyres squealing around the corners. The driver raced up to the room chased by the Duty Officer. ‘What’s your name’, asked the Duty Officer, ’Smiff’ answered the soldier, and then he spelt ‘s’, ‘m’, ‘i’, ‘double f’ with a voice which indicated that he was obviously under the influence of alcohol. As it was a made up name all in the room broke out in laughter, but the Duty Officer had no sense of humour.

One of the guys in my room would walk up to the end of his bed, grab the end of the bed with both hands and do a forward roll on to his bed. He was a prime target for removing the clips down the length of his bed spring. So when he came to perform his regular forward roll his body hit the mattress and all the bedding collapsed to the floor with him in the centre. The shock of falling through the mattress was written on his face. He then had to pull away the bedding and mattress while he and helpers reinserted the clips. He had his suspicions but he never did find out who were the perpetrators.

While at North Head I learnt lots of information and skills associated with firing the M2A2 which was the main artillery piece being used by Australian troops in Vietnam.

With the aid of a theodolite and tables on the movement of the sun I was able to take readings of the movement of the sun and calculate my precise grid reference. I could also use the theodolite to give the gunners a line to their sights so that the guns would point on the same correct bearing. I also learnt how to construct a graph of meteorological information and then apply it in calculating the effects of the weather on the flight of the shell. Knowing my grid reference and that of the target I could calculate the range and direction to the target and supply information on elevation and bearing for the guns to fire on the target. Nowadays in the modern army all these calculations are done more easily with the aid of a GPS and computers.

If the forward observer wanted to adjust the fire then new information could be calculated and given to the guns. I was also trained to direct fire as a forward observer. We were taught how to bring the fire onto the target by bracketing it first. Bracketing occurred when one shot was placed in front of the target and another behind. Then by adding or dropping the range of the shot the forward observer could easily and confidently direct the shots onto the target. However, most of our firing in Vietnam was in close infantry support and in this we carefully directed the rounds closer and closer to the target.

At the completion of my Survey Course I was posted to 102 Field Battery stationed at Holsworthy an army base in the Western Suburbs of Sydney. For the first time in the army I was going to a new place with someone I knew as Trevor Bryant who also had graduated from the same course was posted to 102 Field Battery. One of the first things we were told was that the Battery was going to begin a tour in Vietnam early in the coming year.

Holsworthy was the complete opposite of North Head. It was an adventure I could have done without. At North Head we lived in historic nineteenth century brick barracks with scenic views in all directions. The course was held within the vicinity of the barracks and we always ate a prepared meal at a table with a knife and fork. The weather seemed to be always mild and sunny.

The barracks at Holsworthy were timber huts with hopper windows that would not close and the doors at the ends which seemed to be always open creating a tunnel for the cold air to blow along. I would go to bed wearing a track suit over my winter pyjamas under all my blankets and great coat. We had to go out on regular overnight exercises and we could feel at night the frost settling on us as we lay in the open trying to sleep or posted on guard duty. Maybe this was the real army.

Meals in the barracks were quite good but out in the field that was not the case. Some of the men who outranked us had been to Malaya and they would regularly brew up a concoction with loads of curry that was far too hot and spicy for us to eat. As a result some including myself would choose to have no dinner. I can still visualise the smirk on the Sergeant's face at our attempts to eat the food he had selfishly prepared. It was behaviour which was foreign to me. To have the responsibility to prepare food for the whole group and deliberately make it inedible to many seemed the height of selfishness. He was the sergeant in charge of the signallers, luckily I did not have much

to do with him. This sort of self-centred behaviour did not happen once we went to Vietnam. In Vietnam we formed small groups on the guns or command post which made a team supporting each other.

Sometimes activities at Holsworthy seemed ridiculous such as forming into a line and moving forward to clean up litter at the army base. If no one picked up the paper that the sergeant had hidden behind a building pier we would have to repeat it again.

One day Trevor and I had to go to the adjutant's office. He asked us to attend an appointment with a psychiatrist in the city who was assessing Ben, the soldier who had shot the fisherman. It gave us an opportunity to tell the psychiatrist some of the unusual behaviours exhibited by Ben. We hoped that our information would be supportive and assist his case. Travelling back to the army base there were some delays so it was a rush for me to get ready for guard duty that night.

After collecting the rifle from the armoury I did not have enough time to clean the inside of the barrel. As a result I went on parade with a dirty rifle. The duty officer was not impressed so I was charged and had to face our major a couple of days later with escorts at my side. I did not bother defending the charge and so for punishment I had to pay a $2 fine. I gained the impression that the major thought my crime was unworthy of all the attention.

While at Holsworthy a retired Governor of NSW died. He was Lieutenant General Sir Eric Woodward KCMG, KCUO, CBE, DSO. He was the first governor to be born in NSW. Our barracks gathered together some artillery men with yours truly included and transported us to Ingleburn Army Barracks to combine with some infantry men to form a march past at the funeral. We had to go to Ingleburn a couple of times to practise our slow marching. Our outfits had to be spick and span- uniform pressed, boots spit polished, scabbards and belts polished and the rifle clean of course. On the day we were driven over to a church on the North Shore somewhere and did a slow march for about seventy metres down the street and hopped back on the bus and returned to Holsworthy. When we gave a salute with an eyes left all we saw out the corner of our eye were mourners outside the church some distance away. Not bad for a day's work.

New faces were coming into the Battery all the time, including guys from the 8th and 9th intakes and soldiers from A Battery which had just returned from Malaya. The battery was building up to full strength and those not going to Vietnam were being transferred. For example soldiers who were due for discharge and those with police charges or other legal matters could not come with us. Also there was a juggling act as the complement of our unit had to have a certain ratio of conscripts from different intakes compared to the number of regular soldiers.

In about September1967 the battery went with 3RAR on an exercise to Shoalwater Bay in Queensland to prepare us for war conditions in Vietnam. The plan was that we were going to Vietnam in support of 3RAR. It was an opportunity for the officers of both units to interact and establish strong working relationships. It was particularly vital for the forward observers as it was an opportunity to interact with the infantry companies to which they were assigned. The exercise was as close to war conditions as possible. So the command post had to be dug underground and the gunners had to dig sleeping

pits, construct machine gun positions and spread barbed wire around the fire support base.

When firing at Holsworthy the emphasis was on developing gunnery skills and not all the other activities associated with war. Now we had to behave as though we were in a real war situation. The enemy was a British army unit. I can't remember if someone was declared the winner. However, everyone can remember those terrible sand-flies that had declared war on all the gunners and attacked with ferocity.

For some reason we did not go to Vietnam with 3RAR. They were rushed over to Vietnam before the end of the year to strengthen the Australian Forces from two battalions to three battalions. Maybe, Intelligence had a suspicion that the Tet Offensive was going to happen and that an extra battalion was needed. As a consequence all the team building with 3RAR was for naught. So we went to Vietnam with a different battalion, 1RAR who we did not know much about.

We had seven personnel responsible for the survey duties, a sergeant, a bombardier, a lance bombardier and four gunners. The bombardier was equivalent to a corporal and a gunner was the artillery's term for a private. Together with the signallers and the officers, we formed the team that worked in the command post. We received information from the forward observers about the target and then we provided the guns with information on what charge to use, what elevation to raise the barrel, and what bearing to point the barrel to hit the target.

Momentum was beginning to build and we started a programme to prepare us for the challenges that awaited us at Canungra, the Jungle Training Camp in Queensland. We were spending quite a lot of time on fitness training.

Before we went to Canungra we went on leave to spend Christmas with our families. However, we were back in time to do more forced marches, lots of running with rifles and packs and other physical activities before being bussed to Queensland to begin another adventure.

The night time trip north in the coach seemed very long and uncomfortable. However, there were many guys who took control of the microphone at the front of the coach and entertained us with yarns and jokes for most of the journey. How they remember so many hilarious items I will never know.

At Canungra we did not receive a warm cordial reception. There was no sympathy or understanding that we had spent the night in cramped unpleasant conditions with very little sleep and in need of some rest and recuperation. We undressed from our polyesters and into greens, were supplied with rifles, told where our tent was and began the rigorous jungle training course. It definitely introduced us to the fact that soldiers going to a war zone have to take it very seriously.

Physical exertion was constant. We would line up in platoon strength, that is about forty soldiers, and run in step for a kilometre with rifles and packs and exchanging a machine gun between us as we ran. This could be followed by climbing ropes 5 metres high sliding along a 10 metre rope and climbing down to earth on another rope. If it was

not done correctly the rope would painfully burn the hand. We were also repeatedly put through an obstacle course which would include walls to climb, water to run through, barbed wire to slide under, towers to jump off into deep water, quite often as a team helping one another to the end. At certain places machine guns were set up to fire live ammunition not far above our heads. We also had to do a day time assault across an open field in which we had to traverse various obstacles and slide under barbed wire while loud explosions, billowing smoke and the sound of gun fire was continuous. With the constant sliding of bodies under the barbed wire groove were formed which made it a little easier to slide under the maze of low trip wire. We learnt to slide on our backs under the wire so if we got hooked on the wire we could see the problem and unhook it.

We were all supplied with a rifle and we had to learn its serial number and carry the rifle at all times, even sleep with it beside our bed. Our main weapon was called a self-loading rifle or SLR. When the trigger is pulled the gas from the exploding charge re-cocks the rifle automatically. So the operator can fire the whole magazine by cocking the rifle for the first shot and then pressing the trigger once for each extra shot. There was a setting for the gas to cock the rifle. If it was too low the gun would not operate when you pulled the trigger and if too high the gun's recoil would bruise your shoulder. For comfort the setting had to be just right.

One soldier in each section was supplied with a machine gun instead of an SLR. Because the M60 machine gun was much heavier than the SLR rifle the machine gunner often swapped weapons with one of the others in his section for the day. One day I exchanged weapons with Blackie our gunner and spent the day carrying that blasted thing. At the end of the day we were called on parade and the sergeant read out a rifle's serial number and asked who owned it. It was mine. So I was taken to an office to front an officer and tried to explain why my rifle was found in a tent. In the end it was concluded that a soldier in Blackie's tent had skipped the camp, he had gone Absent Without Leave, AWL, and left his rifle beside Blackie's bed. Then Blackie picked up the wrong rifle and left mine behind beside his bed.

The explanation must have been accepted as no one was charged. Knowing the staff at Canungra they would have been disappointed that we had a legitimate excuse. The missing soldier was not from our battery. He was a soldier from another corps who was training with us in preparation for a tour of Vietnam as a reinforcement for a different unit.

On one occasion I was in a mess line near our medic, Doc McKenzie. I took the opportunity to ask him about a suspicious bump on my head. He looked at it and said it was a tick. 'Just bend over and hold your head still and I will fix the problem.' With that he took an extra puff on his cigarette then placed his glowing cigarette on the tick and burnt it. I did not feel any pain and the emergency operation was a success. The bump and the tick problem were no more. We then moved along the line received our meals and continued with the hectic training programme.

On one of the days we were taken to a room where an officer from the Intelligence Corps presented reasons for Australia's involvement in the war in Vietnam. I guess it was like a coach trying to motivate a team before a game. He would have mentioned Communism, Cold War, Domino Theory, atrocities by the other side and the illegitimacy

of the other government. We could tell that it was an unbalanced presentation. He was an officer and we were mere gunners so we knew how to respond. I figured that we lived in a democracy so all that was necessary was for our elected representatives to debate the issue and decide what was best for the nation. I did not mind going overseas but if I had a choice I would have said 'No'. My father had told me not to volunteer for anything and I thought that was good advice.

We were young and all of us would have seen Vietnam as an opportunity for adventure. I suspected that there was a type of selection process before we arrived at Canungra when soldiers who were thought not up to scratch or bad for morale were quietly transferred out of the unit.

Towards the end on the jungle training course we were taken out on a five day exercise. We were driven by bus a short distance to a place with steep hills and lots of trees and undergrowth. We were going to be introduced to basic infantry tactics. After arriving we were organised into groups, met our instructors, told whether we were forward scouts, riflemen, or machine gunners and did some lessons on patrolling and clearing patrols.

At the end of the exhausting day we were told where to harbour for the night. In between making a shell scrape and spending time at the machine gun post we would have tried to eat some food from our ration packs. During the night the instructors playing the role of the enemy fired blanks and made noises resulting in us standing to on numerous occasions. At this position Trevor misplaced his glasses and was very worried that in the dark they may be lost or accidentally broken. Anyway they were found intact much to his relief and he was able to soldier on.

The next day was contact drill training. It began with us patrolling very slowly through the scrub being vigilant in all directions and trying not to make any noise followed by some shots somewhere ahead. 'Contact' would be called and the riflemen would go to ground while the machine gunner and his number two would go to the right or to high ground if close. Then the officer would organise the riflemen with some moving around to bring extra fire from the side onto the enemy. We were on a ridge so every time the riflemen went around they had to scramble down a ravine and then climb to the top again. This would go on time after time - very exhausting as you were down in a prone shooting position then running and then down to the prone position again, carrying packs and rifle. After each skirmish the instructor would talk to one of our officers saying what was good and where to improve and ask them to have another attempt.

When we were to arrive in Vietnam the tactics had changed slightly as the enemy learnt where the machine gunner was going to run. Instead, all of the patrol went to ground and an individual strategy was determined.

That night we harboured on the side of an extremely steep hill. The dusk and sunrise clearing patrols would have been fun as it was so steep that to prevent sliding down the hill I had to brace my feet against the trunk of a tree. When I started to nod off my legs would relax and I would start sliding towards the hidden bottom of the gully. The sliding would wake me so I would scramble back to my position and brace my feet against the tree and the cycle would begin again. As a consequence no one had any sleep. Trying to prepare some food or get to the machine gun post in the dark proved to be very difficult and dangerous.

The next day was filled with more war games, mainly contact drill with fire and movement. Half the soldiers would fire at the enemy while the other half advanced and selected a shooting position behind some cover. Then the roles would be reversed with the other half advancing while the rest provided covering fire. We spent that night in an ambush position. Again it was a night with very little sleep. We were supposed to have a fifty percent stand to but again we were on the side of a steep drop over-looking a road and the rugged conditions were not conducive to comfort or sleep. The instructors, the enemy, walked along the road early in the morning and we fired our blanks at them.

You guessed it, the next day we played war games again followed by an early morning attack on an enemy base. When I say early morning I mean the attack was at about 4am but the preparation began at about midnight. This was another night with a very limited amount of sleep. Preparations for the attack seemed to take for ever. We had to move in the dark through the scrub as quietly as possible and not knowing where we were going.

When we were near the start position a white cord had been place on the ground so that we could follow it in the dark and officers told us where to line up in preparation for the assault. In the attack some of the troops as they ran through the 'enemy' camp enjoyed kicking the ropes of the instructors' tents causing the tents to fall to the ground. Some tents had instructors still in them trying to sleep and who were now wrapped in a wet cold tent.

We were then taken back to the Training Centre and prepared for our move back to Holsworthy. After the rigours of Canungra the sight of Holsworthy Barracks gave us a warm welcoming feeling. Little did we know at the time but our unit was going to appreciate the severe tests we were put under at Canungra as in Vietnam we were going to be tested to the limit and face tasks that no other battery had endured since the world wars.

Somewhere in our preparations to go to Vietnam we were taken to a room and asked to write our last Will and Testament. It hit home to us the risks we were taking. We were given no instructions on how to word it, other than where to write our full name, address and the day's date. In general we did not have much to bequeath but I now had my Life Assurance Policy to include. I think those Wills written on the spur of the moment, with no preparation by people who did not have many assets and were too young to have thought of such matters would have proved interesting and maybe humorous reading.

A friend of mine asked me to be the Best Man at his wedding. The wedding was planned for a date after my expected return from Vietnam. I went for dinner with the bridal couple to be and the chief bridesmaid to a quiet restaurant in Surry Hills. The restaurant staff asked the diners if they were celebrating a special occasion. My friend told them that I was going shortly to South Vietnam. Then the compere made an announcement to all the diners saying that we were having a farewell dinner before I embarked for Vietnam. Soon after, the waiter came over to our table and presented us with a bottle of champagne. He pointed to a gentleman at another table and said that he was giving it with gratitude. I waved at the man to express my thanks and we all appreciated the man's generosity. It was a feel-good moment.

We left Australia bound for Vietnam on a Sunday night at the beginning of March 1968. I can remember the day because I went to my church and said my farewells to my friends after they came out from the morning's service. At about lunch time my father drove me in my car to Holsworthy Army Base. I said my good byes and walked into the Base for the last time.

That afternoon seemed to go on forever. It was a strange feeling just sitting around and waiting for some action. We were going away for a year with unknown persons planning our unknown itinerary. Other than knowing that we were going to a war zone no one knew what the future held. It was difficult to relax. We were prepared and wanted to begin the journey. Finally the buses came and we hopped into the buses to commence our adventure. I guess we were experiencing a feeling that all other soldiers experienced when they left the comfort and safety of their home and stepped into the discomfort and dangers of a war zone.

The evening bus trip to the Sydney international airport was memorable in that we began to sing songs from previous war eras, such as 'Pack up Your Troubles in Your old Kit Bag' and 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary'. I guess it was a way of coping with the situation. We did not know what the future held for us.

The flight was in a Boeing 707- something we had only heard about. Here we were in comfy chairs with male stewards bringing us drinks and food. Most of us at some stage went up to the front and spoke to the captain in his cockpit and looked out the front window. It was a great sight, seeing the cloud formations, the vast ocean and dotted islands in an amazing panoramic view. Nowadays it is a sight passengers are not allowed to experience. I sat next to Ron Maher a cartographer from Sydney who was a crew member on Alpha Gun. While he was 'holidaying' in Vietnam, his girlfriend was going on vacation for the year in England. When he returned they planned to marry and live happily ever after. I met him years later and that is exactly what did happen.

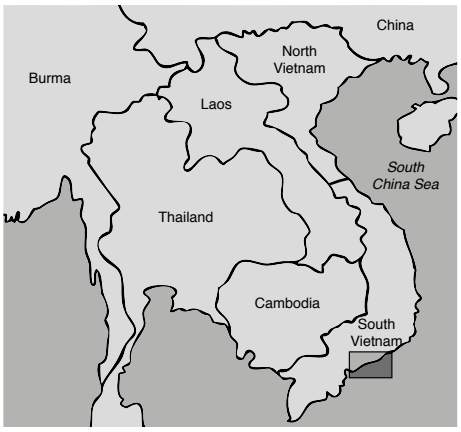
We had a stop-over in Singapore where we were not allowed to leave the terminal. I took the opportunity to purchase a doll for my niece who was turning four and arranged for the shop keeper to mail it. The shop keeper sent the present to Australia by sea mail. I was unaware of this and so when my niece had not received her present after a month had passed I sent a replacement gift. So in the end she received two presents.

ARRIVAL IN SOUTH VIETNAM

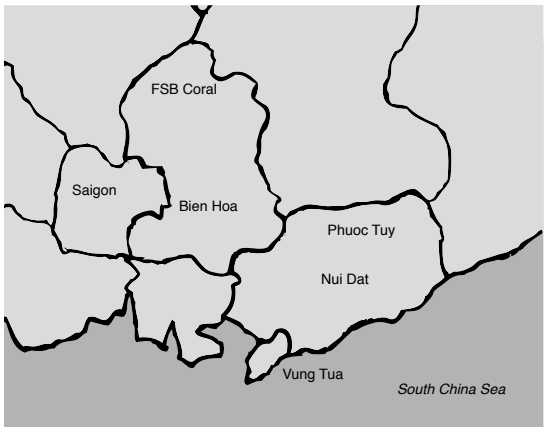
The main airport at Saigon, Ton Son Ute, was one of the busiest airports in the world. I guess this was because of all the troop movements and the arrival of large quantities of equipment and supplies needed for the war effort. As we hopped out of the plane onto the tarmac there in front of us was a row of fighter bomber planes parked in bays with protective walls around them. It was the first indication that we were in a war zone.

We were told to line up on the tarmac and change from our polyesters into our greens. This signalled that the holiday trip was over and that our war had begun. To get to our greens we had to unlock our bags which were like small cricket player's kit bags. As new soldiers arrived it must have been a common event at the airport seeing hundreds of men taking off their clothes and getting dressed again. I placed my polyesters in the bag and locked it again. Later I was to discover that I had inadvertently placed the key for the padlock in the pocket of my polyesters which were in the bag so to open the bag when I arrived at Nui Dat I had to cut the bag.

We were then flown by Caribou to Luscombe field, the aerodrome at Nui Dat, home for the Australian fighting corps in Vietnam. The non-fighting corps, hospital, support stores and port facilities were at Vung Tau a couple of hours drive away on the coast. The Caribou did not have the comforts or the service given to us on the Boeing 707. We sat along the sides in makeshift material seats facing the centre and wondering what was ahead of us. Down below was the jungle that we had heard so much about and we wondered what it had in store for us.



North and South Vietnam



Enlarged Section of South Vietnam

The artillery battery which we were replacing left behind a number of soldiers who were reinforcements for their battery and had not completed their tour of duty. Quite a number of these were battery surveyors so our individual work-load was going to be lightened. This also meant that there was a shortage of tents and bed spaces. I was allocated a new tent which had its canvas sides raised a metre above the ground but with no floor so my bed was sitting on the grass-covered ground. So together with the other three in my tent we had to sandbag the walls a metre high and nail down a timber floor using spent 105 mm shell cartridges as piers.

Our position had the six guns spaced out in protective bays. Around each was a circle

of corrugated iron about a metre high holding back an earthen wall. The gun crews were in the tents as close as possible to their respective guns. The rest of us were in tents in the second row from the guns, that is, the surveyors, signallers, storemen, clerical staff etc. At one end of our position was a long, sheet-iron building half of which was the O Rs' - other ranks'- mess and the other half a recreational area which we called the boozer. Everyone would walk to this building for their meals, evening drinking and socialising. Each night a movie was shown for all to see. Some of the movies were the latest Hollywood had to offer and they provided a welcome distraction and something to look forward to. Over the back behind some trees were the sergeants' and officers' quarters. We knew that we were within a large army base but there were not many visual signs of that being the case.

The toilet was a shed on a hill at the back of our tents. It was built on a concrete pad over a large hole with three thunder boxes sitting in line. Closer to the tents there were several four inch clay pipes stuck in the ground. These were at a convenient height so that they could be used as urinals or pissaphones as we called them. Showering was done on a concrete slab about the size of a squash court. There were canvas buckets which we could fill with water and with a pulley and rope raise them to a height suitable for a shower. At the base of the canvas bucket was a shower rose which could be turned to control the flow of water.

The first tools we were introduced to were the pick and shovel. They proved to be the most useful tools that we had been issued. A warrant officer thought that we could fill the sand bags with soil within the base. So we filled hundreds of bags to place around the new tents only to find out in the wet season that the plant seeds germinated and vegetation sprouted out of the bags making them look like a vertical garden or the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. So all the effort spent filling them was a waste of time as the sand bags had to be replaced. The old bags had to be taken down and replaced with bags filled not with soil but sand from a designated spot outside the base.

We had arrived in the dry season. In Nui Dat the trees were green but there was no undergrowth or grass growing. The ground was red and hard to hit with the pick and shovel. On the plus side there was no rain at all and work was not interrupted by poor weather.

One of the first assignments we had to do with the guns was to shoot harassment and interdiction fire, commonly known as H and Is. These were artillery rounds fired at any time and at any place as directed. This could mean firing on the same target repeatedly or changing targets continuously. The targets would have been suspected meeting places, junctions on tracks, reported lights and fires or results of intelligence reports. The grid references of the targets and the times to fire were radioed to the battery and from this information the strength of the charge, elevation and bearing were determined well in advance. The info was provided to the guns at the time of firing. It made life interesting as we could be firing at midnight, 4am or lunch time.

We all became used to the guns firing at any time. The guns firing did not necessarily mean that there was a fire fight or that our soldiers were in contact with the enemy. The firing of H and Is also meant that the gunners rarely had a night without either having to get out of bed and fire the gun or be woken by the firing.

There were no women and no Vietnamese on the base. The only women I saw were Australian women who on rare occasions came to entertain the troops. I attended only one of these shows as the rest must have been performed when we were away on an operation. All the soldiers arrived at the show with a fold-up chair and a rifle slung over their shoulder. The shows were something that were well appreciated by the troops as they took our minds off the army routine and the music and entertainment brought back fond memories of life at home.

We were told that Vietnamese people were not allowed to enter our camp for security reasons. That suited us just fine. The less the Vietnamese knew about us the better. This was not the case with the American bases. In the American bases locals entered the camps to do all sorts of jobs that the soldiers should have been doing themselves. Information about the American bases and the movement of troops could have been easily gathered by the Viet Cong from those Vietnamese working in the American bases.

In a laundry at Baria, the provincial capital, we could have our greens cleaned at a minimum cost. Each day the dirty greens were collected and a driver took them to Baria and on the return journey brought back the clean ones. On one of these trips not long after our arrival I went as a shot-gun to protect the driver and our important cargo. It was an opportunity to get out of the base and see the Vietnamese people going about their daily life.

Before we left Australia we were not told what the enemy looked like. In photographs or film clips we saw the enemy either dressed in green army uniform or wearing black pyjamas, with a straw hat and a rifle slung over their shoulder. The road passed Hoa Long which was considered an unfriendly village and there walking down the road were two men wearing black pyjamas with a straw hat and a rifle slung over their shoulder. I held my rifle a little tighter and was a little confused as the men seemed to be rather relaxed and not interested in our vehicle. I mentioned this to the driver and he said not to worry as they were members of the local militia. The black pyjamas and straw hat I realised was a very common outfit worn by many Vietnamese whether they were friend or foe. So the enemy looked like everyone else. How confusing not to be able to recognise the enemy.

In discussions we referred to the enemy as nogs or noggies. During The Second World War they referred to the Germans as Jerrys, the Japanese as Nips and the Italians as Ities (pronounced eye-ties). However, for this book I will be politically correct and not use the terms nog or noggies. I guess the enemy would have had a term to describe our forces. As there are now many Asian and Vietnamese who contribute to our society I feel a little uncomfortable to use the term. If we were to have conscription at this time there would be many Australians of Asian background. However, in my time in the army I did not meet one person in the Australian army who did not look European or Aboriginal.

After we had settled in and become acclimatised we were sent out on an operation. This would have been a couple of weeks after we arrived. We were taken by truck to a dry paddy field the other side of Hoa Long not far from Nui Dat. I'm sure it was a practice run to dig the command post, dig our sleeping holes, put out the defensive barbed wire and machine gun pits and respond to fire missions and H and Is in battle field conditions.

Protecting our rear was a company from 7RAR who we were supporting until 1RAR arrived. The other companies were patrolling and setting up ambush positions within our 11 kilometres range. We were told via our Forward Observers that 7RAR were reluctant to use us as they had only weeks to go before flying home and that we had not proven ourselves.

We were constructing what is called a Fire Support Base. We were going to build many of these bases before our tour was over. It is a base established for artillery or mortars to support patrolling infantry. The correct name is a Fire Support Patrol Base but we shortened the term to Fire Support Base.

Here we learnt how to set up our defences when in the bush. We laid out three lots of rolled concertina barbed wire around the whole position. There were two rolls on the bottom and one on the top. A company of infantry dug in guarding our rear. They would have established strong machine gun pits with claymore mines set up to fire if needed.

A small bulldozer pushed earth into a wall about a metre high around each gun and the artillery men dug machine gun emplacements out in front.

Constructing the command post was a major task on the first day for the surveyors and signallers. The bulldozer was used to scrape a hole about two feet deep, eight feet wide and twelve feet long. This would be fairly rough so the edges would have to be squared and the base evened out. A trench was then dug along a centre line lengthways to a depth of about four feet and two feet wide. This enabled someone to stand in the trench and have an earthen table at their front and behind them. Then two layers of sand bags were placed around the perimeter of the hole leaving a gap at one end for the entrance and another to allow the tannoy, our loud speaker system, wires to come in. Large planks of timber and two layers of sandbags covered the roof and above that a large tarpaulin covered the construction and the two gaps. At the entrance crude steps were fashioned and at the other end of the trench an earthen seat was shaped for the signaller.

The signallers had to raise their aerial to have improved communications. They also had to set up the tannoy with wires and speakers. The tannoy was a means of two way communication between the gun sergeants and the officer in the command post. They also had to ensure that batteries were charged and the lighting in the command post was functioning.

As this would have been a paddy field for probably a thousand years the river water which came into the field would have had fine particles of clay suspended in the water. When the wet season ended and the water dried up the clay particles would have settled on top of the subsoil. So in the dry season it baked into a solid block that was extremely difficult to dig. It would have been the hardest soil to dig in my tour of Vietnam.

At dusk very small bats flew across our position at a height of about five metres. We had some fun trying to throw objects in front of their flight path to see if their radar would detect the object and so change their flight direction. There was no intention to hit or harm the bats and none were injured but it did provide some light relief.

One evening after the sun was set one of the machine gunners from the company to our rear fired a burst of shot. This was the first small arms fire we had heard fired in anger. We all dived to the deck and wandered what was happening. Word came through that the gunner had seen a figure at the wire perimeter but the threat had gone. I guess it was a reminder that we were here on serious business. In retrospect I think it was probably fire from an over-zealous guard with an itchy trigger finger.

We had a few more trips to the bush, each about ten days with a few days back at Nui Dat before going out again. Each time we went bush we had to be transported by either Chinook or truck. Going by Chinook was very exhilarating. The spinning Chinook's twin rotors were like a fierce wind storm launching into the air everything that was not weighted or held down. We leaned against the wind and covered our eyes as we scrambled to get aboard. Inside the helicopter were seats down both side walls similar to a Caribou aircraft. We would grab a seat and get as comfortable as possible wearing our webbing, carrying ammunition for our rifle, our pack with clothes, blanket, eating utensils and food and of course our ever present rifle.

The Chinook would lift to a height to enable the M2A2 guns which weighed 2,260 kilograms to be strapped on and below that a pallet with the ammunition for the gun, barbed wire and any other stores the gunners needed. We then headed to our destination with no idea of which direction we were going. Inside at the front of the Chinook on both sides were American soldiers with flak jacket and helmet, manning machine guns which were pointed out at right angles. Where the straps holding the gun below were secured to the helicopter was a large rectangular hole which enabled us to view the terrain and jungle below. When we arrived at the site of our new Fire Support Base our Gun Position Officer, Lieutenant Ian Ahearn would direct the pilot where to place the gun.

When going by truck it was more mundane but because we usually travelled along roads we had some idea of where we were heading. Some trucks were loaded with all the supplies and equipment necessary for the battery. The other trucks towed a gun with the gun crew sitting on the back. As I was not assigned to a gun I could hop on any truck in the convoy. We were usually escorted to our destination by armoured personnel carriers. Once the convoy reached the site of the new Fire Support Base, which was a clearing about the size of a football field, the trucks would be directed where to place the gun. The trucks would then be escorted by APCs back to Nui Dat.

When the guns arrived at a spot there was no need to be silent as the fanfare of helicopters or trucks had heralded our arrival to any enemy within many kilometres. Then the command post would use the tannoy, a loud speaker system to communicate with everyone on the position. The sound of the tannoy was similar in volume to the loud speaker system a high school might use at a sports carnival. So with seeing our arrival and hearing the firing of guns and the sound of the loud tannoy the enemy knew exactly our location.

When practising on the artillery firing-range at Holsworthy in Australia we were learning individually all the various skills required to complete a fire mission. We were then firing on targets such as dumped cars or a geographical feature on the range and the emphasis was on procedures and performing accurately with less concern for speed.

Now in Vietnam the emphasis had changed as lives were dependent on our delivery so we had to work as a team to get the rounds on the ground as quickly and accurately as possible.

A typical scenario in Vietnam for an artillery battery when an infantry patrol made contact with the enemy was as follows. The patrol went to ground while the infantry officer assessed the situation. At the same time our forward observer who was with the patrol found a protected spot to calculate from his map the patrol's position and the direction to the target. He then radioed the battery, giving the direction to the target and a grid reference of a position say 500m beyond his estimated target for a battery fire mission with one gun to adjust fire. The extra 500 metres or so distance was for safety reasons in case there was an error in reading his location on the map.

When the message arrived at the battery Command Post the message was repeated back to the FO for a double check. As the radio operator repeated the co-ordinates of the target the battery surveyors heard the information and started calculating the elevation for the gun barrel and the bearing to hit the target.

Meanwhile, the Duty Officer called on the tannoy 'Fire Mission Battery', and all the gun crews ran to their guns. Then the Duty Officer over the tannoy gave the charge, bearing and elevation for the guns. Each artillery shell came with seven charge bags. The more charge bags placed in the cartridge of the shell the further it went. The maximum range of the guns was about eleven thousand metres. The Section Commanders ran from gun to gun checking the number of charge bags and with a compass the bearing the guns were pointing. Alpha, Bravo and Charlie guns had one Section Commander and Delta, Echo and Foxtrot guns the other. Then they told the Command Post when they were ready to fire. Once clearance was given by Headquarter Battery the gun chosen to adjust fire fired.

Back at the patrol the soldiers heard the comforting sound of the round hitting the ground 500 metres away. The FO then ordered the gun to fire closer, drop say 300 metres- which meant 300 metres closer- again making sure of safety. The battery surveyors calculated the necessary changes and the new instructions were given to the guns. The next closer shot gave comfort to the Australian patrol and concern to the enemy. Then the FO made an adjustment and directed all of the guns to fire say five rounds fire for effect. This would mean thirty high explosive rounds falling on and around the enemy position. They would not be feeling too comfortable. When the shells landed the officer leading the patrol decided either to take out the enemy position or withdraw and pour more artillery at the enemy's location.

To get the rounds on the ground as quickly as possible we needed the FO, radio operator, Duty Officer, battery surveyors, section commanders, gun sergeants, layers setting the bearing on the gun and of course the loaders all doing their tasks with professionalism.

It was like a dramatic stage performance. Every performer had a role to play and every member had to know their role thoroughly. First to perform was the FO and his radio operator who sent the information about the target. Then the scene changed to the command post where the receiving radio operator took the message and gave

the information to the surveyors and Duty Officer. They calculated the elevation and bearing for the guns and provided the information for the next scene at the guns. Here the section commanders, gun sergeants and gun crews prepared the guns and fired the rounds. The final dramatic scene was back with the FO who saw the exploding rounds hit the target. Now we were not a group of individuals trying to hit dumped cars on a firing range, we had become a group of professional performers that strove for perfection. Lives were now dependent on our performance.

There were six artillery guns in a battery. Sometimes they were given a number to identify them from 1 to 6 such as gun number 5 or gun number 2. Other times they were given the name of the first six letters of the phonetic alphabet used by the military. I have decided to call the guns in this story by the phonetic alphabet, that is, Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Echo and Foxtrot. I think that the phonetic alphabet names give a more personal touch and it is the name the gunners used mostly to refer to their gun and crew.

Over the next month 7RAR Infantry Battalion was replaced by 1RAR, the battalion which we were going to support for the rest of our tour. Every time 1RAR left Nui Dat we went with them. We were all part of a team dependent on each other.

In the early days we were constantly learning how to adjust to the new conditions. A good example of this was the wearing of clothes. When we went bush we went for about two weeks. So how many changes of underwear did we take? Now take into account that water to wash clothing is not provided. As a result underclothes were not worn. We took a spare set of greens so after a fortnight in the dusty, sweaty conditions even these stunk. Socks were also not worn as these could not be washed in the bush and when they were washed back at the base they tended to shrink. So the underwear and socks were put aside for the rare times when we went on leave.

While in Vietnam there was a constant tussle between the gunners and the soldiers holding rank over the wearing of shirts. The army wanted all soldiers to wear a long sleeve shirt at all times. This was to help combat mosquitos bearing illnesses such as malaria and prevent skin cancer. However, when the gunners were away from base camp experiencing hot humid tropical weather with only two shirts which could not be washed for weeks at a time the gunners preferred to be shirtless. The junior officers and NCOs were aware of the situation and only enforced the rule strictly when high ranking officers were visiting.

In January, before we had arrived in the country the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Regulars had a co-ordinated series of major threatening attacks on Saigon, provincial capitals and major towns right across the country during the festivities of the Chinese New Year. These celebrations were called Tet. It is commonly called the Tet Offensive. It was now about late April and there were rumours of a likely mini Tet offensive. It appears that the North Vietnamese were so impressed by the reports in the western media of the Tet Offensive that they thought it was good policy to do it again.

We were told to prepare to be transported by Chinooks to establish a Fire Support Base inside Bien Hoa Province supposedly to intercept retreating and depleted North Vietnamese forces after they had attacked Saigon. Bien Hoa Province was a

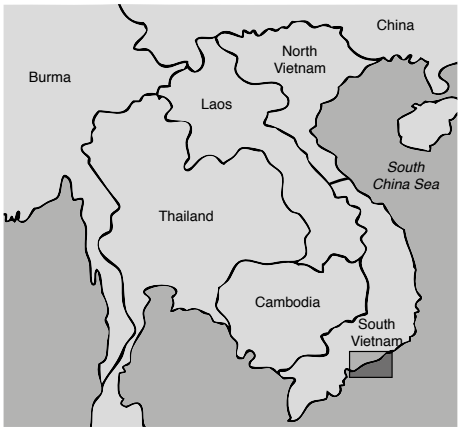
neighbouring province but as it was north of Saigon and because it was between it and the Cambodian border it was considered more dangerous. Leaving our province of Phuoc Tuy and going into combat with possible North Vietnamese regular troops heightened our expectations and readiness. This was going to be very different from being in Phuoc Tuy where we were supporting the infantry in setting up ambush positions and operating clearing patrols against mainly Viet Cong guerrilla forces.

The day before the move to Bien Hoa we would have been able to prepare all the equipment needed and bundled it ready for the helicopters to lift. In our case we needed to stack all of the materials to construct the Command Post, metal boxes with our surveying and signalling equipment and loads of empty sand bags. The gun crews needed their ammunition, tarpaulin and barbed wire.

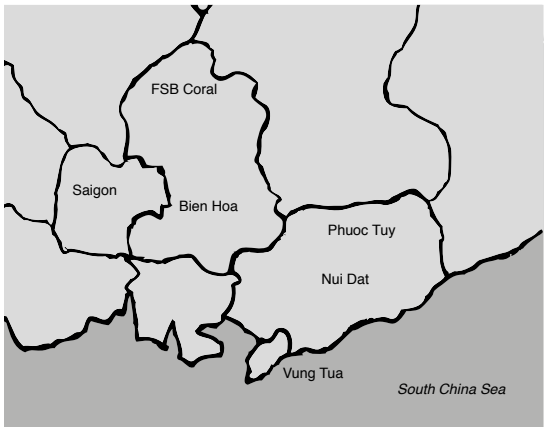
On the day of the move we woke before dawn and walked carefully along the track in the dark to the mess to have breakfast. After eating we assembled with our rifles and personal packs ready to move. Assembled in the dark and hearing the approaching helicopters provided an eerie atmosphere. The Chinooks arrived just as the sun was about to rise.

Arriving in Bien Hoa Province we set up our base with the necessary defences in place and continued with our normal routine. In fact Fire Support Base Harrison, as it was called was quite uneventful. The only incident I can remember concerned the brewing of tea. We were trying to boil some water to make tea with a kerosene cooker called a choofer and I placed my foot near it. Trevor in his enthusiasm to dunk the tea bags pushed a little hard, the saucepan tipped and the hot water went over my foot. I yelled of course, did a little dance and removed my shoe.

Two lieutenants had a discussion about sending me back to Nui Dat for better medical treatment and to stop possible infection. It was determined that I was to stay. This meant that I was not going to miss out on the surprises that the next Fire Support Base had to offer. The next Fire Support Base was named Coral, a name that will live with me and those who were there for the rest of our lives.



North and South Vietnam



Enlarged Section of South Vietnam

We had been at FSB Harrison for a little more than a week with very little activity when it was decided to move us further into the Province searching for those tired, depleted withdrawing North Vietnamese regulars. This time the whole Australian Task Force was going to be brought to the area.

Our coming operation was to be a big show as it included the Australian Task Force, not just 1RAR and 102 Battery. It was planned to have one large Fire Support Base incorporating the Kiwi 161 Battery, some mortars from 1RAR and our 102 Battery. Later on the American A Battery with its mobile 155mm guns was going to join us.

It was planned that1RAR would patrol in an Area of Operations called Bondi. At the same time 3RAR were to patrol in a separate AO called Newport. These two Areas of Operations were adjacent to form an overall AO Surfers. Originally the plan was to have all of the artillery at the one place protected by D Company 3RAR but this did not happen. Unplanned events and unexplained poor decisions caused mayhem on the first day of our move which almost resulted in catastrophic results for our battery.

On moving day we rose at dawn to prepare for the move. The situation was new to us as in the past we had always moved from Nui Dat and established a new Fire Support Base. On this occasion we were dismantling one FSB and moving to establish another FSB on the same day. We never had to dismantle one base and build another in the same day. It was going to be a challenge. We knew the day was going to be exhausting with no rest. Sandbags had to be slashed, sleeping holes filled in, the command post dismantled, the hole filled in and the materials stacked ready to be moved and the barbed wire rolled up to be used again.

We were ready to move but no Chinooks arrived. The Chinooks belonged to the Americans so they had first priority. The American Big Red One Division was engaged in combat with a strong enemy force and needed the use of the helicopters. This worrisome contact with the enemy was not far from where we were going.

As a result of the delay we established a temporary command post with a tent, table and chairs while the gun crews had to remain operational. This meant that the guns, ammunition and equipment could not be packed in case we were attacked or received a fire mission. We were very exposed. Our Command Post and shell scrapes had been filled in and the protective barbed wire rolled up ready for the move. Our position was very vulnerable from an enemy attack. In addition the day was passing by and we could do nothing about it. It was not a pleasant situation. So we waited knowing that when we eventually arrived at Coral there was a whole day's work to be done. This was a bad beginning for the planned move.

ACTION AT CORAL IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Later in the day the battery sent a recce patrol of about five soldiers led by our, Gun Position Officer, Lieutenant Ian Ahearn and including a battery surveyor, Jeff Dwyer. They were flown to our next proposed Fire Support Base. On arrival they found that the site was covered with small trees and was protected by American infantry. So far everything was going to plan. Our recce party planned to meet another recce patrol from Headquarter Battery. Headquarter Battery did not have any guns as its role was to support the gun batteries by monitoring and checking our activities and providing clearances to fire. As the patrol from Headquarter Battery was led by a more senior officer, a major, our patrol had to find them to receive instructions.

Our patrol was dropped at the place where Coral was to be established but it could not locate the other patrol from HQ Battery. The Americans who had secured the site told our patrol that the other Australians for some unknown reason had walked away from the site. It seems that the Headquarter patrol had incorrectly thought that they were placed in the wrong position. This was unlikely though as the Americans had better knowledge of the area and they would have thought they were protecting the correct spot.

After some radio calls and confusion it was determined that the major had wandered off without informing anyone of what he was doing. Coloured smoke had to be thrown and a trek of over one and a half kilometre through unknown territory before our patrol caught the wandering HQ Battery patrol. These artillerymen were unfamiliar with patrolling through enemy territory. They would have been trying to remember and apply the training they received at Canungra in the jungle training course. Because they were in a hurry they were walking on roads. Australians knew that it was safer keeping off roads and away from tracks. However in this case time was passing quickly so they had to travel as fast as possible. So they had no choice but to stay on the road. At one spot on this trek they saw under rubber trees over a hundred freshly dug holes. These holes were typical of those the enemy used to get below the surface when under attack. This was another indicator that the enemy were close by and in strength. Unknowingly the patrol was heading towards a North Vietnamese Divisional Headquarters.

Later, we were told that the original proposed FSB site was selected by our two battalion commanders the day earlier. Apparently the American helicopter pilot knew the area to be very hostile and refused to fly below a certain altitude. As a result the battalion commanders were unable to make a thorough assessment. The refusal of the pilot to go lower should have been a strong indicator to the battalion commanders that they were in an area where the enemy were active and had to be respected.

Because the American Forces had been very active in Bien Hoa Province for many years one would have thought that they would have had a selection of clearly marked suitable sites for a Fire Support Base. It just seems ridiculous that late in the first day Australian soldiers were running around the country side trying to find the planned site of FSB Coral and the operation was only beginning to unfold.

To make things worse the Kiwi 161 Battery landed before schedule at the original site and 3RAR were given the job of clearing trees to make the site more suitable. With the Kiwi battery settled in one spot and the Australian recce patrol away and looking for a different site there was no way the two batteries could be together. Things were not going to plan. Was this poor planning or poor execution of a plan?

The combined recce patrols lead by the major who was still searching for the wrong grid reference found a site which the major recommended as the site for FSB Coral. Then the members of the artillery patrol had to secure the site for the incoming helicopters, soldiers and guns. Usually a company of infantry secured and guarded a landing zone but in this case in hostile territory this small band of artillery men had the responsibility of this huge task. It was huge in that artillerymen are not expected to secure and maintain security over a whole FSB while at the same time building and establishing the site.

Now the Kiwi 161 Battery was camped at the original Coral site and 102 Battery was landing at the new Coral site. How could this happen?

The infantry company that was assigned to protect both the batteries was unable to be in two locations at the same time. As a result the company commander decided not to provide any protection for 102 Battery. What a ridiculous decision! The Commanding Officer's decision on where to locate the company of infantry allocated to defend the artillery was very difficult to understand. Again, was this poor planning or poor execution of a plan?

It was not until late afternoon that the first Chinook bringing the guns of 102 Battery arrived. There were not many helicopters available so the shuttle service took a considerable length of time. As I said before, normally we would arrive at a FSB fresh and just after dawn. This time we were tired from dismantling the other FSB and sitting in the hot sun for hours. Now we had to do a day's work preparing the new FSB. This could not be done with the limited amount of sunlight available. The challenge for the battery was going to prove impossible.

My immediate task together with others who worked in the Command Post was to construct it as already mentioned. After about an hour of digging I was told to go with John Lynch, a signaller to man a machine gun position in front of where Foxtrot Gun was situated. Because artillery had secured the site and no one had relieved us, we had to continue with providing protection. Meanwhile the companies of 1RAR were landing at our position and walking away to distant ambush locations.

How nice it would have been for one of the infantry companies to take on the security role freeing us to do the necessary work that had to be done by the battery in the preparation of defences. One would think that an officer with some authority would have told one of these infantry companies to stay and protect the Fire Support Base.

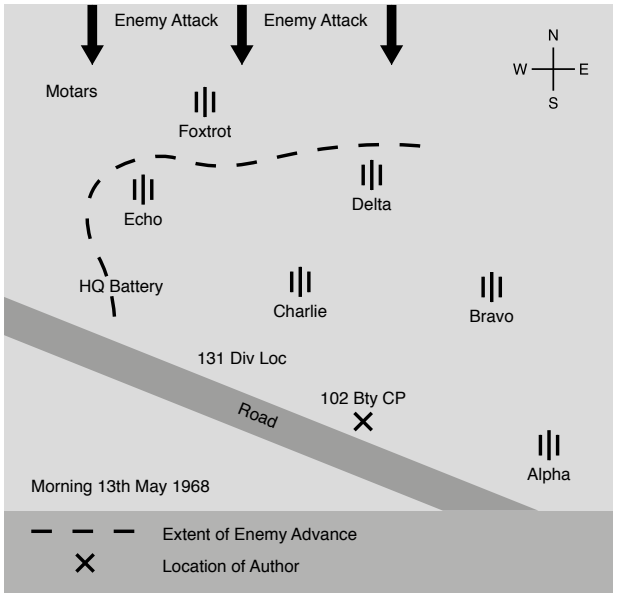
Lying out in front of the Foxtrot Gun position John and I manned the M60 looking into the bush for any indications of the enemy. Little did we know that the very spot we were lying on was going to be a scene of many dead bodies in twelve hours' time, for this was the spot where the enemy were going to mount their early morning attack.

To plan their attack they would have had recce patrols observing our movements and recording our defences. It is very likely that while John and I were lying there we would have been watched and our position recorded. The enemy recce patrols would have noted that our guns were facing south as that was the direction we were told they would be coming. Thus an attack from the north would have been to their advantage as the gunners would have difficulty turning the guns while under sustained fire from attacking troops.

After being relieved John and I went back to complete the construction of the command post by lifting the heavy timber beams for the roof and filling and placing the many sandbags in position. When lifting one of the heavy beams I lifted at the wrong time and felt a sharp pain in the lumber region of my back. The pain persisted. There was no one to complain to so I just had to soldier on the best I could. By the time we had completed the command post the sun had set and it was getting too dark to begin anything else.

Three of the battery surveyors, Jeff Dwyer, Peter Kiernan, Trevor Bryant and I selected a spot to sleep between the command post and a dirt road that ran along behind our position. We were so exhausted that we planned to sleep on top of the ground. However, our Battery Captain walked past and ordered us to dig a sleeping hole. He must have realised how exhausted we were as he told a couple of gunners from nearby Alpha gun to assist us. We dug one wide hole for the four of us to curl up and go to sleep.

At our FSB that night there were about one hundred and thirty soldiers, none of them trained to defend a position under a planned enemy attack. There were about twenty in the mortar section of 1RAR. Also there were about twenty from Headquarter Battery consisting of surveyors, radio operators and Regimental Police, and about ten trained radio operators and radar experts with 131 Divisional Locating Battery. Finally there would have been about eighty with 102 Battery including some plant operators and RAEME technicians who did repairs to guns and vehicles.



Fire Support Base Coral

One must ask how such a group of soldiers could have been left completely undefended when there had been a continual barrage of information all day that a strong and active enemy was near.

If I stood at my fox-hole near the road and faced north, to my immediate left along the

road were members of 131 Divisional Locating Battery. These men were trained to locate and determine the trajectory of enemy mortars and rockets and trace the flight back to where it was fired. Further along the road were the members of Headquarter Battery. Immediately in front of me was our command post with the battery fanned out across in front with Alpha on the right near the road and Foxtrot on the far left about fifty metres from the road. The even numbered guns were in the front and the odd numbered guns were to the rear. In front and to the left of Foxtrot were the mortars from 1RAR who arrived very late to the position. The whole contingent would have covered an area about the size of a football field.

Further to my right about three hundred metres away but not in our position was a group of Australians digging in for the night. At the time I did not know who they were but since have found out that they were a mixed group of Support Company and an anti-tank unit with the 1RAR battalion commander.

As we went to bed that night we knew that our usual defences were nowhere near finished. We had no barbed wire around the perimeter, the earth was not pushed up around Charlie, Bravo and Alpha guns and the machine gun positions out front were crude. At that stage we did not realise that there was no infantry company protecting our rear. In fact there were no machine guns set up across our rear at all.

Going to sleep was easy. As soon as our heads hit the ground we were asleep.

In the middle of the night we heard our guns firing a fire mission. It was a sound we had heard many times before so we rolled over and continued to sleep. What we did not know was that the fire mission was in response to a contact between an enemy patrol and D Company 1RAR. The enemy had fired RPG's into the branches above the heads of the Australians with devastating results. A number of Australians were killed. What we did not know was that the enemy patrol was part of a much larger group travelling south to attack our unsuspecting Fire Support Base.

At the end of the fire mission Lt Ian Ahearn asked permission to leave three of the guns, Delta, Echo and Foxtrot pointing to the north, a decision that was very crucial for the outcome of the oncoming conflict.

We were again woken by continuous sounds and explosions of war. This time it was a dangerous cocktail of armaments, rocket propelled grenades exploding and flying overhead, the sound of whistling incoming mortars and their detonation, machine guns continually firing and the sound of rifles shooting non-stop. This was close and serious. This was not a sound we had heard before. All our training was going to be tested. Soldiers were obviously fighting for their lives. We were a little disoriented and were trying to assess the situation.

We grabbed our rifles and the machine gun and crawled from our sleeping hole to a trench that was beside the edge of the road. We could tell by the direction of the tracer bullets, loud noises and rockets flying overhead that the attack was on the opposite side, the northern side, of our position. We were snuggling into the long grass looking out across the road wondering if we had any infantry across there guarding our rear. Alpha Gun's ammunition bay was ablaze so it was providing flickering light to improve our visibility as we strained our eyes looking across the road.

In the past we always had an infantry company protecting our rear. We had gone to bed after working all day with no idea of anything other than our own situation. It seemed that there were no infantry, so we deduced that we were on the rear perimeter of the position. There also appeared to be no machine gun posts. Thank God the enemy didn't attack on our side as without any protection we all would be dead and the Command Post overrun. Jeff Dwyer with his heart racing pointed his machine gun out towards the darkness looking for possible targets while the rest of us were still in a state of shock trying to assess the situation.

We were very mindful that the unnecessary firing of our weapons would not only give away our own position but also the extent of our base. So we decided only to fire when there was a definite target. Jeff decided to investigate what was happening on the other side of our position. He was away for about fifteen minutes and returned to report that there was an enemy infantry assault and that they had over-run the mortar position and taken Foxtrot Gun. He also said that Delta Gun was firing over open sights directly at the enemy. During his reconnaissance he got a nasty gash on his leg when he tripped over a star picket.

On his way back to our position one of our troops who was in the centre of our position must have panicked and started firing in Jeff's direction. The soldier was told firmly to stop firing and to control himself. The next day the soldier was sent back to Nui Dat and he never came on operations again.

Alpha gun's ammunition bay, which was only metres away, was still ablaze with flames reaching to the skies. It must have been hit by one of the early salvos. In the bay were over two hundred high explosive, illuminating and splintex 105 mm rounds, charge bags, with cardboard cylinders around many of the rounds, cans of petrol, all covered with a thick weather proofed tarpaulin making a very flammable mixture. Trevor ran over with some others to try to extinguish the flames. However without fire fighting equipment the task was useless.

Nobody knew, including our officers, whether the rounds experiencing such intense heat would explode or not. Some of the contents especially the drum of petrol could explode at any moment. So we had to make a decision on whether to stay or move away. We decided to stay as we were on the boundary of our position and that we were the last line of defence on this side of the Command Post. So we kept snuggling into the long grass in the ditch just hoping that the ammunition would not detonate.

On the other side where the enemy were attacking, the Battery had placed two M60 machine gun posts each manned by two gunners. Both crews heard the chattering of the enemy just before they saw an extended line of the enemy stand up in the long grass and charge with their guns blazing. Both positions fired a burst from their machine guns before they both jammed and both crews ran back to the relative safety of their guns. In running back Gunner Grimes was shot in the hand which meant the loss of a finger and the dropping of the M60. It was fortunate that the machine guns did jam as the superior enemy force would have overwhelmed them and by withdrawing they gave the gun crews a cleared area in which to fire.

The advancing enemy went rapidly through the Foxtrot Gun position and the mortar

position shooting into all the sleeping holes and hutchies. The only mortar men to survive were those who pretended to be dead or those who had withdrawn back towards the artillery guns.

Greg Ayson whose personal weapon was the M60 machine gun now was without a firearm as his M60 had been dropped in the area where the enemy now had control. He hung on tightly to the only weapon available to him, his machete. It must have been a very frightening time for him as the enemy were only metres in front blazing away with their AK47s. He was very relieved when it was decided to take Gunner Grimes to the aid station and his SLR became available for Greg. By the time the Foxtrot Gun crew got themselves organised the charging enemy were upon them so their Gun Sergeant ordered them to fall back to the Echo Gun position.

As the gun for the artillery was our standard the gunners were determined to retrieve the lost Foxtrot Gun. Some wanted to retake it straight away but others thought that they should wait for a more opportune moment. It was decided to aim Echo Gun straight at Foxtrot and planned to fire directly at it if the enemy tried to operate the gun. What they didn't know at the time was that a member of the gun crew had removed the firing pin and had it in his pocket. This meant that the enemy were unable to fire the captured gun at the Australians. In the meantime the defenders directed a lot of small arms fire and grenades at the position to make life unpleasant for the enemy near Foxtrot Gun.

Meanwhile, Bravo's Gun position had been hit in the initial barrage by a salvo of rocket propelled grenades. It had destroyed one of the pneumatic tyres on the gun which made it almost impossible to move. One of the crew, Gunner Nichols, sustained serious injury to the side of his face. Bombardier Geoff Grimish crawled across the ground under a stream of enemy tracer bullets with the injured gunner to the Command Post to seek medical attention.

Fortunately after the earlier fire mission the crew of Delta Gun sat down to have a brew of coffee. So when the attack commenced the Delta Gun crew picked up their small arms and began defending their position straight away. What a lucky thing for the rest of us defenders. With their small arms and machine gun fire they were able to hold off the assailants until they gained permission to fire the M2A2.

Taking care not to fire into the mortar position the Delta Gun crew fired over eighty rounds by line of sight. What a feat, they would have had two crew members hiding behind the shield with one adjusting the elevation and the other the direction. Another crew member would have had to stand up to load the round into the breach. Then there would have been someone giving directions such as more to the left, down a bit that's it, fire. While they were firing there would have been incoming bullets, rockets and mortars whizzing around them and the enemy only metres in front.

The most devastating anti-personnel round was the splintex. It was like a shot gun firing thousands of little darts. Because we had not fired these regularly the fuse setting on the first round was not correct and it exploded a couple of hundred metres away. Someone out the front would have received a hell of a surprise. The fuse on the next round was set correctly and exploded immediately on leaving the barrel. Ray Darragh the bombardier on Delta Gun told me that in one instance he was telling a soldier to

get down as they were going to fire. The person kept ignoring his request and then he realised that the soldier was an enemy soldier and they fired the gun. The enemy soldier was there no more.

Later dead enemy soldiers were to be found within metres of Delta Gun. Most of the rounds fired were high explosive but they fired anything they could place in the breach. On one occasion an illumination round with no fuse setting mistakenly went rocketing towards the enemy.

The enemy's advance had taken Foxtrot Gun and most of the mortar position but sustained fire from the reinforced gunners at Echo Gun had stopped their advance. The attackers could not go to their left as Delta Gun firing over open sights was getting the better of them. So they moved down their right hand flank. This is where the men of Headquarter Battery with bombardier Andy Forsdike were holding the perimeter. The fighting was close, fierce and deadly. The enemy had managed to get around behind their machine gun post so in the confusion and darkness it was difficult to recognise friend from foe.

The conflict here reminds me of a movie called Zulu starring Michael Caine which was based on a true event in the Zulu War in 1879. In this film a motley lot of orderlies, medics, guards, engineers and walking wounded defended a hospital at Rorke's Drift in South Africa against the best warriors the Zulu nation had to offer. Here at Coral this motley lot of radio operators, surveyors, regimental police and clerks was defending the perimeter against the best the NVA could offer. In both instances the defenders held out but at a great cost. It is in situations like this that the efforts of a small group can be easily overlooked. If the enemy had been able to get through these limited defences then there would have been catastrophic consequences for the rest of the defenders.

In a Department of Veterans' Affairs magazine an article quoted Andy Forsdike as saying 'Ammo was low, no grenades, the VC were all around us, out of the 7 men around the M60, I had lost one dead and one wounded, there was nothing I could do.' Things may have seemed hopeless but this little band held on to win the day.

I spoke to some former members of Headquarter Battery at the 40th anniversary celebrations. They said that there was a ditch that went on an angle across the front of their position which the enemy used for protection while crawling closer to the Australian defenders. It was probably dug to channel water away from the road. One of these men positioned himself so that he could see into part of the ditch. He calmly sat aiming at the ditch waiting for a target and managed to shoot two of the attackers at very close range.

The remaining mortar men were now in a deadly desperate situation. Their lieutenant was able to call out to our officer and request that the artillery direct fire straight into their position. These sorts of requests are only made when the defenders think that they will all be killed and their only hope is for the request to be granted. It is a request only made in desperate situations. Echo Gun was the only gun able to fulfil the request. It was behind and to the left of Foxtrot Gun and the mortar position was straight in front of them. I guess prayers were said and calls were made for the Australians in front of the gun to get below the surface. Boom. Echo Gun fired the splintex right on target.

At an address years later I heard Lt Ahearn say that 'On the firing of splintex by Echo Gun all movement ceased over the target'. Echo Gun then continued to fire more rounds to make sure that the mortar men were safe. Our lieutenant must have been relieved to hear after the firing the grateful call from the lieutenant with the mortars to say that they were safe and that the splintex had done an excellent job.

Back at my position on the perimeter, the flames from Alpha Gun's ammunition-bay fire were still roaring and we were looking across the road for possible targets. We were told later that the burning ammunition bay provided a clear marker to use in directing air support. When the American Gunships arrived I felt like cheering. They came out of the sky to the rescue with guns blazing just like the cavalry in the Western movies. Spooky a slow moving converted DC3 aeroplane with lots of fire power was pouring out tracer bullets like a cascading waterfall. In the distance I saw anti-aircraft fire directed at the aircraft. This was quickly followed by a dive bomber diving at the gun emplacement and dropping a bomb which created a carpet of white fog over the trees. The dive bomber must have been flying around waiting to respond to any enemy anti-aircraft fire. The anti-aircraft gun did not fire again.

It was a time when individuals did what they thought was right for the group. We had not had any training on how to withstand a planned co-ordinated attack with highly trained assault troops. The four RAEME guys led by Sgt Kel Ferris who repaired and maintained our cars and guns were in their pits doing their bit. One of these was craftsman Russell Ruygrok a soldier who had joined the army as an apprentice car mechanic and at this moment he was more worried about his life than the state of his vehicles. I became good friends with Russell when I settled down years later in his home town of Maitland. We attend a gym course run by the Department of Veterans' Affairs and when we see each other there is an instant rapport. Not much is said but both know that there is a bond of 'We were there'.

The two unfortunate unknown sappers who were given the job as bulldozer drivers at Coral must have been thinking that life could not get more complicated. They would have been near their bulldozer seeing and hearing all the rounds striking it and causing damage and wondering if it would operate in the morning.

Gunners were crawling with their rifles over their shoulders hugging the ground to get below the enemy tracer bullets to drag more rounds to Delta Gun.

Then the light began to improve, the sounds of war lessened and the enemy began to withdraw. As they withdrew a fire mission was called to fire on possible assembly points or tracks the enemy might use. The fire near Alpha Gun had decreased in intensity and the rounds now seemed unlikely to explode so the crew were able to turn their gun and join Charlie, Delta and Echo in the fire mission. It took a little more time but the crew of Bravo gun managed to turn the heavy gun with its damaged tyre to join in with the others. Our Battery Commander who was at another site said how happy and relieved he was to hear the guns firing indicating that the battery was operational. He would have seen at a distance the fierce battle the battery was fighting and he would have been very fearful of the outcome.

As the enemy departed a handful of gunners were assembled to do a sweep in front of

the position. For this task some of the gunners from Foxtrot were chosen so that they could reclaim their gun. During the sweep there was some shooting as there were a few of the enemy who were too injured to escape but were still able to fire a weapon. The clearing patrol members came through unscathed and were delighted to welcome Foxtrot gun back to the battery.

In the gun crew's area there was evidence that the enemy had rummaged through and pilfered their personal belongings. It seemed strange that such highly trained troops should get distracted and revert to such behaviour. If they had kept focussed on their task the final outcome may have been different.

Meanwhile, Iroquois helicopters coming to ferry the nine dead and other casualties landed on the road right near where we were positioned. It was awful seeing to see the seriously wounded and dead lying on stretchers waiting in a line. Our battery was particularly lucky in that we only had two walking wounded, gunners Mick Grimes and Steve Nichols.

Headquarter Battery was not as lucky with two dead and many more wounded. Among the wounded was Mal Hundt a popular guy from Headquarter Battery. He had numerous gunshot wounds, some from the enemy and some unfortunately from Australians and we were not expecting him to survive. As he was experiencing trauma Trevor offered him his blanket. It was a very good act as the nights did get cool and Trevor would not be able to get another blanket until he returned to base camp many weeks later. Mal did survive and every Anzac Day in Sydney when Trevor sees Mal he asks him about returning the blanket and they just smile at one another.

Another HQ Battery casualty was Gunner Vic Page who had sustained wounds which meant that he would never walk again.

Among the dead was Errol Bailey like myself a school teacher who was called up for National Service. He had married his sweetheart from Teachers' College and she was bearing their child. In my work years later I worked at Kurri Kurri High School and met his wife. It is times like that you are not sure what to say.

Another of the dead was Corporal Bob Hickey, whose wife was having nightmares about him being killed so her local minister contacted the padre to see what he could arrange. They had moved Bob from a rifle company to a mortar platoon which was considered a relatively safe placement. However this proved not to be the case.

There were two artillery men from Headquarter Battery gunners Ian Scott and Christopher Sawtell who had also fallen. They had only been in the country for a couple of weeks. Gunner Scott was only eighteen years old when his battery received the orders to go to Vietnam. He was going to be transferred because of his age to another regiment but he protested strongly against the transfer. On closer examination it was found that he turned nineteen just before the battery's embarkation. His mother says that she can remember his jubilation when he was allowed to go with the battery to Vietnam.

I decided to open and eat a can of baked beans. I am sure I was not hungry. It must

have been some response to the emotional event we had experienced. Sergeant Creek came over to the four of us and asked us to go out in front of the position and assist with the burial of the dead enemy. As we walked through our position we could see much evidence of the night's actions. All of the hutchies and tarpaulins were damaged and needed replacement as they were covered with tears and holes caused by the incoming small arms, mortars and rockets.

When we arrived at the front, there before us were over fifty dead North Vietnamese soldiers. I looked at the mutilated bodies and then at the beans and tipped the beans out. About forty metres away the bulldozer had scooped out a hole large enough to place and bury all of the bodies. I know I took part in the burial of the bodies as I remember the initial scene and the final filled in grave. However I cannot remember my participation in burying the bodies or other things that happened at that time as it has been blocked from my memory.

Trevor says, 'You and I were in the party that actually collected them from where they had fallen and carried/dragged them to the central point. I remember the various body parts (particularly the brain and spinal cord of one body which had the back of his head blown away) that we also collected. For many of them, you took one leg and I took the other and we dragged them along the ground on their backs or fronts. I think it's worth mentioning that you and I eventually put sandbags over our hands (in the absence of any gloves) to protect us from the feel of dead flesh and blood. Also is it worth mentioning that earlier we were part of the Clearing Patrol when Allan Goode shot the wounded armed NVA who suddenly sat up?' I know that sounds gruesome and those things are not usually mentioned. However, I feel that I have to try to explain the ordeal the defenders experienced that day.

No soldiers like to leave their dead behind. They want to give their own a fitting burial. So I would imagine that there would have been many more casualties than what was lying in front of us as indicated by the many drag marks through the long grass.

I observed that the enemy had equipment and clothing of a very high standard. These soldiers were highly trained, in excellent physical condition and well equipped. I did notice that under their greens they wore the black pyjamas. I guess this gave them the option if the situation arose to take off their greens and blend in with the local population.

After that I walked out further in front of the position. I was where I was twelve hours earlier with John Lynch manning a machine gun. There on the ground was a neat pile of about six live enemy mortar shells. Silly me picked one up. We were told not to pick things up in case they were booby trapped. However, I guess I was in some state of shock. It was interesting to note that the spot was no more than fifty metres in front of Foxtrot gun. They must have moved their mortars very close to our position so that our artillery and the cobra gunships would not get a clearance to fire on them. They obviously were very well trained and had the attack well planned.

I walked further out from our position and there in front of me was the end of a white cord on the ground which continued into the bushes. This was the cord the attackers had followed in the dark to their assembly point for the final attack. Beside the cord

were a couple of those square holes the enemy dug in case they needed to get below the ground. These holes would have been for the soldiers marshalling and giving instructions on where to line up for the assault. It was just like what we had done in our practice attack at Canungra in our Jungle Training Course. Again, this proved that they had a very high level of training. I then looked around and I was surprised at how far out I was and felt a little uncomfortable so I headed back to the safety of our lines.

The mortar men had gone through a terrible ordeal. Seven had been killed, some wounded with others suffering from the traumatic experience. They all would have faced the likelihood of being killed during the attack, and when reclaiming their area they would have seen the dead bodies of their mates. They also experienced the uncertainties of survival when Echo gun fired splintex directly into their position. When standing in front of a gun when it is fired the noise is so loud that the ears pain and the ear drum can be permanently damage. They would have felt the full force of the noise and the immediate sound of all the little deadly darts hitting everything around them. It would take a while, if ever, for them to recover so it was decided to send all the survivors back to Nui Dat and to replace them with fresh soldiers.

From their positions away from FSB Coral the rifle companies within the Area of Operation Bondi had a good view of the spectacle of the defence of FSB Coral. They would have seen the mass of green tracers coming from hundreds of the enemy's AK47s and machine guns. Also seen would have been the red tracer bullets in reply from the Australian M60s and armalite rifles. The RPGs flying through the sky and crash landing into the base would have also added to the spectacle. In addition was the sight of flames leaping from Alpha's ammunition bay as it burned and the flashes from the barrels of Delta and Echo guns as they fired directly into the attackers. They probably also heard the explosions and flashes as 161 battery's 105mm rounds firing in support hit the ground. Then there was the air display by Cobra Gunships and Spooky pouring out tracer bullets and the dive bomber delivering the finale to the anti-aircraft gun.

A good friend of mine in Maitland, Tony Mulquiney was in Alpha Company 3RAR and he said that they were not far away and had a good view of the proceedings. He also said that they were asked if they were able to go and assist the defenders at Coral. After thoughtful consideration they decided that it was too dangerous to respond to the request. The enemy knew their exact location and the risk of moving in the dark into unknown territory was too risky. They probably also would have been in danger of being mistakenly fired upon by the defenders.

Not all of 1RAR were able to watch in comfort the spectacle happening in front of them. One of our forward observers Captain Don Tait who was with Bravo Company 1RAR in an ambush position said that through that first night they were being constantly watched by the enemy and every time they made a noise or made a movement the enemy fired a burst of shot in their direction. Just enough to say, stay where you are and don't move. He thought that on this occasion the enemy were very skilled at keeping the Australians quiet.

A friend of mine, Bob Foot, was also with Bravo Company. He said they were lying on the ground in an ambush position and the enemy were only about ten metres away and firing intermittently. When the North Vietnamese fired their mortars at them Bob could

hear the primary sound as the mortar went into the barrel, then the whistle of the mortar in flight and then the silence before it hit and exploded. The enemy mortars must have been very close and Bob was wishing he was in a fox-hole.

The Support Company with the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Phillip Bennett had the best view. They were only a few hundred metres away with a clear view of the action. They would have been frustrated in that even though they had a lot of fire power they could not provide any meaningful support. The battery and mortars were between them and the enemy targets. In addition the enemy were inside our position within seconds or on the far western side. The weapons of the Support Company were virtually nullified. However they probably would have been able to take some opportune shots at possible targets. The enemy were very careful in planning the direction of the attack.

After my wander out in the front of the position I went back to dig a new sleeping hole. The previous night four of us had slept in a common hole. Now we had to dig a personal hole. Usually we dug two holes side by side which could be covered by joining two hutchies together forming an A frame with two star pickets. Peter Kiernan and I decided to take advantage of the ditch beside the road and dig there.

After experiencing the first night at Coral our sleeping holes improved in design. We were now incorporating a protective covering over our sleeping holes to make us safer from the mortars and rockets. Fortunately we had ammunition boxes which could be dismantled and used as a base to hold the covering sandbags. We left a small opening at one end so that we could slide into the hole.

Reports came through that we had been attacked by at least a battalion of North Vietnamese regular troops plus other supporting elements. My guess is that their battalion would no longer be functional and it would take some time to recover and rebuild it to operational strength.

I believe it was our junior officers and sergeants making crucial decisions and providing decisive leadership which saved many lives and our ultimate success.

When we received the fire mission very early in the morning to fire towards the north we did not know that we were firing on North Vietnamese forces who were on their way to attack us. Before that fire mission the guns were turned south as that was the direction we had been told the enemy would come. That fire mission very early in the morning was very fortunate for us. The members of Delta Company 1RAR who sprung the ambush gave us a warning that there was enemy activity close to our north and that the enemy were moving towards us. However there was no indication that this was a large force with the intent of taking the Fire Support Base.

After the fire mission Lt Ian Ahearn requested and gained approval for guns Delta, Echo and Foxtrot to stay pointed to the north. When the attack did come these guns were ready and pointed at the advancing enemy. Had they been pointed to the south the whole gun crew would have been required to lift the heavy gun to turn it. While they were doing that they would have stood and exposed themselves to enemy fire. In addition while they were turning the gun they would not have been able to use their small arms to fire on the advancing enemy.

When we arrived at Coral the bulldozer drivers did not have enough time to push protective earth around all the guns. Again the right decision was made as the three guns selected to have the protective earth were Delta, Echo and Foxtrot, these three guns were the ones directly involved in the defence of Coral. The earthen mounds not only meant protection for those in the gun positions but also for the whole base. If the enemy fired straight ahead it would hit the mound so they had to aim at a target above the mound. If the shot missed the target the bullet went harmlessly into the sky. If the mound was not there the enemy could aim lower and if the shot missed the bullet was likely to hit something or someone at the rear.

Had our officers decided to make the mounds instead around Alpha, Bravo and Charlie Guns the mounds would not have been as effective.

Sergeant Max Franklin's decision to withdraw his crew to Echo gun probably saved lives. When the attack came his crew were in their foxholes probably asleep so by the time they got themselves orientated and organised the enemy were upon them. In addition the action of either the gun sergeant or Bombadier Tony King to take the firing pin ensured that the enemy could not use the gun. I have heard two differing stories on who took the firing pin so I had to mention both. Well done boys, quick thinking.

Lt Matt Cleland was the Section Commander responsible for the front three guns. When Foxtrot gun was lost he felt that it was his responsibility to reclaim it. If he had taken direct action it would have meant a charge across open ground. His decision to wait for a more opportune time proved to be the correct one.

In the Command Post was Lt Bob Lowry taking responsibility for the busy and important radio network communicating with all the other relevant units and reporting on the happenings at Coral. This information would have been of particular interest in guiding the fire from the artillery, gunships and Spooky. He also would have been responsible for getting permission to fire the splintex over open sights. It is quite scary to be enclosed in a confined space not knowing what precisely is happening outside and with the sounds of war getting closer and closer.

When the attack began, the crew of Delta gun were sitting having a brew. I don't know whose decision that was but it must have been sanctioned by Sergeant Stevens. It was a crucial decision as the crew had their rifles at the ready and started firing at the attackers straight away.

When the two machine guns in front of the position jammed the correct decision was made for the occupants to withdraw to the gun position. By withdrawing the other defenders now had a clear arc of fire with no chance of accidently shooting our own.

There were also elements of good fortune or luck which helped us. When Alpha gun's ammunition bay burst into flames no one was sure if it could explode. There were over two hundred various types of deadly rounds and drums of petrol. If it had exploded I would not be here, nor would half the battery.

We were also fortunate that the attack did not come from the south. Unknown to us there were no defensive machine gun positions placed in that direction. The officer

responsible for the defence of the base was not in our battery so I can only guess why the defences were inadequate. If the attack had come from the south again I would not be here and probably all of the battery would have been lost.

It appears that the attackers were unaware of the location of the mortars. Had they been aware they would have made arrangements to claim and take the prized weapons. The mortar men with their infantry training and their placement in front of the line of attackers would have thrown out the rhythm of the attack.

The stubborn defence by the motley members of Headquarter Battery also was a factor in the success of the base's defence. Their training did not include defensive tactics against a co-ordinated infantry attack. Headquarter battery personnel when they left Australia would not have been expecting to be positioned on the defensive perimeter of a Fire Support Base. Yet they performed extremely well.

History reports that in battles the victor sometimes wins against tough opposition because of quick intuitive decisions made in the heat of battle and unexpected good fortune. These factors definitely contributed to our success that night. The North Vietnamese were well trained, had an excellent plan and a great opportunity but things did not go their way. Thank God. On the other hand our forces had a plan which could not be implemented. For example our officers had no control over the availability of the Chinooks on the day of the move. The officers responsible seemed unable to adjust to the changing circumstances. Yet through excellent leadership from the lower ranks and a lot of luck we survived to tell the tale.

The fact that 102 Battery only sustained two relative minor wounds to soldiers seems hard to believe. With the amount of rockets and mortars fired into the position plus the wall of small arms fire the enemy would have thought that they had inflicted considerable damage upon the battery. They may even have thought that the battery would not be able to function.

I have been told that in the official history of the events of that night the recorders have for some reason not appreciated the actions of the defending one hundred and thirty soldiers. If the casualties had been higher the politicians would have initiated an inquiry. This inquiry would not have been kind to the people responsible for the chaos on days one and two at Coral. There did seem to be a desire by some in the Australian forces to misrepresent the events that occurred in the early hours of the 13 May 1968 at FSB Coral.

THE SECOND ATTACK

The top brass had now realised that we were up against a strong, well equipped, highly trained and aggressive enemy. Even though the battery had access to only limited information about the enemy it was something we had suspected much earlier. All the rifle companies of 1RAR were told to return to FSB Coral and form a protective ring around the base. The company commanders were in a dilemma on how to return. Australian troops did not like retracing their route back as the enemy were prone to set an ambush for their return. On the other hand they knew that a large enemy base was nearby and by going a different route they could walk into some serious trouble. All companies returned safely and began digging in on the perimeter.

As Peter and I were digging our sleeping hole we looked down the road and saw in the distance a long convoy of vehicles coming towards us. The men in the lead vehicle would have known they were approaching their journey's end as there was still a fine ribbon of smoke from Alpha Gun's ammunition bay rising into the sky indicating our position. The convoy was the rest of the Task Force and our Commander coming to join us at FSB Coral. There were lots of trucks carrying equipment, ammunition and supplies. There were the engineers, the Armoured Personnel Carriers and their crews, and a battery of American mobile 155mm guns. These guns looked like tanks as they moved on tracks but they were been made of lighter metal and had a longer barrel.

The American Battery was attached to the Australian forces and was based at Nui Dat. Because they were on the opposite side at Nui Dat we had not seen them before. They camped across the road where Peter and I were digging our fox holes. For the rest of our stay at FSB Coral we were going to enjoy our interaction with the Americans.

The day was fairly busy as the companies of 1RAR and the rest of the Task Force had to set up their positions and prepare for the job ahead. Throughout the day there were fire missions mainly in response to sighting enemy reconnaissance patrols. They were obviously very interested in what we were doing and probably planning another attack. I have heard that one of their tactics is to constantly probe the defences of a defending base looking for that weak spot.

We were told that night to have a fifty per cent stand to as we were expecting another attack. However, this time if we were attacked we would have a lot more protection than we had the previous time. However, there was extra concern for us, as the rifle companies did leave a gap in the defences directly in front of our position. The riflemen were planning to cover the gap if needed with extra machine gun fire.

That night the skies opened up and rain poured down continuously. I had heard that it had rained the night before but I guess I was so tired that I slept through it. The wet season was beginning. This was the first rain we had experienced since arriving two months ago. That night Peter and I had a problem as the convenient ditch near the road turned out to be an inconvenient water drain to clear water from the road. So we sat in the rain near our water filled holes with others getting soaking wet and trying to keep the working parts of the rifle and barrel out of the mud. So instead of the fifty percent stand to we had a hundred percent of us awake and on duty. At moments like this you don't complain, there is no one to complain to and things could be a lot worse.

Sitting in the rain was not as bad as it sounds for it was at these times soldiers talked

to one another about home, their loved ones, their ambitions, life's experiences both tragic and humorous, told good jokes and bad jokes. I must add that we were not on the perimeter of the base. Ironically these times of adversity when an unpleasant experience is being shared can turn out to be very enjoyable and provide a bonding experience.

The enemy must not have liked the rain as the expected attack did not eventuate. So after seeing our second sleeping holes fill with water Peter and I had to dig another replacement. The next day we selected another spot not far away to dig our third fox-hole in three days. We made sure that the next hole was not dug in a ditch or a drain. We also tried to get some rest to recuperate from the arduous hot days and lack of sleep. In fact some of the guys after the first night had difficulty sleeping at night so they tried to sleep during the day and stay awake and on guard at night. Some did this for the duration of their stay at FSB Coral.

On the third night at FSB Coral Trevor and I were rostered on as the Duty Surveyors for the night. The officer on duty was Warrant Officer Les Wheeler and the radio operator was bombardier Vince Dunn. Provided we could cope with no sleep, being on the night shift was a fairly easy task. As a rule all the companies stopped patrolling at night and either harboured in a defensive or ambush position. This night they were dug in around us at our FSB.

We did however have harassment and interdiction [H and Is] to fire. The battery would have received the co-ordinates of the target and the times to fire earlier in the day. The necessary elevation and bearing would have been calculated by surveyors on an earlier shift. All that was needed to fire was for the radio operator to gain permission to fire and for the Duty Officer to provide the necessary information to the guns before they fired.

All was going smoothly. Trevor went outside near the entrance to sit on a seat and have a much deserved rest. Meanwhile, the radio operator was transmitting and receiving messages over his two radios - one tuned to the battery frequency and the other to the regiment frequency - and the Duty Officer was giving instructions to the guns over the tannoy loud speaker system. In between time we chatted about the past events and things in general to pass the time away.

At some time very early in the morning I heard the whistling sound which I thought must be incoming mortars. I had not heard the sound so clearly before. My immediate concern was for Trevor who by this time had closed his eyes and was feeling very comfortable on his chair outside the entrance of the Command Post. I raced to the entrance and called out to him. He responded straight away, nearly knocking me over as he dived into the Command Post. He said later that when I called he looked up and saw an RPG hit a tree nearby. As he stumbled in to the relative safety of the CP the mortars landed. Several of them exploded on the sandbags surrounding the Command Post. We could hear the deafening sound and felt the shock waves blast through the tarpaulin. Where we sheltered at the entrance the mortars would have landed inches away but fortunately into the sand bags. The blast had blown holes in the tarpaulin covering the entrance so light from our fluorescent lighting was streaming out revealing our position to others.

At the same time a crescendo of small arms fire erupted. It sounded just like it had two nights earlier when we and the battery were fighting for our survival. Then the call came over the radio for a fire mission battery. Trevor and I jumped to our equipment to do the necessary calculations. The radio operator was providing us with the information and we were calculating as quickly as possible. Our officer exhibited great distress by shaking and falling to the floor with his hands over his head and sitting in a foetal position. He was saying, 'Don't take the fire mission. We are under mortar attack. We can't take it.' The three of us just ignored him but he continued and was getting more distressed. He kept telling the radio operator to tell the callers that we could not respond to the fire mission. It is interesting that in the American army the call for a fire mission is a request but in the Australian army it is an order. As we had no functioning officer we had to cope without him.

When we had done the calculations I picked up the tannoy, a loud speaker system to communicate with the gun crews, to call fire mission battery. This was the job of the Duty Officer but as he was out of action sitting on the ground and still showing great distress I thought that one of us should call for the fire mission. The tannoy did not work, it was silent. The tannoy system had been destroyed by the mortar explosions.

Then the radio operator said the he had lost the regimental network. It too had been destroyed. That meant that we could not gain permission to fire. However, the radio operator arranged for everyone to communicate on the battery network. It must have been chaotic for the operator but he managed. As the tannoy did not work I went to the entrance and yelled as loudly as I could 'Fire Mission Battery' but there was no response.

There we were in a Command Post with no functioning officer, no operating tannoy, not receiving the regimental net and at the same time under mortar and rocket attack and ground assault. We could not leave to seek help as this was our posting for the night. We were not taught how to deal with this situation at corps training or at jungle training at Canungra.

All we could do was rely on our training, initiative and luck. It was sounding awfully like the previous attack when about half our position was over-run. The sound of war was getting louder and seemed to be getting closer. The thoughts of enemy shooting through the entrance or a grenade being dropped through the hole left for the tannoy wires was very real. It is times like this that you think of your loved ones at home, say a little prayer and hope for the best. I was thinking that the Command Post hole could be our grave.

Things were about to improve and our training, initiative, and luck were about to swing into action and our prayers answered by events over the next few minutes.

First, our Gun Position Officer Lt Ian Ahearn slid into the Command Post. He told the Warrant Officer who was still in great distress on the ground to get to his feet and go and resupply ammunition for the guns. He then told me to cock my rifle and point it at the entrance and to fire if any enemy were there. So I lay on the back earthen table with my finger gently resting on the trigger and the barrel pointed at the entrance. It was a very unpleasant but necessary job as I had to make a very quick decision on whether a person moving the tarpaulin at the entrance was friend or foe.

The shrapnel-splattered tarpaulin began to move and in jumped Sgt Algie Elgar from Charlie Gun. I did not fire, oh that was close. He said Charlie Gun was ready for instructions on the fire mission. This was a big breakthrough as now we were communicating with the gun crews. To compensate for no tannoy a system of relaying instructions by calling loudly across the battery was quickly organised.

We then received a second fire mission from the desperate soldiers on the perimeter so we had three guns firing on one target and three on the other. While undergoing training in Australia we only fired one fire mission at a time. However, in Vietnam we had learnt by necessity to fire two fire missions at the one time if needed.

Then there was a call for a third fire mission, this time for illumination. My first reaction was that we could not calculate three fire missions simultaneously. However, Ian and Trevor made a few suggestions and we were calculating three fire missions with all the adjustments simultaneously without making errors. This was not text book stuff. It was survival for the FSB and providing support for those who were in desperate need.

When firing one fire mission there were built in checks to make sure procedures were as safe as possible. When firing two fire missions at the same time the risks of making a mistake increased. So as we were firing three fire missions simultaneously and the instructions were being called out across the position we had to be accurate and focussed on our tasks. For every adjustment to the firing by the forward observers the surveyors had to recalculate the bearing and the elevation. Then the necessary changes in elevation and bearings were being relayed by voice to the correct guns across the battery.

Then Bruce Hicks stumbled into the Command Post with blood streaming from his head. A call for Doc McKenzie was made so he could attend to the wound. The Command Post team did not miss a beat.

It was magic to see the battery fully operational while under such duress. The radio calls kept coming, ‘Fire mission battery, one gun adjust ,fire, five rounds fire for effect, fire, add two hundred metres, fire, four rounds fire for effect, fire, drop one hundred metres, fire’ and so on. This went on for hours and hours as the three fire missions and the information being relayed to the guns by gunners calling across the battery position. It all had to be done with no mistakes as the lives of our troops depended on our speed and accuracy.

On the surface the enemy green tracer bullets were pouring through the position. It seemed that the enemy were aware of the gap in the outer defences in front of our position as that is where they were directing their attack. One of the gunners, Laurie Bird, told me that Lt Ahearn deserved a commendation as he can still visualise Ian standing at the entrance to the Command Post calling out instructions to the guns with green tracer bullets flying all around him. In front the two companies of 1RAR were suffering casualties and the situation was precarious but they were managing to hold the attackers at bay. The attacking forces did manage to capture some of the front line trenches but their advance was stopped by intense and accurate fire by the 1RAR defenders.

Performing a fire mission while the base is under ground attack by assault troops with

incoming rockets and mortars is the stuff that makes nightmares for gunners. The gunners are very exposed as they have to operate in the open with no place to shelter.

As dawn was approaching and visibility improved, the sound of gun fire and explosions began to reduce indicating that the enemy were withdrawing. It was at this time that I was having difficulty concentrating so I asked the bombardier in charge of the surveyors to organise a relief for us. We had been on duty from sunset to sunrise and in most of that time under constant pressure and extreme concentration.

When Trevor and I exited the Command Post we could see the great amount of damage that had been done to the sandbags that were protecting us. We would have strolled back to our sleeping holes eager to discover what had happened to everyone else. The battery would have fired over a thousand rounds in the fire missions. Meanwhile the guns were still firing at likely targets of possible assembly points or withdrawal routes. Peter emerged from his hole and we noticed mortar holes only inches from his and my holes. If our sleeping holes were slightly to the left or the right our story would be very different.

There is a lot of luck involved in survival in these circumstances and it looked like luck was on our side. We were exhausted but the adrenalin kept us going as we had to find out what had happened to the others and assess the damages and begin the repairs and extra jobs which had to be done.

This time it was reported that the base had been attacked by two battalions of North Vietnamese with added support units. There were five Australians killed and thirty four enemy bodies lay out in front of the perimeter. Again drag marks indicated that their rear guard helped the enemy to drag many injured and dead away. Our battery was very lucky again as we only had two men injured. Gunner Bruce Hicks had some minor flesh wounds to the head and Sgt Rodney Robertson from Echo Gun had received serious damage to one eye. Both injuries were the result of the mortar barrage. While I was talking to Peter a front-end loader drove past from the perimeter out front with arms and legs sticking out of the bucket. I guess they were enemy dead being taken to a central place for burial.

That was the last ground assault we were to have at FSB Coral. At the time we did not know that of course so we had to stay alert and be prepared for the unexpected. However, we did come under mortar attack on several more occasions.

About a week after our last ground assault, 3RAR with mortars and tanks established a FSB at Balmoral. It too sustained two fierce ground assaults. On each of these occasions the enemy mortared our position hoping that we would not be able to assist the Australian defenders. Even though their mortar fire was accurate we were fortunate in that we did not sustain any casualties. As our battery was positioned on a road not far from an intersection the enemy would have been able to accurately locate our position on a map. This was demonstrated by the way they were able to hit the Command Post on the second attack.

Saying we came under mortar attack is so easy. To experience it was another story. We could hear the whistle of the rounds coming but we could not get behind anything

for safety. All you could do was listen for the incoming round make as small a target as possible and hope that the round fell harmlessly away from everybody.

When the mortars were in the sky our 131 Locating Battery which was nearby would have calculated the location of the enemy mortars. They did this by tracing the flight of the mortars with their radar. From the trajectory of the mortar they mathematically calculated the location from where the enemy mortars were fired. This location then was given as a fire mission to the artillery. Then our artillery and the nearby American 155mm guns responded. With the enemy mortars landing and our artillery firing the two types of explosions became very confusing.

Some of the American guns were only twenty metres from my fox hole. When the Americans fired their 155mm mobile guns they generally fired directly over my head as that was the direction to the enemy base. It was like an artillery duel similar to what was common in previous wars. Is that explosion incoming or is it outgoing? It was so confusing. The American gunners could operate in the tank-like cabin in their vehicles. The Australian gunners did not have the luxury of the same protection. They had to operate in the open and were vulnerable to incoming ordinance. As I was not needed to crew the guns and not on duty in the Command Post I was best staying put in my fox hole. This I was happy to do.

I have since read in a Department of Veterans' Affairs magazine that when constructing FSB Balmoral 3RAR had learnt from the mistakes made with the establishment of FSB Coral. They sent out an infantry patrol on foot to quietly secure the proposed site and to quickly build the defences. The tanks were also sent on a patrol from Coral to strengthen the defences at Balmoral. Then late in the day they flew in the mortars and the rest of the battalion.

Thus they had established a defended Fire Support Base with a whole battalion and tanks protecting their mortar men. Very different to what was the case on the first night at Coral when there was no support for the mortars and artillery. With the remainder of the battalion flying to the base late in the day the enemy did not have time to plan an attack on the first night.

My friend from Maitland, Bob Foot was in the platoon from 1RAR that escorted the tanks to the new Balmoral position. The Australian troops were trained to move silently and unnoticed through the terrain. There is no way tanks can move silently and unnoticed. With the motors roaring and the sound of the tanks crashing into trees they would have been heard a kilometre away. This was a new experience for the Australians.

On the journey they encountered another heavily defended enemy camp. They attacked the enemy with fire and movement. The tanks went forward while the infantry fired in support and then the infantry went forward while the tanks fired in support. The firing by the tanks cleared the vegetation exposing the enemy's firing positions so the infantry could see their targets more clearly. Fortunately they suffered only one casualty with one soldier shot in the foot and the patrol continued on its journey. Bob was very pleased to have the mission completed when they reached the relative safety of Balmoral.

Then they had to be returned by helicopter to FSB Coral. As he hopped onto the

helicopter Bob had difficulty getting aboard and the helicopter took off with him hanging on for grim life outside the machine. With his tiredness and the weight of his rifle, pack and the radio on his back holding on was extremely difficult. Luckily his platoon commander saw his plight and pulled him to safety by his belt. Mission accomplished they continued back to Coral.

Every day at Coral 1RAR patrols would leave the base searching for the enemy. Daily these patrols had contacts with the enemy and every day there seemed to be casualties. The members of these 1RAR patrols knew that each patrol was destined to make a contact and have a fire fight. There was high chance that one or more may not return alive. They had my admiration. They were courageous.

On 30 May Private Dale Abbott was killed. He was a conscript whose parents strongly opposed him going to Vietnam. Because he chose to disregard their demands they virtually disowned him. They wanted nothing to do with his body so it was not returned to Australia and instead buried in a war cemetery in Malaya. There is more to this tragic story which I will mention later.

The Australians had calculated the area where the enemy base was located and kept probing to find out more information about it. Successful tactics were developed by the infantry working in conjunction with the tanks and artillery. At first the infantry were wary of working with the tanks. However, after they saw that a shot of canister by the tanks not only killed the enemy but also blew away the undergrowth and exposed the enemy's bunkers their opinions changed. The tanks then drove on top of the bunkers and enemy trenches, swivelled their tracks and in the process crushed the construction and anyone inside.

As mentioned before the American mobile 155mm Battery had camped next to us with the narrow dirt road being the dividing line. They had not been there long before some Americans came out to the road and began passing a football to one another. This was like a teacher walking into a kindergarten room with a jar of lollies. It was a good way of getting attention. It was not long before Australians were out there learning how to throw the ball the American way. Rules for a game were devised- a cross between grid iron, rugby and touch football. Lots of fun was had. Matches were played on a regular basis. One of our soldiers was Ross Prowse who played rugby at a representative level for Gordon in Sydney. He wrote home about playing with the Americans and an article appeared in his local paper saying that Ross was keeping match fit by playing Grid Iron.

The American Battery had its own mobile kitchen. They ate cooked hot meals every day. The menu included bacon, eggs, steak, sausages, hot potatoes and vegetables. The selection of hot food on offer was amazing. In contrast when we were out on operations we received a hot meal about once a month. After the Americans were fed we joined the line with our plates and were given generous servings of the meal for the day. The kitchen staff seemed to consist of about six big Afro Americans. By the look of them they enjoyed eating lots of their own cooking. They did not say much and did not look welcoming but they always gave us plenty of food when we presented our plates.

Our regular rations came in a box about half the size of a shoe box and it had sufficient food for a day's worth of meals. It mainly consisted of small tins for three meals and

dessert. We were quite happy with these meals and there were few complaints as there was a variety of easily digestible food. As the weather was always hot we needed to drink a lot of fluids. When we drank a brew of either coffee or tea we drank it by the pint so for those who drank milk coffee there was a great demand for milk. Our ration packs had insufficient quantities of powdered milk to meet the demand so we were always in need of extra milk. I wrote home regularly requesting large tubes of condensed milk.

One interesting item was the packet of four cigarettes which were with the rations. Marlborough and Winfield were popular but Salem and Camel were generally discarded. As there were a number of soldiers who did not smoke the smokers were spoilt for choice.

The Australians dug holes to sleep in. The Americans had half round sheets of corrugated iron approximately a metre in diameter which they lapped together to form individual sleeping tunnels on top of the ground. Then they would cover the iron with sand bags and place some at each end. During the attack on our third night some had not completed the sand bagging and some soldiers were peppered on the arm from the exploding mortars. The soldiers had two days to complete the sand bagging. The job should have only taken about two hours. Had they dug a hole like us they would have been fine, however, now they were going to receive an extra medal, a purple heart. There seems to be some irony in this story.

One time I was walking past the two sappers who were responsible for driving the bulldozer. They were sitting under their hutchie sewing some cloth together. I asked them what they were doing. In reply they said that they were sewing yellow, red and blue cloth together to look like the North Vietnamese flag. Apparently they had a thriving business of selling the flags to gullible Americans and claiming that they were flags captured in battle.

At dawn and dusk the Australian units on the perimeter sent out clearing patrols to reclaim the area in front of their position and to check on any enemy activity. The Americans, however, had a different strategy. They would line up all their soldiers along the earthen wall and start firing into the scrub. One of the guns they used was a Bofors Gun, an automatic anti-aircraft gun, but now being employed as an anti-personnel weapon. The firing sounded like a fierce contact with the enemy, so at first it was difficult to relax. I suppose it was a good way of ensuring that everyone's weapons were in working order and that they had target practice. It did not though inform them of what was going on in front of their position. If the enemy were present the firing may have killed some but it would not have detected any enemy that may have been lying in a shell scrape.

Our toilet or thunder box was placed over a convenient hole which was about a metre in diameter and deep enough to reach the water table. The hole was probably a well but there was nothing to suggest that that was the case. It was a very dangerous deep hole to have within our position. However, it was covered with boards and the thunderbox placed on top. One day I was sitting on the box when an almighty explosion occurred. The explosion happened about fifty metres from me, just outside the American perimeter. A mushroom cloud lifted from the site and floated high into the sky. Without thinking I lifted my pants that were around my ankles with one hand to a height that

enabled me to run. With my other hand I grabbed my rifle and raced to the nearest foxhole. In I dived and as I was getting back my breath and getting my clothing sorted I was wondering what the heck was going on.

As I lay there with the rifle pointing towards the explosion and my eyes scanning for a target an announcement was made over the tannoy. We were told not to worry as the explosion was just the Americans disposing of some unwanted supplies and munitions. My athleticism did not go unnoticed and I am regularly reminded at reunions of the event.

Another event I can remember concerning the Americans happened on the first day of their arrival. An American Officer came over to our Command Post to speak to some of our officers. About twenty metres in front of our position a fire fight erupted. A couple of armoured personnel carriers were tearing through the long grass with their machine guns firing. We could hear the returning fire but could not see the enemy in the long grass. All of the Australians hit the ground with rifles in hand. This American Officer stood there just like John Wayne in the movies daring the enemy to fire at him. I think he thought he was brave, we thought he was stupid. In the contact a couple of the enemy were killed and one Australian was shot, I am not sure if he survived.

There was one day when the American Big Red One Division was involved in a large contact within the range of our guns. We were asked to support them and the fire missions lasted all day. We would have fired over a thousand rounds and as a result our ammunition was getting low. The Americans arranged for us to get resupplied and ammunition arrived at night by helicopter and we had to use vehicles with their headlights turned on to direct the helicopters and unpack the ammunition. Turning on headlights while in enemy territory is not recommended but resupply was necessary in case we received another big fire mission.

The next day an American general came to the battery to thank us for our quick and accurate firing. He also promised a supply of beer which we did not receive. It has been a running joke with the gunners claiming that our officers drank the supply.

My last comment about the Americans at FSB Coral concerns an occasion when I was on duty in the Command Post. An American observer in an aeroplane wanted to use the battery to fire on an enemy vehicle that was travelling along a track. In the Australian Army there are strict rules and procedures for talking on the radio. That obviously is not the case in the American Army. The call went something like this, ‘Hello there you Australians I want a fire mission battery with one gun adjust fire. I’m after this truck and I am going to give him a hell of a welcome. Let’s see if we can get him. Fire. That was good, he’s beginning to go faster, add two hundred metres. Ah that gave him a fright, he’s gone to hide under a tree left two hundred metres. That was good, two rounds fire for effect. You Aussies are darn good. They won’t be using that truck again.’ An Australian radio operator would not give you a running commentary. He would only give information relevant for the guns to hit the target.

I guess we had a lot to do with the Americans, firstly because their 155mm battery was right beside us and also because we were in Bien Hoa, a province in which the Americans had some large bases. We did enjoy their company, especially the football

games and the hot meals. Trevor kept in contact with one of the Battery Surveyors from the American battery, Denny Nevala from Michigan. A couple of years ago Denny came out here for Anzac Day and marched in Sydney and he and his wife socialised with us for the rest of the day. It was good to be able to reminisce and talk about what has happened since. He was very impressed by the march and said that they have nothing similar to Anzac Day in America.

We had arrived at FSB Coral on the 12 May and were flown out on the 6 June 1968. If the time at FSB Harrison is added to the time at Coral it is estimated that we had been away from Nui Dat for about five weeks or more. Our two pairs of unwashed greens were stinking and we were looking forward to wearing some clean greens, having a lovely cool shower, having a cold drink and experiencing a sound sleep in a soft bed.

The operation had come at a great cost as 1RAR had lost seventeen dead and in the artillery, HQ Battery lost two dead. In addition there were many suffering serious physical and psychological wounds. The losses for 1RAR can be put in perspective when it is realised that they only lost fifteen killed in action for the rest of their twelve month's tour. Had the casualty rate stayed the same for the tour as it was at Coral the battalion would have lost more than a hundred and fifty men.

No one of any rank came to speak to us about our efforts at Coral. We had our understanding lieutenants telling us that Australian artillery had never fought without infantry support and had never fired over open sights against an infantry attack since the First World War. If an Australian War Historian were to name an action where artillery without any infantry support confronted and beat off a superior attack he/she would be struggling to give an answer. It is a rare feat and deserving of some acknowledgement and recognition.

On the second attack the battery was operating three simultaneous fire missions without a tannoy, restricted radio contact while experiencing a ground assault and under intensive mortar and rocket attack. In none of our training was there a scenario anything like the one we had experienced at Coral. The higher ranked officers were silent on the subject.

We knew that we had done something special which was worthy of recognition but we were also concerned about the poor decisions made on the first day by our commanders.

We had been sent to Bien Hoa to intercept battle-weary retreating enemy who were not looking for a fight coming from the south. These troops were supposedly withdrawing from their attacks on Saigon. Instead we met fresh well-equipped North Vietnamese regulars coming from the north and who were itching for a fight. Was the Intelligence information supplied to the Australians wrong or did our leaders misinterpret the information they were given? Something went amiss. Was the operation ill-conceived because the intelligence was wrong or was the operation ill planned because our commanders interpreted the intelligence wrongly?

Artillery men are not expected to secure the Fire Support Base and maintain the security of it. Yet this is what happened at Coral. The primary role of the artillery is to support the

infantry. Why didn't one of the four rifle companies of 1RAR stay and provide protection instead of walking away? Why wasn't it fully understood that after our move to Coral the Artillery and Mortars did not have sufficient time to establish their routine defences? If the enemy had come from the south we had no machine guns placed to protect the position. We all would have been wiped out.

On the first day there were constant indications that the enemy were present and in force. For example the reason why the helicopters were late was that the American Red One Division was in a fierce contact not far from the Coral position. Also on the first day our reconnaissance patrol lead by Lt. Ahearn had seen at least a hundred freshly dug holes similar to those the enemy dug. There must have been many other indicators of a strong an active enemy which the leaders should have been aware of and which should have rung alarm bells.

My father's battalion was sent to Greece on an operation that was ill-conceived, ill-planned and poorly executed. I think the same can be said as the task to establish FSB Coral was ill-conceived, ill-planned and poorly executed. Day one would have been a complete disaster had not HQ Battery and 102 Battery been able to hold the line.

I found a definition of 'Duty of Care' which is very interesting. It begins with ' A duty of care is a duty to take reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions which you can reasonably foresee would be likely to injure persons who are so closely and directly affected by your acts or omissions …'

There were many acts and omissions by our senior offices on the first day at Coral which they could reasonably foresee and were likely to result in injury to people. The act of leaving artillery and mortar men with no protection in a known area of strong enemy activity is likely to lead to them being attacked and having casualties. The act of moving the mortars and artillery so late in the day could have been avoided and the omission to assign one of the eight infantry companies available to protect the base is glaringly obvious.

If I had been in 1RAR I would have been asking similar questions. Such as how come they also were expected to intercept weary, retreating enemy yet found themselves attacking well-entrenched enemy in an enormous bunker complex. Instead of waiting for the enemy in ambush positions 1RAR found themselves being used as assault troops attacking an entrenched enemy. They were doing the opposite to what our leaders had planned. Sending out company patrols to attack such a large complex was like throwing rice at a charging lion. It all must have seemed a waste of time, energy and men as the complex was only partly destroyed and would have been reoccupied after our departure. If our leaders were serious the bunker complex needed to be attacked by a much larger force such as a brigade. However, our proposed mission was to intercept battle weary troops withdrawing from Saigon. At what point was the mission changed?

As a result of the events at FSB Coral soldiers in the battery were becoming a little restless. There was no big incident but you could tell that troops were unsettled. There were soldiers who felt the euphoria and exhilaration from having participated and survived the action. There were also soldiers who were angry with individuals known

and unknown because of certain actions and events. In addition some felt flat and exhausted from the long ordeal and some had heightened anxiety for what the future held.

We also felt that the upper ranks of the army, the decision makers, had not done the right thing by us and we felt that we were entitled to some recognition and an explanation. Even though there was this discontent it did not affect our work effort and our ability to respond to fire missions. In fact the opposite happened. We were more alert and motivated as we knew that we would survive if we worked as a team and did our individual job and we knew that we were capable of adapting and innovating if necessary to get the job done. We felt like a team which had won the grand final and could do it again.

Emotions experienced by the soldiers in the battery would have been many and varied. Some of the emotions would have been similar to those manifested by people who have survived a natural disaster or experienced a monumental critical incident. In these situations people have seen friends being killed or injured, had their lives threatened and have lost personal property. Studies of the post impact phase of these events have been well documented. People exhibit a whole range of psychological and physiological symptoms. These include irritability, anger, denial, loss of appetite, self-blame, mood swings, withdrawal, nightmares, grief, depression, drinking too much alcohol and hyperactivity.

Ever since the evolution of Man, humans have had the same psychological and physiological responses after experiencing disasters and critical incidents. It happened to the soldiers on both sides at the Battle of Waterloo, at Stalingrad, at the Battle of the Somme, the Kokoda Track and even the accidental shooting of soldiers. I now have a greater understanding of these matters as later in life I became a District Guidance Officer. In this role I led a team of School Counsellors who helped create and implement Critical Incident Management Plans in schools.

Finally after some time the battery was assembled and Lt Col Jack Kelly the Commander of 12th Field Regiment came to address us with our Battery Commander Major Gavin Andrews. What did he do? By his actions the Lieutenant Colonel obviously knew nothing about morale boosting or the psychological effects of combat and had no desire to understand his troops. He berated us because soldiers in the last war went through more than what we had experienced. We had trouble deciphering what he was talking about and there was no opportunity to ask our questions. He had no intention of praising our efforts or seeking feedback on our experiences.

It seemed that the higher ranking officers had decided that the events on the first day and night at Coral were best not discussed. If the full details of the events on the first day at Coral were acknowledged by the army and known to the people in Australia it would have been very embarrassing and career threatening for some senior officers. It was very confusing because at Coral an American General praised us but our own leader criticised us. I think that it was the only time I saw Lt Col Jack Kelly during my tour in Vietnam.

It was at this time that a large flat rock appeared in front of our boozer. It was painted

with the red and blue of the Artillery Corps with a mushroom painted in the centre. From then on we called the boozer the Mushroom Club-the mushroom signifying the old chestnut. 'Kept in the dark and fed on bullshit.' I guess it was our way of expressing our dissatisfaction at our treatment.

I was told that after the attacks at Coral an officer was asked to write commendations for those soldiers who performed outstandingly. It is reported that he refused on the grounds that everyone just did what was expected of them. We were not trained to repel a ground assault by firing with open sights, we had never been without infantry support, we had never been without barbed wire protection, we had never fired three fire missions simultaneously, we had never operated without a tannoy, we had never operated fire missions with limited radio contact and we were never trained to fire the guns while undergoing a rocket and mortar barrage. We had overcome all of those difficulties, we had attained a level beyond what would reasonably be expected. How could he say that?

We all had experienced a very traumatic event which would have affected all of us in some way or another. Maybe he couldn't think straight and needed time to adjust. As a result I was told that another officer was given the task of writing the reports and Sergeant John Stephens on Delta Gun was awarded the Military Medal and Sergeant Algie Elgar received Mentioned in Dispatches.

After the events at Coral there were some transfers of soldiers. The officer who was reported to have refused to write any commendations, was transferred to a position at Nui Dat. One of the FOs, Captain Don Tait became the new Battery Captain. Warrant Officer Les Wheeler who had the panic attack in the Command Post was also transferred to a position at Nui Dat. Les Wheeler was a career soldier with much valuable knowledge and experience which was now lost to the battery. It was sad to see that he could not handle the pressure that was applied to him on that night in the Command Post. It was pressure that no other Warrant Officer had to experience for the whole of the Vietnam War. To be in a Command Post and hear the mortars whistling through the sky and then hit the structure would have been a severe test for many soldiers. From then on life was not kind to Les and he died a few years after we returned home. In addition the soldiers who received severe wounds were replaced.

As my father was in the First Battalion in the Second World War, I had warm thoughts about possibly being in the Forward Observer party with 1RAR. It would have been nice to say that we both served with the First Battalion. However, after seeing our unit in action at Coral there was no way that I would voluntarily leave 102 Field Battery. I felt that we had a good team and I wanted to stay.

On our return to our base at Nui Dat Gunners Jeff Dwyer and Trevor Bryant went to the Q store to get new ground sheets and a water bottle. The ground sheets were used to cover our holes in the bush and provide some shade from the sun and shelter from the rain. They had discarded these belongings because they were damaged by the enemy attacks at FSB Coral. The Staff Sergeant refused to issue them with new ground sheets and a water bottle because he needed proof that the items were damaged. As the Gunners had thrown away the items proof of damage was impossible.

While they were pleading their case to the Staff Sergeant, Lieutenant Ian Ahearn entered the room and overheard the discussion. He turned to the Staff Sergeant and said,' Staff Sergeant Bushby, these men are heroes. You give them what they need!' It is something Trevor has always remembered. Jeff carried the machine gun with Ian on the recce patrol that had to walk through kilometres of enemy held territory to establish FSB Coral and Trevor was in the Command Post with Ian on the night the Command Post was hit by enemy mortars. Ian understood the ordeal that these Gunners had experienced and that the rules had to be bent to cover these circumstances. The Staff Sergeant was someone who never went outside the perimeter of Nui Dat and was applying rules that were made for soldiers in peace time in Australia.

The events of FSB Coral became a continuing topic of discussion for the rest of our tour. Gunners who came as replacements must have tired of these continuous references. Now we realise that those who have experienced a critical incident or a traumatic event need to undergo a program to debrief. I guess our talking about the events was our way of debriefing.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Stan (front) with brother, Richard

Dad and Richard working

Stan with cousin Bobby and sister Maureen (Moore Park)

Stan, centre with cousins and brother

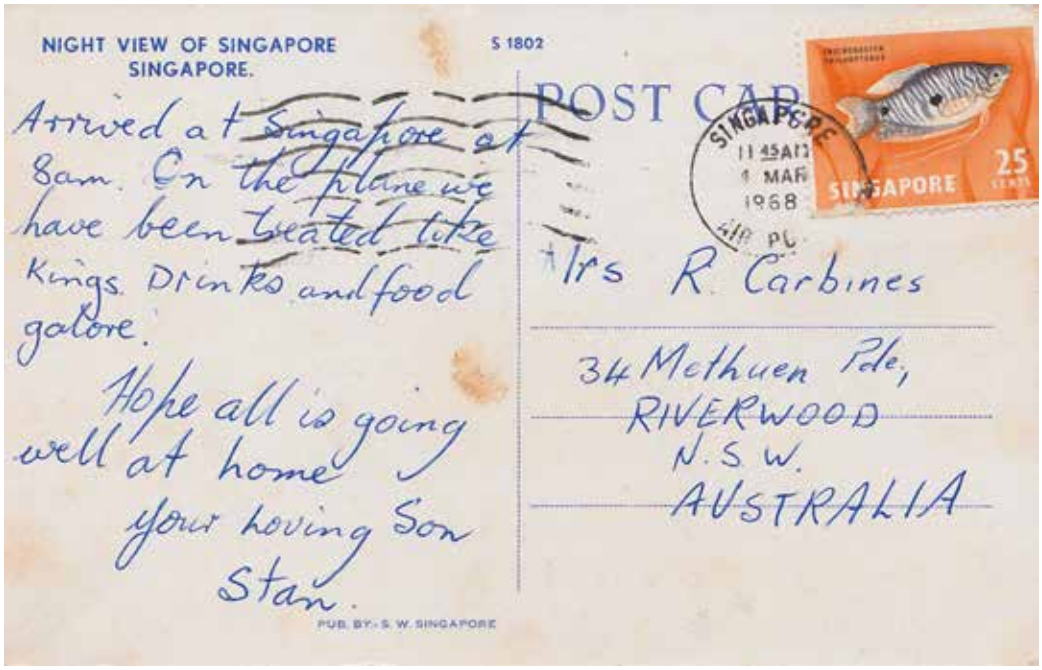
Nanny Murphy with her five daughters and two granddaughters

Kidergarten at Narwee P.S. 1951. Stan 6th from right back row

School Rugby Team. Stan in front row second from left

Training at Kapooka. Stan back row on the right end

Calculating elevation and bearing for the guns. Photo taken at Holesworthy Firing Range.
(left to right) Trevor Bryant, Lieutenant Ian Ahern and Stan



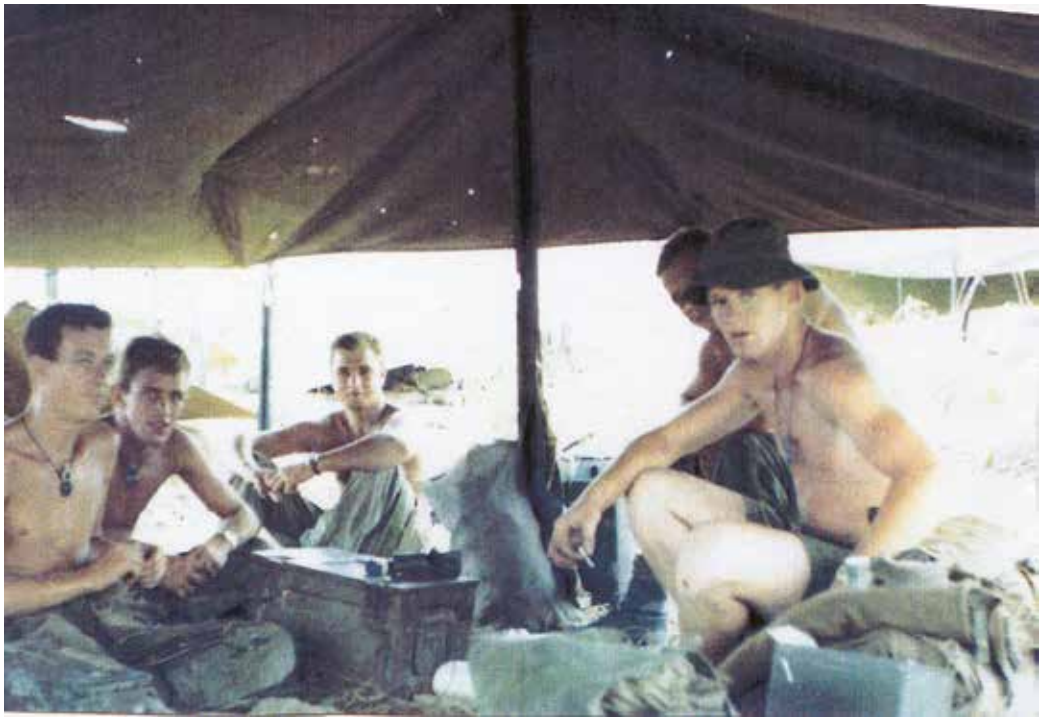
Postcard sent from Singapore on the way to Vietnam. Dated 4th March 1968

Gun ready to fire at Nui Dat

Stan and Trevor at Coral. Note the damage to the hutchie caused by shrapnel and rifle fire

Some of the dead North Vietnamese Regulars
(photo supplied by 12th Field Regiment [Vietnam] Assoc.)

Some of the enemy's weapons gathered after the first attack
(photo supplied by 12th Field Regiment [Vietnam] Assoc.)



Charlie Gun Crew having a break at Coral. Note the damage to the hutchie

From left, Trevor Bryant, Phil Inman, Peter Storey, Mal Chambers and Stan at Coral

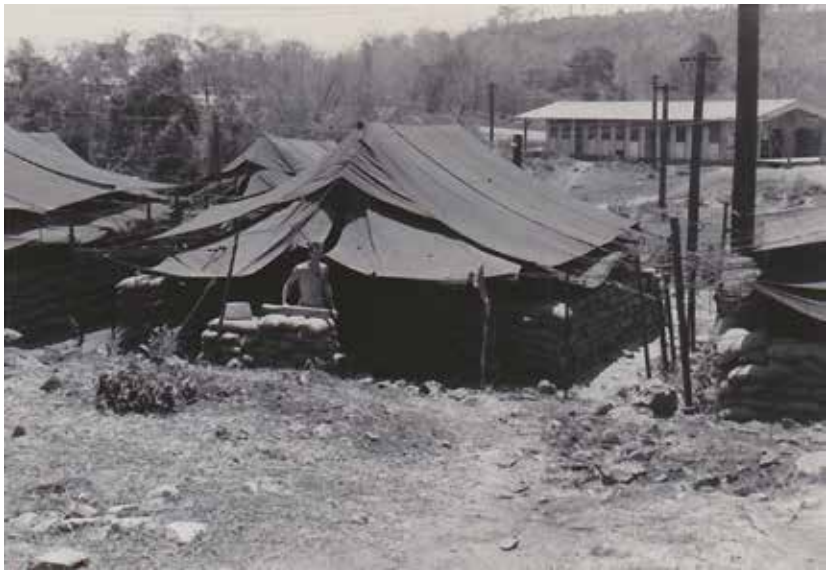
Jeff Dwyer and Stan beside their hutchie

Jeff Dwyer, Rick Cranna and Stan having a rest. We are sitting on the timbers used to cover the Command Post

Having a rest

Chinook transporting a M2A2 with stores and ammunition below

Greg Ayson holding a King Cobra

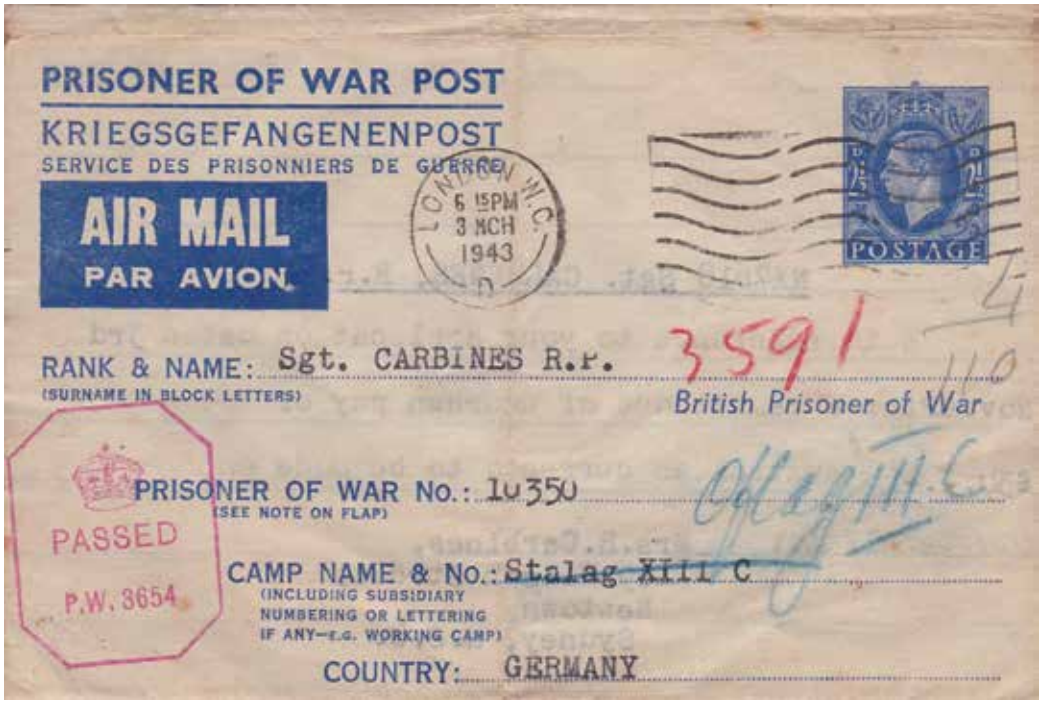


Home at Nui Dat. The boozer and the mess are in the background

Battery Surveyors at the Horseshoe. (left to right) Neil Lloyd-Jones. Stan Carbines, Rick Cranna, Terry O'Neil, Snowy Easton, (front) Peter Kiernan, Mal Chambers and Peter Storey

Our visit to Underelsbach in 1989

This photo was sent home from Stalag 383 near Frankfurt



Front of aerogram sent to Dad from Australia House. The letter concerned deductions from his pay

Wedding day in Newcastle 31/8/1974

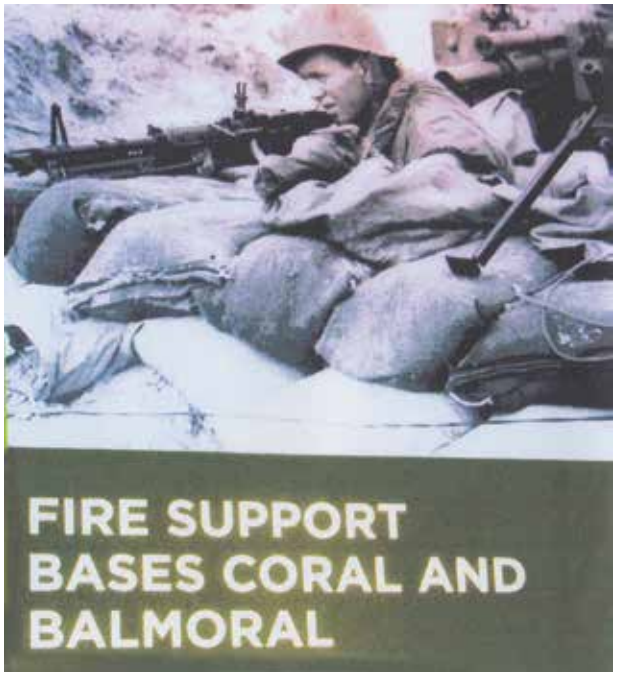
Dad with grandson, David. 1977

Stan's three sons Jonathan, Matthew and David

Governor General P M Jeffrey awarding the Honour Title ‘Coral’ to 102 Field Battery

Margaret and Stan at the Honour Title ceremony in Canberra. 2008

Australian War Memorial, Canberra



This photo at the AWM was taken at Coral and shows Gunner Hahn, a crew member of Delta Gun

The original Foxtrot Gun restored at the AWM. It was captured by the NVA at FSB Coral

Ex members of 102 Battery at a reunion in Adelaide. Stan front row third from left

Command Post staff 40th Anniversay in Canberra. Stan third from left

ROUTINE AT NUI DAT

Back at Nui Dat we settled back into the routine of staying in the base for a short period and then going on an operation for two or more weeks. However from then on at our FSBs we always had a company of infantry protecting our rear and sometimes we had an additional number of APCs in front. To my knowledge we never moved from one Fire Support Base to another in a single day like we did when leaving FSB Harrison and moving to FSB Coral. We always went back to base camp before moving out at dawn to establish a new FSB. It seems that the top brass had learnt from their mistakes.

When I tried to remember the other Fire Support Bases after Coral and the contacts by 1RAR with the enemy and our resulting fire missions nothing seemed to stand out. It all became a blur.

Not long after Coral the 6th Intake boys went home for discharge and their replacements arrived so there was a reshuffle of places in tents. Also Trevor was transferred to the Battery Commander's party. Peter who had begun drinking heavily went on leave and was crossing a road when he was hit by a truck. In the change of accommodation and Peter going to hospital I can't remember what finally happened to him. He was younger than us conscripts, he loved being on his bed under his mosquito net reading books. I have checked in the phone book for Kiernan in Brisbane-his home city- with no success at finding him. At each reunion I look out to see if he is there. Somehow I think the worst may have happened.

After overcoming all the difficulties associated with Coral we were confident in our abilities and prided ourselves on being able to deliver quick and accurate fire to the infantry when required. When there was a call for a fire mission regiment from my experience we were always the first battery to be ready to fire the first shot. A fire mission regiment is when all of our available batteries are radioed to fire at the same target. Maybe the events at Coral honed our skills to a very high level of professionalism.

While in Vietnam we came across many varied creatures or beasties. When we landed at one FSB I can remember walking through the long waist high grass and seeing a very thick five foot python lying on the ground. It did not move away because it had obviously just swallowed something and it had a very large bump in its stomach. I was told later that following soldiers killed the snake. It is not something that I would have done but I could understand that some people would not have felt safe sleeping in a hole knowing that a python was on the loose.

At another FSB we were slashing our sandbags and preparing to move when a loud disturbance occurred near Foxtrot Gun. As the gun's crew were slashing their bags a large angry nine foot king cobra slid out with its back arched and its head raised ready to strike. You could just imagine the reaction from those nearby. Once the soldiers had the snake surrounded and some grabbed metal star pickets the fate of the snake was sealed. Greg Ayson who was over six feet tall held the dead snake above his head as high as he could and still the tail dangled on the ground.

On one occasion at Nui Dat I was with a group of soldiers waiting for my turn to operate the washing machine. We all had a cloth laundry bag which was closed by pulling a draw string. My bag was sitting on the floor and it began to move. There was obviously something alive and fairly big moving around in the bag. We stared to discuss the

possibilities of what was in the bag, maybe it was a snake, a rat, or some unknown nasty jungle creature. I started undoing the draw string at the same time trying to stand as far away as possible. To our relief we watched a giant toad crawl out of the bag. It took a look around and calmly hopped away, not realising the stress it had caused.

War can have times of high activity and then times of inactivity. In the times of no activity the soldiers look for some entertainment. Regularly gun crews would find beasties to fight against each other to determine the champion beasty and gun crew. These were usually scorpions and spiders and at times creatures that we had no name to describe. Quite often the beasties would have to be stirred up to get them angry and aggressive. I know that Foxtrot held the title of champion for some time with a beasty that no one could identify or name. Legend has it that their beasty was a killing machine with eight legs, armour plating and was indestructible. We think the film, The Terminator starring Arnold Schwarzenegger was based on their fearsome creature.

At a fire support base just after Coral I was on duty in the Command Post with Ian Ryan when we heard a human noise just outside. It sounded like a person's last gasp for air. Ian volunteered to investigate the strange noise. On his return he reported that the noise was made by our sergeant who was peacefully sleeping in his hole when a frog jumped on his face. As he was in the dark it would have taken some time to ascertain what the creature was. It is something that would have frightened anyone.

Of all the beasties the scorpion was the one that made its presence most felt. It liked to find a home in stores and equipment. One day I was unfolding a tent with my bombardier when he was stung on the hand. He immediately dropped the tent and yelled out choice swear words while doing what looked like an Indian war dance. I had to smile but at the same time glad that it was not me who had been stung.

On one occasion at Nui Dat many personnel in the battery including myself came down with food poisoning and severe diarrhoea. Our medic Doc McKenzie was running out of the powder medication which was mixed with water and swallowed. As a consequence the battery was sent away from Nui Dat to an isolated spot to recover from the debilitating illness. It was the worst case of diarrhoea I have ever experienced. I guess those back at our base would have been cleaning and sterilising all the cooking utensils. It was a very scenic spot with views across a lovely valley and at time you could hear church bells in the distance.

While at this base I received a package from home. It was a packet of pasta. We got out the little stove and began heating the water to bring it to the boil in preparation for the pasta. With our stoves it took a long while to get the water to boiling point. When it was time to add the pasta I opened the packet and to my surprise my mother had placed a large tube of condensed milk in the pasta packet. It was a great disappointment as everyone was licking their lips. However I now had plenty of milk for my brew making.

On another occasion someone from home sent me a can of strawberries. I told Peter that I would share it with him. I opened the can and started eating the strawberries with a spoon. The strawberries were floating on top of a sugary sweet liquid. After eating only a quarter of the tin I realised that I had eaten well over half of the fruit. I had not fully realised that more fruit kept bobbing to the top and I kept eating them. I don't think Peter fully accepted my excuse for eating most of the contents.

The Ladies Auxiliary at my father's RSL Club sent me a package of various items which were well appreciated. I can't remember all the contents but I know it included letter-writing supplies. One of my sisters was in third grade at our local Primary School. Her teacher organised each of the class members to write a letter to me. All of the letters arrived on the same day. After reading them I knew every knock knock joke, a hundred reasons why the chicken crossed the road and what was black and white and read all over. Receiving mail and sending letters was very important to us. It was not only good to hear from the loved ones and friends at home but it gave us something to do to break the repetition of our daily routine. Johnny Lynch's family sent him every copy of the local Wellington newspaper which was printed tri-weekly.

Because I was a fan of the South Sydney Rugby League Team a friend sent me lots of their supporter paraphernalia. With the lack and irregular flow of information from home I found it difficult to get excited about football. Most of the time we did not know what day it was, let alone know who was playing football that weekend. I don't remember ever reading a newspaper while in Vietnam. Occasionally someone had a Sydney paper but by the time it reached us it was old news. Somehow it is difficult to get interested in old news. That year was the year of the Mexico Olympic Games. Usually I am an ardent follower of these sporting events. However, in 1968 the Olympics came and went without me even knowing.

Not far from Nui Dat there was another base which seemed to be permanently manned by Australians. It was an unusual geological structure. It looked like an extinct volcano crater with half its circular wall blown away. Because of its shape and its outline of contour lines on a map it was called The Horseshoe. From the top of the feature one could see for many miles. The artillery had a permanent battery position which was not always occupied but could be manned quickly without any preparations. Sometimes we would set up machine guns on top of the hill and practice firing across an area where the Australians had laid a large mine field.

This minefield was laid by the Australians to stop the Viet Cong having easy access to the many villages that were nearby. It was thought that it would be guarded by South Vietnamese soldiers. As it was not guarded the Viet Cong saw the minefield as a ready supply of mines. While we were in Vietnam they had discovered how to lift and reset the mines but as yet they were not a big problem for our troops.

However, it did not take long and the enemy had lifted thousands of mines and many Australian soldiers were becoming victims from the ones set on tracks and clearings in the scrub. When it was realised that the minefield was a big mistake a decision was made to remove it. I heard that in the process of removing the mine field it was discovered that the VC had dug a camouflaged base in the centre of the minefield. Some of my friends at Maitland who were in the Engineers spent a lot of time and energy trying to develop a technique of destroying all the mines in the field. They made various contraptions with tractors and whipping chains to explode the mines. One of the successful methods was to bury them.

On one of the journeys from the Horseshoe to Nui Dat the officers were very nervous about a possible ambush or contact with the enemy. Charlie gun had been told that if there was any trouble they were to get their gun to the front of the convoy and prepare

it to fire. Every time the trucks stopped the procedure was for all of the soldiers to jump from the trucks and lie in a prone position ready to fire their weapons. The trucks had their seating around the side of the truck so that every time we jumped we had to jump the back of the seat as well. The height would have been well over two metres. The convoy stopped many times and we were getting sick of jumping with our rifles in hand and landing on the hard uneven ground. However, we arrived safely back in Nui Dat without any incident.

Behind our tent at Nui Dat was some scrub with a few thriving banana trees. We were keeping our eyes on a large bunch of bananas which were growing beautifully. We were then told to prepare to go on another operation. To stop others getting our bananas we decided to hang the bunch on our tent's centre pole where they would ripen and be ready to eat when we returned. However, things did not turn out as planned. We were away for four weeks and on our return there in the middle of the tent was a pile of rotten, smelly bananas with insects buzzing the sloppy mess.

When at Nui Dat the army was always thinking up ways to keep us busy. I have already mentioned the sand bag filling which proved a waste of time as weed grew out of the bags when the wet season arrived.

One task which kept us busy for a time was the construction of a new command post at Nui Dat. The command post when we arrived was underground. This was not only poorly lit and inconvenient it also seemed unhealthy as there was water on the ground and it had to be pumped out regularly. To keep off the wet ground we had to stand on timber pallets. With our crude toileting system you would not be confident about any subterranean water. The engineers came and constructed a large shed on a concrete pad and furnished it with tables and a couple of beds suitable for our command post. Our job was to sandbag the walls, the entrance and the roof. This time the sandbags came filled with sand, ready to stack. It was a big job but the new building was worth all the effort.

Our tents were furnished with shelving which we made from timber ammunition boxes. We had plenty of ammunition boxes so with a hammer and a few nails we could make brand new furnishings cheaper than Freedom Furnishings. Someone decided that our furnishings would be improved if we had metal lockers. No one was too thrilled about the improvement. They arrived as a flat pack with nuts and screws to assemble. Assembling the lockers took up lots of time and energy but did not improve our quality of life at all. As we also had to assemble lockers for the sergeants and officers we became quite skilled as flat pack assemblers.

When we returned from an operation all our personal gear had to be washed and repaired or replaced. The same could be said for all of the equipment we used while out on the operation. An audit had to be taken and the equipment brought up to a standard of readiness for the next operation. The radio operators who were also responsible for our lighting seemed to have much to check and to ensure that their equipment was in operating order. While back at Nui Dat the Command Post still had to be manned for twenty four hours a day and those H and Is still had to be calculated and fired.

Sometimes at Nui Dat we would get a fire mission. When the call came for the fire

mission the gunners would stream out of the boozer and their tent lines to man their guns. This could happen at any time. Of an evening the operator of the film projector would stop it rolling hoping that the fire mission would not be too long. In the meantime those not involved in the fire mission would buy a drink, play crown and anchor, get something to eat or have a chat while waiting for the fire mission to be completed. However, after a reasonable delay the operator would start the projector rolling again and many of the gunners unfortunately missed the end of the film.

One evening I was in my tent when a rifle shot echoed through the lines. It was very loud and close. Everyone in my tent dived to the floor with our adrenaline rushing and ears and eyes alerted. We peered out into the darkness looking for any indication of what was happening. The shot was fired from a tent at the end of our row, about fifty metres away. Word was passed along that one of the soldiers was angry about an incident which happened during the day. So he fired his rifle into the air to vent his anger.

At one of our reunions I heard a very different story. The last few tents in our line were occupied by the soldiers who worked in the office and the Q store. They were soldiers who rarely came out on operations. They basically stayed at Nui Dat full time. Their work would have been like someone having a nine to five job. They had time on their hands. Thus to fill in their time they decided to brew their own alcoholic drinks. They had ready access in the kitchen to a variety of vegetable and fruit skins which they could use to make the savage brews. They would have been hoping to distil booze similar to smooth vodka but I believe it was more like rough moonshine. On the night of the rifle discharge one of the guys became so intoxicated with his home brew that he lost control and fired his rifle. It seemed a very dangerous action to take. For some reason the person was never charged.

That was the only shot I heard which was not fired in anger. It is quite amazing that there were not more incidents of rifles being fired as we carried loaded rifles all the time. It was a tribute to our training that there were not more accidental or deliberate discharges.

While at Nui Dat I was given two memorable tasks which required working away from our lines. I came back from leave on one occasion when the battery was away on an operation. I was told to go with some others to do the night shift on a machine gun on the perimeter of Nui Dat. It was in the lines of the American Artillery Battery. We went to the Americans' boozer where they were drinking and watching television. As I had not seen television in Vietnam it was quite a novelty. As we were on duty for the night we watched it until it finished. When it finished the American national anthem was played and all the Americans stood to attention and placed a hand on their heart. How they love to display their patriotism.

We slept in a long tent, when not on duty, with quite a few Afro Americans at the other end. It was probably the first time we had spoken to people of African descent. We had quite an interesting light-hearted discussion about life in general. Little did we realise what an historical time this was for the Afro Americans. This was the era of the violent struggle for equality. The time of the Kennedy assassinations, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, the Civil Rights movement and the clenched fist salute at the Mexico Olympics. We did not notice any of them in the boozer so I guess there was some form

of segregation. It would be interesting to know what they thought of our discussions as we were treating them the same as any other Americans. If we could meet again what an interesting conversation we could have.

The other task given to me was to be on duty at the Battery Commander's Office over in the 1RAR lines. Our Battery Commander who was a major had a team of about eight soldiers and they lived near the 1RAR Battalion Command Post, not with the Battery. Our battery and 1RAR had gone out on an operation and someone was needed to man the radio in the BC's office. I was selected to man the radio and not go on the operation. Other than hearing the radio operators talking in the Command Post I knew very little about communicating on a radio. My job was to be present at the briefing of the NCOs who were going to lead small infantry patrols of about four men. These patrols acted as listening posts outside the perimeter for the night. These listening posts or patrols were not to engage the enemy but rather to warn the base of any sightings of enemy movement.

If artillery was needed by the patrols I was to relay the relevant information between the 1RAR Command Post which was in the next room and the Kiwi 161 Battery which was on the other side of the base. I crossed all my fingers hoping that the artillery would not be needed as I was not confident with my untested radio skills. It was a very lonely period as I was on my own and there was no one to talk to. I could not go to the boozer or to the movies it was like being in isolation. I had to be available on the spot if artillery was required. I was there for about ten long days and was delighted when the battery returned and I could return to familiar territory.

While in Vietnam we were given three different types of leave. The first one R and R- which I think meant Rest and Recreation- meant a flight to a nearby city outside Vietnam for five days and four nights. Another was called R and C which some called Rest and Recuperation and others called Rest in Country. This was leave of a similar duration but was within Vietnam. The last type of leave available to us was leave given to the whole unit to take at the same time and place at an equipped army recreational facility in country.

R and R was fantastic. I went to Hong Kong and had a ball. As we hopped off the plane at Hong Kong we were given papers which informed us to which hotel we were allotted. These hotels were top hotels with excellent amenities and services. On each floor was an employee who was security, friend and adviser. We tipped these employees well as they made us feel that we and our belongings were safe. I met up with some guys who were in my platoon at Kapooka and enjoyed every aspect of the holiday. I had a room which had a double bed, a desk and chair, my own bathroom and wonderful air conditioning. It felt like heaven or close to it. It was so much better than sleeping in a hole in the ground and stinking because I was unable to shower for a month.

We had lots of money and we spent it. I even spent money on things I didn't need. Reel to reel tape recorders were a must, together with a camera, tailor-made suits, tailor-made shirts, music tapes, pearl necklace and anything else we could be talked into buying. We must have been a great boost to the Hong Kong economy as thousands of troops from various countries went there to spend money and have a good time.

At night it was off to night clubs to enjoy the cuisine and spectacular night life. We would sit in the restaurants eating and drinking the best that was on offer. Large dancing bands would be playing and excellent singers performing the latest songs. One of these songs I remember was 'My Girl' made famous by the Temptations. It wasn't that I had a girl it was because it was a happy lively song and pleasant on the ear and that we were having a happy and lively and pleasant time. The song I most associated with the Vietnam War is a song by the Hollies 'He Aint Heavy, He's My Brother' even though it became popular the year after I had returned home. The words were:

But I'm strong enough to carry him
He ain't heavy he's my brother
So on we go
His welfare is my concern
No burden is he to bear
We'll get there

It expresses the sentiments that many soldiers had for one another. The obligation of caring. It was a duty of care.

On one occasion I went to a bar with my friends and they were happy to be entertained by bar girls. While the girls sat with a customer the customer was expected to buy them an expensive drink but the girls only received a cheap drink like coloured water instead. I told the boss lady that I was not interested in having a girl and she must have been confused as she brought out another girl. Again I said I was not interested and again she brought over a different girl. When she brought out a girl from the back who was a real stunner I thought it was best if I left. As I went down the street I kept looking back to make sure she wasn't chasing me with another girl.

Compared to our life in Vietnam Hong Kong was a paradise. One of the guys came back from R and R, singing the praises of Susie the bar girl in Hong Kong. She knew all the best places to shop and made sure that you were not ripped off. She also performed other services like massages with extra services. She was fantastic. Anyway the next guy went to Hong Kong and of course took advantage of the services Susie had to offer. He also sang her praises. Then the third guy went and couldn't wait to see Susie. Then the first guy became a little worried about things and decided to see our medic. He had Non Specific Urethritis, commonly called NSU. It is an easily treated venereal disease. The second and third guy waited hoping their symptoms would not appear. It looked like Susie delivered some unwanted extras.

After I returned from R and R I had the latest Akai reel to reel tape recorder. I spent many hours with mates sharing recordings, listening to music and copying recordings. We would check with the last guy who came back from R and R what recordings he brought back. We would all clamour to copy them. The Beatles and the Supremes were very popular. We even copied tapes in which we had no interest. I guess it was something to do that was different from the humdrum of army life.

My R and C leave was at Vung Tau. The town was a base for the Australian non-combatant forces and was situated on the coast not far from Nui Dat. The R and C Centre was a large building outside the perimeter of the Australian base. As I had

no weapon and the place was not guarded and there were rumours that the VC also holidayed there I did not feel safe. I had a fairly quiet time doing short walks around the local streets.

A guy in the battery knew I was going on R and C so he gave me a letter to deliver to Wendy, a bar girl in the town. He gave me the address which was in a sleazy part of the town. When I entered the bar a few of the girls thought I was a prospective customer so rushed over to be the chosen one. I told them that I had a letter for Wendy. Their English was limited and I don't think they fully understood. Anyway one decided that she was Wendy. I gave her the envelope with the letter which she immediately tore open. She then indicated that she could not read the writing and asked me to read it to her. It would have made a good scenario for a comedy act with all the girls wanting to understand what I was reading. After I had finished reading one tried to take me to the back room. However all I wanted to do was to get away to a more desirable part of town.

Our unit had one period of leave together at the Badcoe Club [named after an Australian Victoria Cross recipient] which was inside the perimeter of the Australian Base at Vung Tau. Everything was under one roof-our accommodation, the bar and lots of other facilities. Just out the front of the building were the sand and the surf. It was a great spot. On the beach were surf skis, surf boards and kayaks available to use. I can remember that the hot temperature of the water in the surf made the experience like swimming in piss. It was not as refreshing as swimming in the surf at Sydney. We had a great time mucking around at the bar and taking advantage of the opportunity to relax and think of things other than war and survival. We could switch off knowing that we were not going to be called upon to fire a fire mission. Rumour has it that we had too good a time and were not welcome back. This could be true as we had some wild boys who liked to party.

The weather in Vietnam was hot all year round. At night it cooled a little so it was nice to sleep with a thin blanket. I stayed in Vietnam for all of the wet season and I can't remember being greatly inconvenienced by the weather. I suppose we expected to have rain and mud so we just coped with the conditions. The heavy rain seemed to stay for a few hours and then the sun shone through and dried us and our clothes. On a few occasions when we were out on an operation we were able to take advantage of the pouring rain by taking off our clothes and having a lovely shower.

All Australians counted the days to when they were expected to return to Australia. The last day was called a wakey, so soldiers would say something like thirty days and a wakey to go. Being in the 7th Intake I would be sent home before Christmas as I was due for discharge on the 31 January 1969. On about the 15 December when the Battery was at FSB Diggers' Rest those of us being discharged were flown to Nui Dat to prepare for our flight home. What a great feeling. I felt a little awkward about celebrating in that I did not want to make a big thing of it as my mates still had a couple of months of the unknown ahead of them.

There were probably about eight of us returning to Australia. The majority were 7th Intake but a couple were Nashos who from earlier intakes had extended their service. We had survived and we were returning to our loved ones and those simple luxuries

of home. A shower and a change of clean clothes each day, sitting at a table with a chair, sleeping on a bed and having plenty of milk in the refrigerator would be well appreciated.

On the 17 December we were driven to Luscombe Field where we were flown by Caribou to Ton Sun Nut, the international airport at Saigon. When we arrived by Caribou nine months ago we did not know what the jungle below had in store for us. Now we were going home and we knew what life was like down in those trees and we were glad to be bidding it farewell. We flew out on a Boeing 707 headed to Australia, again getting good service from the stewards and having a short stopover in Darwin. Upon landing at Darwin we walked across the tarmac to the terminal. As we walked we noticed that the heat radiating from the surface was extremely hot but it was Australian heat. We did not complain. It was a joy to be back on Australian soil.

When the plane's wheels hit the tarmac in the dark in Sydney there was an emotional spontaneous cheer from the occupants. It was hard to believe that Vietnam for me was over and I would soon begin a new life as a civilian. We had to present ourselves to an officer at the airport who gave me a leave pass which expired on the 13 January. Trevor and the other guys going to other destinations were to stay in Sydney for the night and fly out in the morning. At the end of my leave I had to present myself at the Eastern Command Personnel Depot on South Head in Sydney.

As my parents did not have a car an uncle brought them and my two sisters to meet me at the airport to take me home. I guess my mother's thoughts would have gone back to the time when she went to a wharf to meet my father on his return from Europe in 1945. All the army uniforms and slouch hats would also have kindled memories in my father's mind. There was the customary welcome and oh it is great to be home but nothing of real substance was said. I guess they would have been very relieved and I think part of me was still in Vietnam.

I had parted from mates I had been living with for eighteen months through all sorts of traumatic ordeals and through lots of fun times. I did not know if ever I would see them again. We had come eye to eye with death and come through it. That very morning I had been in my tent at Nui Dat carrying a loaded rifle over my shoulder and at night I was safe at home with my parents. It all seemed too much to absorb. In my father's war it took months to get home. In our war it took hours. They were able to adjust slowly to the changing circumstances but that was not the case with us.

Dad's journey home after the war was far different from my half day jet flight from Saigon. He was woken up by the sound of tanks roaring around the wire perimeter of his prison compound at Regensberg in Germany. Then he experienced the sight of a tank tearing through the high wire fence. It was General George S Patton's 3rd Army liberating Dad after more than four years as a prisoner. One could not imagine the much relieved thoughts and feelings of the prisoners as they watched the action played out in front of them. The Americans arranged for the Commonwealth and British soldiers to be flown to Reims in France for the British to take responsibility for them. They were then taken to England for recuperation and extended leave. After they had regained their health and fitness the Australians and New Zealanders boarded a liner which was taking them home via the Panama Canal.

When the ship reached New Zealand Dad and a few of his mates decided to stay the night ashore and get back on the ship early the next morning. They were surprised to be woken the next morning by the sound of the ship's horn as it left the harbour with them still ashore.

Not knowing Dad was still in New Zealand Mum and my brother, who was now six years old, assembled with other members of the family to welcome him home after six years away. They had decorated the outside of the terrace house in Surry Hills and held flags and welcome home placards. They must have been very disappointed to see sailors, air crew, pilots, ex-prisoners, and other personnel in various uniforms come down the gang plank but not the person they wanted to see. Dad arrived a few weeks later to a quieter, more subdued, but just as warm welcome home.

The next couple of weeks for me were very busy and a bit of a blur. As well as simply adjusting back to life at home there were relatives and friends to catch up with and there were the usual Christmas events. It was a far cry from life in Vietnam. We lived not far from a large shopping centre called Roselands. I can remember going shopping and returning home with nothing. In the large complex I felt uncomfortable with strangers behind me so I tended to walk with a wall behind me and then leave with no shopping done. I also had a startled reaction to loud noises such as cars back-firing. I also noticed that when I held a cup and saucer the cup would rattle indicating that my hand had a tremor. I sometimes had to use my other hand to hold the hand with the cup and stop the sound of the rattling cup. This indicated that it was going to take a while to adjust back to normal everyday living. On Christmas Day I did give a thought to the boys and hoped that they were safe and having a good day.

When I came home from Vietnam I had more money than I had ever had before in my life. That wasn't to last long. I decided to buy a new car. At the end of 1968 there was a London to Sydney Marathon car rally over a distance of 7,000 miles travelling through eleven countries. The winner was going to receive ten thousand pounds sterling plus lots of glory for the driver and positive publicity for the maker of the car. A Citroen was leading at Nowra and looked like winning easily when the car was unfortunate to be involved in a head-on collision and the driver had to be taken to hospital. The winner was a Hillman Hunter driven by Andrew Cowan. I must have been caught up in the hype because I bought a new burgundy Hillman Hunter.

I also paid for the phone to be connected to the house. After that Mum did not have to walk to the corner and use the public telephone to make her calls. Now Mum was able to phone her mother and sisters from the comfort of her kitchen.

I drove to the Eastern Command Personnel Depot at South Head on the 13 January to begin the process of discharging from the army. The ECPD was not a very inviting place, I did not know anyone and it was very busy with soldiers everywhere lining up, sitting down waiting for service or hurrying to and fro. The thought of staying there overnight with my personal belongings was not appealing. I decided to stay at home and drive my new car there each day.

I came home from Vietnam with an injured back so I had to attend specialist appointments and have physiotherapy in the city. I had injured my back while lifting

the overhead timbers for the Command Post at Coral. With the constant exercise and not wanting to let the team down I managed but now back at home with less exercise and getting in and out of cars the back became a more serious problem. I now had a permanent reminder of FSB Coral. When I didn't have a medical appointment I was sent with others to Paddington to rake and pick up leaves at Victoria Barracks. There was not much of a check on us so after a couple of hours of working I drove home. No one seemed to mind. The 31 January 1969 was my last day in the army and then I was a civilian again.

ADJUSTMENT TO CIVILIAN LIFE

There was an expectation that when my army life was over I would come back to civilian life and continue life as it was before I was conscripted. It was almost as though the two years in the army were gap years. Just something to do before one settles down to their real life. This expectation seemed to be held by everybody including myself.

When I was discharged the school year was just about ready to commence. The Department of Education offered us teachers returning from the army a refresher course for two weeks at Armidale Teachers' College. What a waste of time. The lecturers were on holidays and so they came to the College for a couple of hours to either present something they liked doing or just talked. It was an easy way to make money. There seemed to be no plan or program of preparing us for the classrooms full of pupils that we were going to face the next week. There also was no appreciation of what we had experienced during our service in the army or any thought of any areas where we may have difficulties.

I was appointed to a Primary School in Sydney which was about a thirty minute drive from home. I was given a fifth grade class of girls for the year. Overall the first year teaching was terrible. It is hard to know the reason. However, I think the fact that in the army you worked as a team and that was not the case at this school. I felt very isolated and without the support and camaraderie which the army provided. My unit was still in Vietnam. Thoughts such as, What are the guys doing? When is the battery coming home? were in the back of my mind. But I also thought that I had to forget the army and get my life back on track. How confusing it was.

In the army as a Battery Surveyor for 105mm Howitzers I was as good as the best in the world but as a classroom teacher I was a novice. My contribution in the battery was very important and highly regarded but at teaching I was at the bottom of the pecking order.

I also felt that the ability to speak to people was unduly affected. While in the army and particularly in Vietnam developing reading and language skills were very limited. I did not read any of the small number of novels floating around, and newspapers and magazines were unavailable, I was not studying with text books and the general flood of bill boards and directions on articles which you get at home to read was not there. Apart from reading my personal mail there was not much need for reading at all.

With language there was no radio or television to add to language stimulation and the spoken vocabulary with the troops would be at a common level. For instance you would describe someone who was over-weight as fat or a slob, you would never say rotund, obese or portly. Why think of an appropriate word when a good swear word gives the message. Swear words could be used as a noun, adjective, verb or adverb. So I feel that my language skills and self-confidence had been affected badly by the two years in the army.

Because I had not been able to keep abreast with current affairs I did not know facts that I normally would have known. For instance what countries had gained independence in 1968? Who won the sporting grand finals? Who are the current leaders of the countries in the world? I was also unaware of the bush fires in Victoria and Aunt Lucy's illness and Uncle Peter's divorce. In Vietnam these facts were irrelevant but in civilian life these are topics needed for normal everyday discussions and interaction.

By going into the army I had lost contact with the friends I had had at Teachers' College. School appointments were made in the January after I had left College. As I was going into the army I did not chase people to find where they were appointed. They would have been appointed anywhere in the state and may have even been transferred a second time. I did not keep contact with anyone currently in the army and I had some contact with a couple of the 7th Intake boys but they lived in different parts of Australia. This isolation was partly created by the premise that I had to return to life as it was before the army. I did not realise at the time that my experiences in the army could not be pushed aside. The experiences were going to stay with me for the rest of my life.

Relationships with the church youth group were not back to what they were prior to the army. Not only had I gone through many experiences which changed my outlook but circumstances had also changed. A lot of things can change in two years. Before I came home they elected me without my consent to be president of one of their groups. It was not a position I desired but I did not want to come back and upset people. I guess it was their way of wanting to include me again. Like teaching it was not a job I enjoyed and couldn't wait for my term to finish. They had lived two years without me and I had lived two years without them. Things were just different. Two guys from the group also had their marbles pulled from the barrel but they escaped National Service by failing the medical. I knew both guys fairly well and could not think of a reason for them to fail.

On my return my father wanted me to join his RSL Club and get involved with what it had to offer. I did join but did not get involved. They were an older generation and I did not know of any Vietnam veterans who attended. One of the members of the club asked me if I had ever come under fire while in Vietnam. I took it to mean, was it a real war? Lots of Vietnam veterans did not receive a warm and equal membership in their local RSL Club. My father asked me to give a presentation with my photo slides to a group at the RSL. At first I said I would do it but on reflection I felt uncomfortable about it and changed my mind. I think everything was too fresh, too raw, too emotional and too personal.

I was glad to come home from Vietnam when I did but there were nagging thoughts that it would have been more fitting to come home with the boys in the battery at the end of our completed tour. It would have made the tour more meaningful by sharing the emotions associated with the beginning as well as the end of the tour. I felt as though I had left a task which was not completed. I did not have any choice on when I left Vietnam but it was an uncomfortable feeling.

I raised this issue with Rick Cranna who did come home with the battery. He said that I did not miss much as the 8th Intake on their return were due for discharge and after returning from leave the 9th Intake were preparing for discharge. In addition some members on their return were immediately transferred to other units. So together with other changes in the personnel, the members in the battery lines at Holsworthy on their return were very different from the personnel in the battery when it flew to Vietnam. Rick's reply gave me mixed emotions as I probably did not miss much by returning early but to hear that the battery which had endured so much together just disintegrated on its return was disappointing.

As my first year of teaching was ending I applied to enrol at the University of NSW for

the following year. I wanted to continue with the Commerce Course I had begun while working at the bank. This time I applied for a major in Psychology as it included some theories on learning. This would fit in better with my teaching career. The Department of Veterans' Affairs was offering to provide some support while I did the course. The Department of Education granted me leave so I still had the option of returning to teaching. It was a very good year.

At university I enjoyed the life of a student. I met a group of fellow army guys, two of them from Corps Training at North Head and one I knew from Teachers' College. If it fitted in with our course we met at the Round House to have lunch and discussions. We seemed to be more mature and focussed than most of the other students who seemed to be attracted to many other extra activities happening on the campus.

It was a time of anti-Vietnam War sentiments towards the Australian Government. Students would stand on the lawn outside the library with microphones and sprout their message of anger and self- righteousness. One guy I can remember called himself The Wizard. He must have been a professional student as he was much older than us and he obviously enjoyed being in student politics. Looking at his bohemian attire and his long unruly hair he could have done with two years in the army to straighten him out. In a way it was sad to see a place of learning which should have a place for all points of view presenting such a biased case.

As a result I kept quiet at University about my contribution to the war. I was there to gain my degree not to get caught up in discussions with people who really were not prepared to listen or hear another point of view. I thought that these decisions were best left to the politicians who should know what is best for Australia. Some of the things these presenters were saying were ridiculous such as we were killing women and children.

A couple of times when walking in Sydney and looking in the windows of alternate type book shops I saw North Vietnamese flags and anti-war literature. I am not a violent man but I went close to smashing the window and damaging the display. It was so confusing with our soldiers risking their lives and the Australian public and Government allowing the enemy's flag to be openly displayed.

The following year I went back to teaching. This time I had a third grade at a different school not far from home. The teaching experience was much better than the last experience. I think most of the improvement was because of the change of school and staff but I was also better prepared and more focussed. Last time I taught, I only had two weeks between life in the army and life in a classroom. This time I had a whole year in which I could think and prepare for life as a school teacher.

At the end of the year a mother and father of one of my students came to me and gave me a gift. Many students gave us small Christmas gifts but I was a little surprised at their generosity. They said it was because in the previous year they had extreme difficulty getting their daughter to school. However, while she had been in my class she happily got dressed and was eager to go to school. I was chuffed by their comments. Being praised for creating a learning atmosphere where children wanted to go was one of the best compliments a teacher could be given.

I continued with my university course at night and teaching at school through the day. There were many large anti-Vietnam rallies with thousands of people marching down the streets of the main cities, blocking the traffic and causing disruption to the public. One of the chief speakers at these rallies was Jim Cairns, one of the elected members in parliament and a spokesman for the Labor Party. In fact all of the Labor politicians were using every opportunity to espouse negative comments and generate community opposition towards Australian troops and their involvement in Vietnam.

The next year in 1972 I went back to university full time to complete my degree. I stuck my head down and worked hard as I did not want to be repeating subjects. I still had to live with student anger directed at the Vietnam War. I could not help but wonder if they were partly motived by their selfish endeavours to escape National Service. Many of the students were very ambitious and would have seen National Service as a hindrance to their plans and personal goals. National Service and Vietnam involvement were very much intertwined. If the war stopped then National Service would cease.

It was not possible to escape the Vietnam War, even in your own home. On the daily news there were continuous and lengthy reports on the Vietnam conflict, e.g. the number of Australian soldiers killed, wounded or blown up by mines, failures in the Paris Peace Talks or the number of body bags sent home to the United States. Then there were film clips of these events and reporters looking for that special photo or a news scoop. With these my thoughts went back to my personal experiences and the deaths and casualties that I saw at Coral.

Then there would be televised news accounts of anti-Vietnam demonstrations. In some of these cases the demonstrators expressed their vitriol against innocent soldiers who had nothing to do with the political decisions. In Brisbane demonstrators poured red paint symbolizing blood on army guards at a barracks. Newspapers were also full of headlines and articles praising and condemning our involvement in Vietnam.

In addition there were the emotive, exaggerated and biased recordings by journalists who would report terrible deeds done by Vietnam veterans. If there was a domestic or neighbourhood dispute and one of the protagonists was a vet then the headlines would be something like ‘Vietnam Veteran Attacks a Neighbour’. Our confidence was also lowered by constant referrals to Vietnam veterans being affected by Agent Orange. Some of the accusers I am sad to say were Vietnam veterans themselves trying to find explanations for things happening in their lives. Then there was the series of Rambo movies starring Sylvester Stallone about a Green Beret Vietnam veteran who on his return to America could not fit back into society. The character John Rambo used his army skills and knowledge of weapons and hand to hand combat to fight violently against the forces of injustice. All these incidents gave the message that Vietnam veterans were capable of violent acts and were different from other people.

The TV series Mash also brought back memories because the tents they had were similar to ours. In fact because I did not watch it I thought for a long time that it was about Vietnam. How confusing and how difficult it was for us veterans to get our lives back to some form of normalcy.

In that year there was a national election with the Vietnam conflict and conscription

being a major issue. The Labor Party which had been in opposition for many years finally won an election. On the day of voting I did not know which party to vote for, normally I would vote Labor but I couldn't vote for Jim Cairns and his party. The Liberal Party were the ones who had created this mess so I couldn't vote for them either. Making an informal vote did not seem to be an option. I shudder when I think that I voted for the Democratic Labor Party.

With my university degree completed I thought that it was an opportunity to have a break from my routine in Sydney and teach somewhere else in the state. I was appointed to a school at Kiama, a lovely rural coastal town just south of Wollongong in NSW.

I met another teacher who had come from Ireland to Australia for a few years on a working holiday. At the time there was a shortage of school teachers in Australia and lots of young teachers were coming from many English-speaking countries including Canada and the USA to fill the vacancies. We rented a unit together in the centre of the town. I enjoyed my time at Kiama. The staff members at the school were excellent work colleagues and we did lots of fun activities at school and socially outside school hours.

The principal asked me if I could speak at an annual Anzac Dinner which was being held in a nearby town. I said that I would do the address. When it came to preparing what to say I knew that they wanted me to speak about my experiences in Vietnam but I did not do it. So I talked about the landing at Gallipoli and how 25 April should be our Australia Day. I know I did not give them what they were expecting.

One of my highlights at Kiama was when I trained a group of student tennis players to win the State Primary School Tennis Championship. It was a state-wide knockout competition with the last four teams playing on grass courts at White City in Sydney. White City at Rushcutters Bay was the home of tennis in New South Wales. Tennis greats like Lou Hoad and Ken Rosewall played many exciting Davis Cup finals on these courts. It was an occasion the children would remember for ever.

The parents had hired a mini bus and we all travelled up the Princes Highway to Sydney. For some of the students who had not been to Sydney before it was a very special adventure. Our team consisted of students who had only played in the local junior competition. The other teams had players with reputations of playing at a higher level and were known to the White City staff. Before lunch we had knocked out one of the other teams and after a break we played the other winner to determine which school was the state champion.

At the end of the matches both schools were equal counting matches, sets and games. So we were declared equal winners by the organisers. The other school was from the Western Suburbs of Sydney with a school population of well over a thousand. Our school had less than two hundred students. We had a community tennis court not far from the school and I would meet the students in the team before school and practice for an hour most days. It had all paid off. Our two schools shared the trophy.

Kiama had a lot to offer and occupy my thoughts. The constant barrage of topics concerning the Vietnam War in the media faded. With the war now over for the Australians it was a good opportunity to move on to other interests.

While I was there a friend who was a Real Estate Agent asked me to join the local Chamber of Commerce. The regular meetings were OK but I did not feel comfortable and did not feel that I belonged. Also I went to try out for the local Rugby team. This also was not a success as I had injured my back at Coral and was unable to take the punishment and running in games. I had played a lot of competitive tennis before going to Vietnam but now I could only now play at a hit and giggle level.

Towards the end of 1973 I went to a party in a rural setting out the back of Kiama. It was here that I met my future wife. Margaret claims that I was attracted to her bottle of wine but I keep assuring her it was her who attracted me. The room was dark when we first met. In better light she looked just as beautiful as she sounded. The attraction grew to love and we were married in August 1974. The marriage date was put forward somewhat because I wanted to undergo training to be a School Counsellor in Sydney. I had a University degree with a major in psychology and it seemed natural for my career to go that way. This would mean moving to Sydney to complete the training and then a posting to somewhere in the state of NSW.

My parents had a very busy and memorable year in 1974 as it was the year that both my sister and I married. Margaret and I waited until my sister was married before we announced our engagement and planned to marry in the September school holidays. By marrying before the end of the year Margaret would find it much easier to get a transfer to a Sydney school. Once she had her appointment we could find a place to live which was suitable for her travelling to her school and me to the Counselling course. Margaret's parents also had a busy year as they had to plan and organise the wedding at short notice. Everything went well and we were married in Newcastle on 31 August.

We were married at St Andrews Presbyterian Church just near Civic Park in the centre of Newcastle. When we exited the church the sun had set and we could see a variety of coloured lights glowing in the Park as it was the annual Mattara Festival. The Mattara Festival is an annual event in Newcastle in which the whole community gets involved and joins the celebrations. At the time Civic Park was the centre for the festivities. Coloured lights from the rotating Ferris wheel, merry-go-round and the various stalls together with the sounds of joy and excitement added to the occasion.

Then we went to the wedding reception which was held at the Newcastle Co-Operative Store. The building had two function rooms which were suitable for holding wedding receptions. The Newcastle area had many of these stores but with the advent of the large discount stores, shopping centres and the diminishing influence of the miners the Co- Operative Stores lost patronage and closed their doors. The Co-Operative stores were linked to the coal mining heritage by providing the workers with a store to purchase goods at a reasonable price.

I have heard that many Vietnam veterans had difficulty settling down and continuing life as it was planned before they were conscripted. I am sure that this also happened to me. In my first year back from Vietnam in 1969 I taught at a school, in 1970 I was a student at University, 1971 I went back teaching to a different school, 1972 I went back to University, 1973 I moved to Kiama and 1975 I returned to Sydney. I am sure many of the changes were a way of coping with the readjustment back to civilian life. The experiences in Vietnam and particularly Coral had affected me more than I had realised.

Things were going to change for the end of the conflict in Vietnam and married life brought stability.

MARRIED LIFE

Again I was moving and again I was leaving friends behind to start a new life but this time as a married man. I had Margaret to share the experiences. She was appointed as a language teacher to a high school not far from Hornsby where we lived. I caught the train each day to North Sydney with a friend, Dave, from Berowra who was also attending the course. It was a very full and exciting year and time seemed to fly very quickly. Hornsby was fairly central for access to both our families. Margaret was originally from Newcastle which was only a couple of hours up the highway and my family lived on the other side of Sydney.

I applied for a War Service loan to buy a unit at Hornsby. It was 1975 a very unsettled and memorable year in Australian politics. Gough Whitlam was the Prime Minister but his political party, the Australian Labor party did not control the Upper House. Early in the year Malcolm Fraser the leader of the Opposition, whose party did control the Upper House, refused to pass the Supply Bill. This meant that the Government would have no money and would not be able to operate. So even though my application for the loan had been approved the Government could not give me the money. The vendor was getting very frustrated with me as he had other commitments but there was nothing I could do. Finally the Bill was passed, the unit became ours and the vendor was happy.

The same political scenario repeated itself again later in the year. It was a very volatile time for Australian politics. However this time the story was very different. The Governor General, John Kerr, sacked Gough Whitlam as his Government could not function without the Supply Bill being passed. He then installed Malcolm Fraser as caretaker to govern the country until new elections could be held. The actions of the Governor General were unprecedented and shocked much of the population. The nation was polarised with feelings and emotions aggressively displayed. Fraser's party won the national election with a landslide majority.

I was still quiet about mentioning my service in Vietnam. I would get the inevitable question of, 'What was it like?' How do you answer? Do you say, 'Great, I had an all expenses paid holiday in Hong Kong'. Or do you answer,' Terrible I had to bury fifty mutilated bodies in a common grave'. It wasn't their fault that it was a silly question. It was just the nature of the topic. It was a question you would ask someone who has been on a holiday.

I guess there was some confusion by the people about the nature of the conflict. Was it a war, a civil war or was it a series of skirmishes and battles? Some Australian troops saw no action while others saw lots of death and destruction. Why did soldiers come home and get discharged while their mates were still fighting and risking their lives? This did not happen in our father's war. Our battery was functioning at a very high standard yet it came home and was replaced by another battery which had to go through the process of adjusting to the climate and war conditions. Why couldn't the allies invade North Vietnam and finish the hostilities? It all seemed a little crazy and difficult for individuals in the community to understand.

Margaret and I became very close friends with Dave and his wife, Elissa. Dave said to me at one time 'When you talk about Vietnam, Elissa listens very carefully as she was very active in the Moratorium Marches'. I never said anything which would have upset her as at no time did I ever argue that Australian forces should stay in Vietnam. I must

have become more accepting and less confused because I would have avoided people with those views when the protests were in full swing. At the completion of the training course Dave and I were appointed to different parts of the state. We still communicate regularly with the family and consider them close friends.

The training course was coming to an end and our thoughts were on where I would be appointed. We knew of some of the likely vacancies so we set off with a borrowed two-man tent to tour the state looking at the possibilities. These included Taree, Griffith, Kyogle, Rylstone and Narrandera. One of my church friends was living at Hillston so we decided to pay him a visit. As I had been in the army and knew how to handle a rifle he arranged for us to accompany him and a friend on a rabbit hunting expedition on one of the nearby farms. Margaret drove the car while my friend controlled the spot light searching for glowing eyes for targets. I did not enjoy the experience. I did not fire a shot. It was the first time I had held a rifle and heard gun fire since Vietnam. It brought back unpleasant thoughts. I think my host was surprised and probably disappointed at my lack of enthusiasm.

The event we remember and talked about most on the trip occurred at Port Macquarie. We erected the tent on a slope with the entrance and our feet pointing downhill. During the night we slid out of the tent some distance and it rained so we awoke outside the tent drenching wet. Our quick tour of the possible places for my school appointment gave us some idea of available accommodation and facilities in the towns. We did not go to places that we already knew such as the South Coast or the Hunter.

As Margaret was from the Hunter Valley and I wanted a country appointment I was asked if I wanted to go to Whitebridge. I had never heard of Whitebridge and got a little confused. I went home and asked Margaret if she would like to go to White Cliffs. You could just imagine her response. Whitebridge is a sought after beach suburb in Newcastle and White Cliffs is in the far west of NSW in the Never Never. When the appointments were finally determined we were both appointed to the staff of the same school and I would work in a district of schools covering an area including parts of Maitland and Dungog.

So far we had only lived in flats and units. Now we were establishing a home. We enjoyed deciding on colours and furnishings for the interior associated with setting up a home and the planning and work that comes with caring for lawns and gardens. It wasn't long before our first son was born in 1977, then another in 1979 and the third in 1982.

While the family was growing Margaret had leave from work. She lost her right of return to her school so while on leave she retrained as a Teacher Librarian and was appointed to a different nearby high school. She retrained as a teacher librarian because she had a love of books and the Department was not valuing the teaching of foreign languages. They were treating the learning of foreign languages not as a serious academic subject but rather as a subject of interest.

This stage in life was extremely busy as anyone who has had children knows-nappies to change, trips to the baby sitter, or visits to the doctor and so on. There seemed to be someone in need of comfort or attention all the time. As we both worked we took turns

sitting up at night to comfort the one in distress or sick. Then the car had to be replaced as a larger car was needed. Life was very full of things to do and young ones to care for.

We needed to extend the house by building an extra bedroom, bathroom and living space. I did much of the extensions myself. This included drawing and submitting the plans to council and the construction of the building. A friend who knew nothing about bricklaying helped me build the piers. My father stayed for a few days to help and give advice on the assembly of the frame. It was also an opportunity for him to mix with the family and for the two of us to share a beer or two at the local. I arranged for electricians, plumbers and tilers to do their bit and I did the rest. The young family had to cope with all the problems associated with the back of the house being a construction site. I also had to cope with young children running around where there was possible danger.

The next phase was just as busy. The boys were at the age of wanting to be involved in various organised activities. At some time they were involved in Soccer, Little Athletics, Basketball, Rugby League, Swimming Club, Cricket as well as attending Cubs and Scouts. Of course they all needed transport and adults to act as coaches, time keepers, marshals, canteen workers or any other job that needed doing. Margaret and I particularly enjoyed being involved in the local soccer organisation. We enjoyed the company of the other parents while standing on the sideline and the pie and sauce for lunch was always delicious. Every year I seemed to get roped into being either a manager or a coach of a team. We quite often had to plan the Saturday morning and seek assistance as the three boys could be playing at different venues and there were only two of us and at one stage only one car.

During this time I heard an announcement on the radio saying that there was a government inquiry into the effects of Agent Orange on the health of Vietnam Veterans. Someone was going to address members of the Vietnam Legion in Newcastle and all veterans were invited to attend. I thought that I would go and see what was happening. The speaker was a young lawyer who was particularly interested in investigating any veterans who had died and reported cases of cancer. I was able to tell him about Mal Chambers a member of our unit who when he left Vietnam was fit and healthy but died from leukaemia only weeks after returning to Australia.

The Legion was a group of Vietnam veterans who formed a social group which met monthly. I did attend off and on for about a year but the drive to the activities in Newcastle and the feeling that it was someone else's group made me lose interest.

Early in1987 I learnt from the media that a Welcome Home Parade was being organised for the Vietnam Veterans. This was something I thought I had to attend, not only for the welcome home but to see the boys once more and to find out what had happened to them over the years. It was nineteen years before at Fire Support Base Diggers Rest that I had last seen them as a group. The Welcome Home Parade was organised for 3 October in Sydney.

The day of the march had arrived and the march was ready to begin. There we were in the middle of the road milling around behind our banner meeting each other once again. The laughs and the welcomes were loud with everybody trying to talk at once. Everyone looked the same as they had in the past.

There was Greg Ayson the guy who held up the dead King Cobra for everyone to photograph. Over there was Johnny Hahn who was on Delta Gun when it was firing splintex into the attacking enemy. In the front row was Sergeant Creek who had a fright after the frog jumped on his face when he was trying to sleep and his yell gave all of us a fright. Behind me was Laurie Bird from Echo Gun who helped fire the life-saving splintex across the mortar position at Coral. At the front with the other officers was Ian Ahearn who took command when the Command Post when it was hit by mortars. Also there was Geoff Grimish who crawled with the wounded Steve Nichols to the aid post with enemy tracer bullets flying over-head. Laughing out loud was Peter Geelen who constantly had a mischievous smile on his face and always reminds me of my episode on the thunderbox. Beside me was Rick Cranna who seemed to be always happy and was good for morale.

They all seemed to be there. How great it was. I wanted to speak to all of them at the same time.

Sydney really turned it on for us with crowds lining the street and cheering. We went to Vietnam in the dark and returned to Kingsford Smith Airport with only our family to welcome us again at night time. We were unlike army units from the past who had welcome home parades on their return from active service. The organisers must have been surprised and pleased with the response by the veterans. There must have been far more than they expected as the venue chosen for the after march reunion was very crowded. They had arranged for all of the artillery veterans to meet at the same establishment. We had a brilliant time. Phone numbers and addresses were exchanged and promises to meet again were made.

During the march there were some mutterings when we passed the Town Hall. Our Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, was on the rostrum with the official party. Bob Hawke was President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions at the time we were in Vietnam. The ACTU had no interest in supporting the war effort or the troops. The waterside workers refused to load the ships which brought our necessary supplies and equipment. The army had to train their own waterside workers to load and unload cargo and get the ships ready to transport the battalions when it was their turn to go to Vietnam. More importantly to the troops the Postal Unions delayed and disrupted mail deliveries to soldiers in Vietnam. Many of the veterans still could remember Bob Hawke's actions and had not forgiven him.

Anger towards the Labor Party and some of the Unions is typified by Trevor Bryant's comments. Trevor says,' I will always remember just after Coral reading in the newspapers from home and seeing a report that the Wharfies' (Steveadore) Union had been sending financial donations to North Vietnam from Union Dues ostensibly 'to buy food'. I remember thinking 'how can they possibly police that the money is used for food? At that point I vowed I would never join a union in my life and I managed to get through my whole career without having to'.

I read in the paper the next day that the organisers had estimated that twenty five thousand veterans had marched. Just from our group a number had passed away. Mal who died from leukaemia, Les died in unfortunate circumstances, John died after a brawl in a pub and another John died in a domestic dispute. As the number of soldiers

who went to Vietnam was about fifty thousand from all over Australia the response from the veterans was excellent. The most poignant photo in the papers the next day was the one taken of the front of the columns of the veterans of 5RAR where they had the men in wheel chairs in front of their formation. These were the victims of those dreaded mines.

Later that year I was sitting in the surgery of our local doctor being told that the results of my medical tests indicated that I had Bowel Cancer. The doctor said that the tumour was as large as a golf ball. As it was Christmas Eve he had difficulty making a referral over the phone as most specialists had closed their surgeries for the Christmas break. He finally made a referral and I was to phone the specialist at the end of January after the doctors had had their annual break from work. It was a long time to wait.

Each January we rented a camping site at Hawkes Nest Beach, a lovely spot about an hour's drive north of our home at Maitland. It had an ocean beach, Port Stephens to the south, the Myall River on its west and a National Park to the north. All this was within two kilometres of its centre. We camped beside Margaret's sister's family and her husband's brother always joined us. Between us we had nine energetic boys. There was always something to keep us active. Fishing, yabbying, boating, surfing, hiking, tennis, touch football and a daily game of cricket were some of the events on our programme. The activities allowed me to keep my mind off worrying about the cancer and the coming medical treatment.

When we came home the events surrounding Australia's Bicentenary were on the news and television programmes. The tall ships entering Sydney Harbour were spectacular. In the re-enactment of the landing of Governor Philip one of my high school teachers played the role of the Governor. The end of January meant that it was time to phone the specialist and arrange an appointment.

On contacting the specialist he wanted me to have a colonoscopy in hospital and a few days later the operation to remove the tumour. It must have been hard on Margaret as the hospital was a fifty minute drive from home and she was responsible for our three sons who were now eleven years, nine years and six years old. Margaret had to care for the needs of the boys, do all the regular home tasks as well as teach at the High School and visit the hospital.

After about ten days I was sent home from hospital to recover and undergo further tests to determine the next step for the doctors. While the surgeon was removing the tumour and a section of the bowel he also extracted some lymph glands. The results from the tests were good. Some of the lymph glands had been diseased but the cancer had not reached any other vital organ. It took about ten weeks before I felt that I could carry on with life as it was prior to the operation. Of course in that time I looked at diet and lifestyle factors I could improve to prevent having more tumours. For the rest of my life I am to have a colonoscopy every three years so as to prevent any more bowel cancer. The Department of Veterans' Affairs does not acknowledge that the cancer was caused by Agent-Orange but they have paid for all of the medical expenses.

May 1988 was the 20th anniversary of the battles at Fire Support Base Coral. Our former Gun Position Officer, Ian 'Scrubber' Ahearn was now a Lieutenant Colonel in charge of the Recruit Training Battalion at Kapooka. How lucky it was for us. He had

plenty of beds, rooms and a fully staffed kitchen. For a very small fee we had the place at our disposal. So the reunion was planned for Kapooka.

While we were there we all reminisced on our experiences at recruit training and those of us who had been at Kapooka could revisit the sites of many vivid memories. Again it was good to see the boys and talk more about what had happened since we returned from Vietnam. I was not able to take full opportunity of the activities as I was still weak from my bowel operation. We were also able to have a remembrance service for James Scott and Christopher Sawtell who both died on the first night at Coral.

Ian Ahearn introduced us to a lieutenant who he said would act as the host and be available to assist and answer questions. This officer was the last Gun Position Officer for 102 Battery before it was disbanded. The Battery had been disbanded not long before and as a result the officer had been posted to Kapooka. Several of our group had gone to the ceremony when the Battery was disbanded. We were all very saddened to hear that this had happened. The pride in your army unit becomes a part of your being. It was particularly sad since the Battery had to struggle to survive more than any other Battery in Vietnam and now it was gone with the stroke of a pen.

While we were at Kapooka the officer had for sale a supply of a recently published book. The book was called 'The Battle of Coral' by Lex McAulay. We were quite surprised and flattered that someone would research and write a book on the topic. The author had been in the Australian infantry and so the book was written with an infantry perspective. He had interviewed many soldiers and tried to intertwine their accounts to form the story. For us it was captivating to read about the events that occurred almost twenty years ago to the day. Lex had written a very good account of the events that happened with the Australian forces between 12 May and 6 June 1968 in Bien Hoa Province.

I thought that a weakness of the book is that some contributors were able to overstate and some understate their efforts on the day and it was difficult and maybe impossible for the author to check. I also know that when you are dealing with memory, people's recollections can unintentionally differ greatly. I felt that another weakness is that he did not question the poor decisions by the higher ranks that occurred, particularly the ones on that first day when so many lives were lost. He also does not investigate who was responsible for those fateful decisions. The obvious question being, why did all the rifle companies walk away from FSB Coral and leave the mortars and artillery unprotected? From an artilleryman's perspective he missed the real story which was how a group of about 130 mortar-men and artillery-men with all the cards stacked against them overcame all the adversities and won the day against an enemy consisting of a battalion plus, but at a great cost.

The reunion was a big success. As we were all staying at the same place we saw a lot of each other and were able to renew old friendships. So the Welcome Home Parade was more than just a welcome home. It enabled us to organise ourselves to have reunions and be interested in the welfare of each other.

In 1989 Margaret and I planned a big adventure for the family. Margaret could speak both French and German so we thought that we would go to Europe on an extended holiday. We both applied for leave and began organising our itinerary. We were going to

rent a campervan and travel around the United Kingdom and most of Western Europe with our three children.

Our aim was to drive around in the van avoiding major cities and staying overnight at camping grounds. We were travelling around Europe in April and May, on the shoulder of the tourist season. Because it was not the peak period for tourists we sometimes had difficulty finding camping grounds that were open. When this occurred we parked the camper on the side of the road or in a parking area at a service station on a Freeway. We had our own bed, cooking facilities, shower and toilet. It took the strain off trying to find appropriate accommodation each night for the family. The experience for us all was very enjoyable, rewarding and memorable.

I had a long time interest in the battles of the Great War in which the Australians were involved. I was particularly interested in seeing Pozieres as this was the site where many Australians died in the fierce and tragic battles of the Somme. The allies had transported most of the Australian soldiers from Gallipoli to bolster the troops on the Western Front and the British Generals sent them on thoughtless charges up the Somme valley against the strongly entrenched German defences.

I did not have good maps and I was unsure of Pozieres's exact location so, after a short and unsuccessful search I decided to drive the campervan to Villers-Bretonneux instead.

After Russia withdrew from the War in early 1918 all the surplus German soldiers came over to the Western Front and provided a strong force to attack the allies. At the time of the attack the Australian forces were resting behind the front lines. The German advance was very spectacular with most of the British forces being completely routed. The German advance had reached the strategic town of Villers-Bretonneux when the Australian divisions were called upon. The heights at Villers-Bretonneux were the gateway to the city of Amien. This was a vital rail centre and was very important for the movement of men and essential supplies and equipment to keep the allies operational. Villers-Bretonneux had to be held. The Australians stopped the German advance and began pushing them back. This defence of Villers-Bretonneux was in April 1918 and by November 1918 the advance begun by Australians had pushed the enemy all the way back to the German border, forcing the Germans to surrender.

The quaint French village of Villers-Bretonneux was surrounded by picturesque rolling green hills. After a short drive, there on a hill was the cemetery dedicated to the efforts of those brave soldiers who fought there so long ago. At the back of the cemetery was an imposing wall with the names of all the Australians who did not have a known grave site. It seemed so quiet, so peaceful and yet so sad.

We realised that Australia was held in high regard by the citizens of Villers-Bretonneux. This was further highlighted when in 1995 Villers-Bretonneux was chosen as the place to hold Anzac Day services for those lost on the Western Front. After a short stay at the cemetery it was time to take the family to our next destination.

Margaret had more of an emotional contact with the area as her immediate family was affected more by the war. At the age of sixteen her grandmother married her first cousin

just before he left for the Western Front. He and his identical twin brother were killed within weeks of each other only months after their arrival. Her other grandfather joined the British army and survived the war. After the war he and his new wife emigrated from England to start a new life in Australia.

Both of my grandfathers volunteered for active service in the war but neither left Australia. One of them who was in his late thirties spent his time in the army stationed in rural NSW. For some unknown reason to the family he was discharged without serving overseas. The other grandfather, Poppy Murphy, volunteered but was rejected because he was too short.

I know that later in the war they withdrew the height requirements for new recruits. However by then my grandfather had lost his eagerness to join the conflict. There are several reasons which could have combined to change his mind. Firstly the high numbers of casualties and loss of life could have influenced his decision. Secondly he came from a very Irish family. His mother was orphaned and brought to Australia as a result of the potato famine in Ireland. So when the Easter rebellion occurred in 1916 in Ireland followed by harsh retaliation from the British soldiers he would have been reluctant to support any British cause. In addition during the war years his fourth child was born with a cleft palate. Because the baby had no way of sucking she starved to death not long after her birth. He was a very family oriented man and would have found it difficult to leave his wife while in need of comfort and support.

Margaret had a pen friend, Jochen, in central Germany who was on our 'must visit' list. They had been writing to each other for about twenty-five years. When she was studying German at university her lecturer organised German pen friends for the members of the tutorial. Jochen wanted to improve his English and Margaret her German, so the arrangement benefitted both of them. Some years after they began corresponding, he married a French girl. Now things changed and his wife Eliane and Margaret began to communicate in French.

Jochen and his family lived at Bad Neustadt/Saale. When my father was a prisoner in Germany he worked for a while on a farm in a small village called Unterelsbach. It could not be found in an atlas. He knew it was near a large town called Neustadt. There are many towns in Germany called Neustadt. In English it translates as Newtown. Margaret asked Jochen if there was a village near him called Unterelsbach. To our pleasant surprise his town of Neustadt was the one Dad spoke of and his village was not far from where Jochen lived. It was an amazing coincidence. Dad could remember the family name of the people on the farm so a visit was arranged by Jochen.

Jochen and Eliane guided us to Unterelsbach and showed us the farm house. We were given a very warm welcome and invited to stay the night. It was almost like meeting a long lost member of the family. We saw the barn with the steers tied up with rings through their noses, the extra block of land in the village for the tractors and poultry and their plot for growing the vegetables on the edge of the small Elsbach River. We did not though go out to their fields where they grew their larger crops.

The owner of the house, Hedwig, was the daughter who was in her late teens when Dad was there. Now she was forty years older and her children had left home. She had

married one of the soldiers who used to guard the Australians. They even showed us a wooden rack Dad had made to hang sausages while they cured. We exchanged gifts and photographs were taken. The lady next door made a visit as she could remember Dad. Another younger lady with her husband and children came to visit. She was a daughter born from a relationship between one of the Australians and a girl in the village. Apparently the family of the girl was victimised by the villagers because of this liaison. Even though she was the daughter of an Australian we were probably the first Australians she had met.

The Australian prisoners were allotted to help German families in need. In the war years Hedwig's mother ran the farm as her husband was incapacitated in some way and their only son was on the Russian Front. Dad thought that the father may have suffered from shell shock during the First World War. The Australians were locked in a house during the night and sent to various places to work during the day. Life for them was not easy but they were able to scrounge extra food and the farmers wanted them to stay fit and healthy to continue working.

Dad was told by a British prisoner that sergeants did not have to work for the Germans, so Dad refused to work. It seemed a very brave or maybe silly act as he could be going to a worse situation. He was taken from the village to the nearest walled town with a tower where he could be locked up. On the long walk he was accompanied by a guard riding a bike with a rifle hanging over his shoulder. Hedwig's family were very upset because they did not know if and when Dad would be replaced. Dad was taken to Stalag XIIIC at Hammelburg, the prison camp made famous by the TV comedy series called Hogans' Heroes. The program in many ways trivialised the real treatment, conditions and difficulties the prisoners experienced.

Dad would talk about his four years as a prisoner but only on the story level and not the emotional level. It must have been very depressing with the loss of basic rights and not knowing what the outcome of the war would be or whether he would ever be released. I do know the severe winters were a major factor in their day to day struggle. The snow was many feet deep and their wooden huts provided only rudimentary protection from the freezing winter elements. Dad spoke of an incident when a couple of guards handcuffed a prisoner outside a tavern while they went in to sit by the fire and have a drink. When the guards came out of the tavern they found that the prisoner had frozen to death.

Lack of food was another factor. The Germans gave prisoners a very limited amount of food. This was partly because the German people were suffering as well. The constant bombing of German cities and the flow of refugees coming from the Russian Front meant that there was a great demand for the necessities of life. Prisoners of war would have been at the bottom of the pecking order. The Germans were a signatory to the Geneva Convention which meant that they allowed the Red Cross to deliver mail and food packages. These food packages allowed the prisoners to cope. In the next enclosure were the Russian prisoners who received no Red Cross parcels and where the dead were constantly removed each day in wheel barrows.

When the Canadians had a practice invasion of Continental Europe in 1942 with the attack on Dieppe in France they handcuffed some prisoners. So the Germans responded

by handcuffing some of their prisoners and so the British handcuffed more prisoners so the Germans handcuffed more, and so it went on. Finally thousands were handcuffed on both sides. Dad was handcuffed for about a year. It made life very difficult especially with toileting and eating. It became known as the shackling crisis and it lasted from November 1942 to November 1943. The prisoners with all their ingenuity could remove the shackles when the guards were absent.

At one time a guard found my father's diary in which he had written some uncomplimentary remarks about Adolph Hitler. The guards came to arrest him and take him for interrogation. He said his farewells to his mates as he did not know what his fate would be. The Germans thought that Dad could have had some sort of political role in the camp. After the interrogation he was placed in an underground metal box for several weeks. Finally they allowed him to return to the huts with the other prisoners.

Towards the end of the war German forces were retreating on both fronts. As the Germans saw the prisoners as a bargaining chip they started marching them away from the two war fronts. Dad and the other prisoners in his camp had a long walk from Hammelburg to Regensburg in the south of Germany before they were released by the American Forces. The marches were very treacherous as the guards were on edge, people were extremely weak and tired and the allied bombing program did not know the exact location of the columns of marchers.

Visiting the German farm and staying the night at Unterelsbach proved to be the highlight of our overseas trip. We were able to tell Hedwig and her neighbours that Dad had survived the war, returned to Australia and lived a contented and successful life. On the other hand, we were able to report back to Dad that people in the village still remembered him with some regard and have recovered from those turbulent times in Europe.

One disappointment in the trip was the treatment given to Australian tourist entering Britain as compared to some Europeans. On entry to Britain we had to get in a long line and be quizzed by immigration personnel while Germans and Italians for example could enter the country freely. When we crossed the channel to come back to England our van was pulled over and we were interrogated about what we were doing and what our intentions were. When you think about what our grandparent's and parent's generation had done for Britain it just did not seem right.

On our return life at home was still busy with the boys involved in various activities so my mind was full of the here and now. We both were still going to work. I had just been given a promotion which meant that I did less counselling but had to supervise other counsellors with more travelling and more meetings. After school the children seemed to have an activity every day which required one or both parents to accompany them.

It did not seem long and the boys were into the job hunting, money earning, driver's licences, driving cars, introduction to alcohol and girlfriend stage. Each one of these was a challenging drama which every family has to experience. It was a worrying stage but the family went through it mostly unscathed.

On one occasion our eldest borrowed our car which we had only bought two weeks

prior. He was driving through a green light at an intersection when he crashed into an approaching car which turned in front of him. Our car was a right-off but thankfully he was fine. The next accident happened when number two son borrowed our car to drive to town. He decided to take a diversion via the scenic route. He was driving along a country road with a sharp bend which he failed to navigate. Farmer Brown was surprised to see his barbed wire fence down and an unknown car in the paddock with his cattle. The farmer towed him out with the tractor and repaired his fence with a pair of pliers. Every panel on the car was whipped by the barbed wire so I again had to contact the Insurance Company. Number three son was driving his girlfriend's parent's car when he had his accident. The car was more powerful than what he was use to so when he tried to steer around a sharp bend on a slippery wet road, the car broad-sided into several parked cars before he regained control. This time I had to visit the owners of the car and make amends.

The next stage was the living away or living at home stage. Sometimes we had one living at home at other times two and sometimes all three. It depended on whether any were on an overseas working holiday, living with girlfriends, moving away for work or studying in another city. Finally they were all away and settled in their vocations with their wife or fiancée.

The Third Reich

ANZAC DAY TRADITION

In the late 1990s a small group of veterans from 102 Battery began meeting regularly each Anzac Day in Sydney. Others joined: a couple came from the Newcastle area, some from the Central Coast, Geoff Knox came from Melbourne, Trevor Bryant from Adelaide and of course there were some from Sydney. The tradition has continued to the present time. We met in Hunter Street to meet and greet and had a couple of drinks. Then we took a short walk to assemble behind our banner and continue the pleasantries with all the others.

After the march Geoff 'Grimo' Grimish always gave the school cadets carrying the banner a few dollars for their efforts. We then waited to give a special cheer and clap for the following 1RAR boys with whom we had shared so many experiences. Then we skirted around where the march ends in Elizabeth Street and assembled in a pub in Park Street. After a few drinks and more conversation we made our way down George Street to the Quay hoping to get a bite of food at some point. We then linked up with our partners and wives before going to the Fortunes of War Hotel to hear a Scottish Pipe Band play. Then we walked to a restaurant at the Rocks for dinner. The annual tradition with some minor changes has continued religiously ever since.

On one occasion we thought that we would have dinner at an Italian restaurant which had a large outdoor area. When we approached the entrance Geoff Knox told the employee that we had a booking for twelve. In fact we had not made a booking at all. We were guided over to a large table, given a menu and told to sit down. A short time later the waiter brought a young lady over to sit at the end of our table. We tried to give her a drink and make her feel comfortable but she was unsettled and kept looking around the restaurant. Then she stood up and walked over to some people who had just entered the restaurant. Next thing the waiters were hurriedly moving tables and chairs to arrange a setting for twelve. Geoff had obviously stolen their booking.

Sadly Geoff Knox passed away a couple of years ago. Grimo owns a few race horses so he named one Gunner Knox in his honour. It usually races at Brisbane winning some but preferring to come either second or run with the pack. If I know he is racing I always put a few dollars on him and think of both the Geoffs. Some other horses Grimo owns are Shellscrape, Red Tracer, Green Tracer, Onerar, Coral Salute and Absent Friends. As you can see most of the horse names have a theme based on our experiences in 1968.

During a lunch break in 2004 I was walking along a hallway in a school when I heard students making a loud disturbance down a covered stairwell. The students were obviously out of bounds and up to some mischief. Generally in schools I kept away from disciplining the students as they might visit my office in the future as a client. My role in the school was to be supportive and not critical of students. However, I still had to provide duty of care for the students and stairwells could be a dangerous area for playing. I looked down the stairs and saw nothing as the disturbance was around the bend in the stairwell.

When I walked down and around the bend I saw a couple of boys near the bottom of the stairs trying to climb the wall by moving their feet up one wall and their hands up the other. They were being urged on by others standing at the bottom of the stairs. As it was lunch time there was added loud noises and activity created by students who were running and yelling through a passage way between two playgrounds. I told the boys to get down off the wall and go to the play area.

The stairwell was only about a metre wide so an adult standing in the centre blocked the staircase. As the boys moved away with my concentration focussed on them a girl shot up the staircase straight towards me. I was only about four steps from the bottom of the stairs so there was not much time to react. My hands went out and grabbed her on the shoulders which made her stop right in front of me. Had I not stopped her we both would have been a tangled mess. I asked her where she was going. She said she was going to get her medication. In the confusion I did not realise that all medications were issued down at the other end of the building. So I let her go up the stairs.

The event was such a shock to me I went back to my office and sat at my desk with my head in my hands. Then there was a knock at the door. It was the girl and she said that I had hurt her and that she had a bruise. I did not look for bruises but told her that if I hurt her I was sorry. I knew the girl and was aware that she used every excuse to miss out on doing school work and would probably say to her teacher she could not write because of her sore arm.

I felt like quitting work there on the spot. The next morning when I arrived at the school there was a police car at the school. I went to my office not knowing what to expect. I knew I had not done anything wrong but an investigation would have been embarrassing, and in schools, rumours and gossip spread quickly whether true or not. The police were there for some other matter. From then on I was not content at work and I did not like those dreaded stairwells. My body said to stop work but my mind said to continue.

It was not long after this that I finished my work with the Education Department. I had been with them for nearly forty years and the body said it was time to stop. It was sad to leave for there were lots of fond memories. It was time to get involved with other activities.

Soon after I received a letter from the department of Veteran's Affairs inviting me to attend a Healthy Heart Programme. It was to be held at our local gymnasium with about fifteen other veterans. When I arrived at the course I recognised only one of the other attendees as I had virtually no involvement with any local veterans in my thirty years of living at Maitland.

Little did I know at the time that my invitation by DVA to join the programme would be instrumental in me meeting and befriending many local veterans and as a consequence introducing me to some local veteran's organisations. These new friendships and service organisations would become a very important part of my life.

The instructor was very knowledgeable and the course covered many aspects of healthy living and general all round fitness. We attended the gym twice a week and enjoyed doing the exercise programme and the camaraderie that developed within the group. Unfortunately the course only went for a limited amount of time.

However we gained so much from having improved fitness, less injury problems and the personal interaction that we arranged to continue going to the gym. I found that I was having fewer back problems and felt better within myself while participating in and continuing the gym programme.

A few years earlier Bob Costello had been instrumental in forming a 12th Field Regiment (Vietnam) Association. When in Vietnam 102 Field Battery and 104 Field Battery and Headquarter Battery together with the Royal New Zealand Artillery's 161 Field Battery formed the 12th Field Regiment. The Regiment did do another tour of Vietnam but on that tour 102 Battery was replaced by 'A' Battery. Through this organisation we have had many great reunions in different parts of Australia.

Leonie Jones made contact through our Association with the aim of building a relationship with the members and to get our co-operation for her studies. Leonie Jones, an academic from the University of Southern Queensland became interested in the Battles at Coral and in particular the actions of our Battery. She was a lecturer in Media and Cinema Studies within the School of Creative Arts at the University. She had done prior studies on the experiences of soldiers in battles in the Second World War and in particular those involved in the actions at Milne Bay in New Guinea.

As the fortieth anniversary of Coral was approaching someone suggested to her that it was an opportunity to research the actions at Coral with the 1 RAR veterans. Amongst those she first interviewed, was Ian Ryan a veteran from 102 Field Battery. She was so much taken by Ian's story that she wanted to include the actions of 102 Battery at Coral in her study.

She asked for volunteers from the veterans of the Battery to be interviewed to produce a living record of their actual experiences. I thought about being interviewed but decided against it as she was probably going to base her story on what the senior officers said. She gathered all the research materials and interviews to produce a DVD called 'They'll come looking for you'. The title is from a warning statement that an American Officer gave to an Australian Officer when he knew that the Australians were going into that part of Bien Hoa. The American obviously knew that FSB Coral was in an area of high enemy activity and that the North Vietnamese would come after us. This is more evidence that our senior officers should have known about the type of reception we were going to receive at FSB Coral. It also reinforces the stupidity of leaving our Battery in that territory with limited defences and no infantry support.

She had hoped to have it presented on television but to date she has not been successful. Because Coral was situated well away from our base at Nui Dat and travelling to it was difficult and dangerous, journalists at the time had no direct involvement in reporting it.

In a paragraph on the back of the DVD she has written.

'It's a forgotten battle from a forgotten war, yet the battle of Fire Support Base Coral is down in history as singularly the biggest and bloodiest battle fought by Australians in Vietnam. It lasted 26 days, withstood 2 major frontal attacks and 57 separate fire fights… Long Tan lasted four hours.'

She had genuinely tried to report and record the interviews as history remembered by the veterans. I did notice on the back of the DVD she mentions that two hundred and fifty Australian soldiers were present on the first night at Coral. There are obviously soldiers who she has incorrectly included. It seems that she has included the members of the Support Company who were nearby but not at our position. According to my

generous estimates there were only about a hundred and thirty from the mortars and artillery.

We were very grateful for the assistance on the first attack of the Support Company which included the anti-tank unit. However there were lots of units including the Kiwi 161 Battery, the Cobra attack helicopters and Snoopy with its cascade of fire power which also assisted that night. They all contributed to our success. Some diagrams in books and articles have mistakenly placed some units closer to the action than what was the case. I was positioned at the south eastern section of our position and can remember seeing those unknown Australians in the distance further along the road digging their sleeping holes.

On the night of the attack I could have walked to the mortar men's position, 131 Divisional Locating Battery's position or Headquarter Battery's position because they were all beside us. I could not however of walked safely to the Support Company's position as it was some distance away and obviously not with the mortars or artillery.

At an army position it is the highest ranking officer who is in charge of the defences. At FSB Coral on the first night the highest ranked officer was a major in Headquarter Battery. He was responsible for our defences. Had the Support Company been with us their higher ranked officers would have taken responsibility for the defences. They did not take responsibility for our defences because they were not at our position.

It was decided to have a large celebration for the fortieth anniversary of the battles for FSB Coral and Balmoral. In Canberra a committee of veterans, serving soldiers and government representatives was formed to organise the special occasion. It was humbling to think that the authorities thought it worthy of so much time and effort.

On the 12 May 2008 at 7pm the veterans who had served at Fire Support Bases Coral and Balmoral, and their partners were invited to a Cocktail Party in the Great Hall of Parliament House, Canberra. It was an honour to be invited as guests of the Government to such a prestigious place. We were well catered for as the food and drinks kept coming. There were hundreds of people present and the stewards made a marvellous effort attending to everyone.

Then it was time for the formal part of the evening. The Honourable Kevin Rudd MP, Prime Minister of Australia gave a welcoming speech and expressed gratitude for our service and for those who had given the ultimate sacrifice. Brendan Nelson the Leader of the Opposition followed, giving a splendid speech which gained universal approval.

The following speakers were to be the two battalion commanders at the time, Lieutenant Colonel Phillip Bennett to speak on FSB Coral and Lieutenant Colonel Jim Shelton to speak about FSB Balmoral. We were expecting Bennett to mention and praise the efforts of 1RAR and give a summary of the events at FSB Coral. However the artillery men were also expecting Bennett to mention that on the first night the artillery and mortar personnel withstood and repulsed an enemy attack of a battalion plus without their defences established and without any protective infantry.

Unbelievably Bennett did not mention 102 Battery or artillery at all. It almost sounds

impossible to talk about FSB Coral and not mention 102 Battery or at least 12th Field Regiment. Yet Bennett chose not to give us a mention. The group of ex-artillery men I was with were annoyed and getting angry as he had completely ignored the efforts by the defenders on the first night. It was as if it had not happened. When Shelton spoke he did mention 102 Battery, thanking us for our quick and accurate support on the nights of their attacks. At his mention of the artillery there was a little cheer in our area just as much a message of opposition to Bennett as well as appreciation to Shelton. I was extremely disappointed and felt very flat after Bennett's presentation. It seemed to be a deliberate denial and fabrication of the events that happened on the 12 and 13 May 1968 and an oversight of our efforts during the second attack.

The next day a Memorial Service was organised for all on Anzac Parade in front of the Vietnam Memorial. Anzac Parade is the wide scenic avenue which leads to the Australian War Memorial. The road was closed and furniture was set out for the hundreds of assembled veterans, guests and dignitaries. The site in front of the Vietnam Memorial and within view of the War Memorial seemed very appropriate and dignified. There were many important dignitaries representing the Government and the Army. Towards the end of the ceremony some young soldiers representing different corps marched along the road and were halted in front of the rostrum. Later trucks drove past pulling the current artillery gun with gunners sitting in the back of the trucks. It brought back memories of those times so long ago. They looked very young and fit. We must have looked like that forty years ago.

At the ceremony's completion the artillery veterans and partners walked up the hill past many other memorials in Anzac Parade on the way to the Australian War Memorial. One of these memorials was one donated by the Greek Government to commemorate the sacrifices of the Australian Forces which fought in the defence of Greece in the Second World War. On arrival there was a short 12th Field Regiment Plaque Dedication ceremony. All over the lawn in that area were plaques dedicated to many units from many theatres of war where Australians were involved. Now there was a plaque for our 12th Field Regiment.

Inside the Australian War Memorial they had constructed a permanent display incorporating our Foxtrot gun, the gun that was over-run and captured by the enemy on the first night at Coral. There was a video running with Ian Ahearn giving a run- down of the events with other commentators adding to the story. In front of the gun was a photo on display of the crew of Delta Gun posing, manning a machine gun and wearing steel helmets. In the photo was a young Johnny Hahn and now he had brought along his grandchildren to see it. Over in front of the gun on display having their photo taken were four of the original crew who manned it on that never to be forgotten day in May 1968. It was difficult to describe the emotions to think that our unit had a display in such a revered and honoured place.

The next morning we were taken with our wives and partners to Duntroon Military College. From there we went by bus up a narrow steep road to the Mount Pleasant Artillery Memorial. It was set high on a hill with sweeping views of the surrounding country side. This was a ceremony only for the artillery veterans of HQ, 102 and 131 Divisional Locating Batteries who were at FSB Coral. Present were the Governor General, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, high ranking army personnel, family members of those who died in Vietnam and the veterans and their partners.

First on the programme was the saying of The Ode to the Fallen, followed by the playing of the Last Post and then the Firing of the Minute Gun and a minute's silence for Gunners Christopher Sawtell and Ian Scott.

Then Ian Ahearn began his speech by saying 'This is our day. This is the day of the Gunners!' to which there was immediate applause. He followed by saying all the things that Bennett didn't say when we were in The Great Hall two days earlier. Ian was in the middle of the action at Coral and he told the story as it happened all those years ago. His address brought back many memories and feelings which caused a few damp eyes among the veterans.

The most amazing part of the ceremony for the ex-members of 102 Battery was the conferring of the honour title "Coral' to the battery in recognition of its conduct during the Battle of Coral in South Vietnam between 12 May and 6 June 1968. The Governor General, His Excellency Major General, P. M Jeffery, read out the reasons for the honour.

The second paragraph begins:

'The gun position defence was a close quarter infantry-style battle fought by Gunners and Mortarmen to defeat a conventional North Vietnamese Battalion (plus) assault.'

The second last Paragraph says:

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

The Battery now and in perpetuity was to be known as 102nd (Coral) Field Battery. This was the first ever that an Honour Title was given to an Australian unit. It was indeed a privilege for us to see a Commanding Officer accept such a prestigious award on behalf of the Battery. However, the Battery had been disbanded in 1987. Plans were now made to re-establish the Battery and this was accomplished in 2011 with its base in Adelaide.

Even though the anniversary celebrations were extremely successful I was still very upset with the lack of recognition given by Bennett to the defenders on the first night at Coral. While in Canberra I went to speak to Vic Page from HQ Battery who was in a wheel chair as a result of his wounds received at Coral. When I began to speak I became emotional and could not continue. I guess it was a terrible reminder of how good luck and bad luck in war can result in a range from tragic to euphoric consequences. All of us at Coral went so close to suffering tragic consequences.

The expression of excessive emotion happened again a few times at home. My emotions seemed to be more on the surface, more delicate and more easily exposed. Programmes on television which either finished with a happy or a sad ending elicited emotions which I had not before experienced.

I spoke to Bob Costello, a former crew member of Charlie gun, who I knew had experienced similar behaviours. He suggested that I seek an appointment with the

Vietnam Veterans' Association at Wallsend in Newcastle. There I spoke to a counsellor and again when mentioning my experiences at Coral I became emotional. He suggested that I may have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and that I should arrange to see a Psychiatrist. I didn't really think that it warranted seeing a Psychiatrist but I did want things to improve.

I arranged to see my local GP to get a referral and then made an appointment to see a Psychiatrist. I was not sure of what effects it would have on me so I asked Margaret to come and drive me home. There was a shopping complex nearby so Margaret shopped while I went to the appointment.

I did not know what to expect when I saw the Psychiatrist. He introduced himself as Doug. He was about my vintage and made me feel at ease. He provided two seats in two different locations and I was not sure if chair selection was part of the diagnosis. When asked later about the chairs he said that they had nothing to do with any diagnosis. He listened and tried to reassure me by making thoughtful comments.

I talked about the difficulties of adjusting back into civilian life with the complexities and opposition to the Vietnam War. Then I talked about the problems with the Battery's movement to Coral, Alpha gun's burning ammunition bay, the intensity of the fire fight, not knowing if we had infantry support, seeing our dead and wounded and the burying of the dead enemy. In our discussion he mentioned Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and also mentioned survivor guilt, alienation and the army making soldiers out of civilians but not able to reverse the process. At the end of the allotted time he wrote out a script for some medication. Time was up so another appointment was made.

I had a couple of weeks to think about what I could say at my next appointment. I thought that I would mention the second attack when I was in the Command Post. There were lots of incidents to raise, the mortars hitting the Command Post, the feeling of isolation with no officer and no tannoy, not knowing what was happening on the surface, the loud continuous sounds of war, Hicks running in with blood streaming down his head, waiting for a possible hand grenade or burst of machine gun fire through the entrance, the dilemma caused by being told to point my loaded rifle at the entrance and fire at any enemy if they appeared and then the dramatic entry of Sgt Elgar with me making a quick decision on whether to fire or not.

I thought that I could also discuss the situation at school when the girl raced at me while I was standing on the stairs. It was an incident which did unduly upset me and I thought it was worth discussing. As I thought more about the incident on the stairs I could see an uncanny similarity between it and the incident in the Command Post when I had the loaded rifle pointing at the entrance.

On both occasions I was in a cave-like room with one entrance in front of me. The Command Post was underground with only one entrance and the stair-well was covered in and I was standing at the bottom with a wall at the back where the stairs turned. In both incidents, there were stairs, I was focussed on what was happening in front, I was expected to make a split second decision and a person came running at me. Also in both situations there was chaos all around, at school it was the children running and screaming as they ran from one play area to another across the bottom of the stairs

and at the Command Post it was just everything with the Battery receiving incoming mortars and rockets, the continual noise of small arms and the disruption within the Command Post.

It was just so uncanny. I was very amazed again at the similarities in the two stories as I explained it to Doug. He said that sometimes it's the body and not the conscious brain that can recall a prior event. Even though I had not linked the two events he was suggesting that my unconscious mind had. He said much more but I was too absorbed in my thoughts to hear or digest what he was saying.

In one of the discussions with Doug I said that I wished I could make an address to people to inform them of the events at Coral. It is a story of which many veterans and people are unaware. It is something that could be appropriate on a Vietnam Veteran's Day. However I did not trust myself or be confident enough to talk about it. He suggested that maybe the next best thing was to write the story. Writing the story could also have some therapeutic effect. That is why I began writing these memoirs.

After a while I stopped seeing Doug and weaned myself off the medication as it was making me tired through the day. I found that quite often I wanted to have a rest and a lie down in the afternoon.

An opportunity came for another trip overseas. It was 2010 and Margaret and I were invited to Margaret's niece's wedding in a large country manor house in Somerset, England. We hired a car from Gatwick and drove west from London guided by the car's GPS which caused many humorous, confusing and frustrating moments. I think it took us the scenic route as we passed many white chalk horses and men displayed on the hilltops, many little villages and narrow roads with lots of breath taking blind corners.

After the wedding we planned to a tour of France and Turkey. Both tours were extremely enjoyable but the Turkish tour had many surprises. The Grand Bazaar of Istanbul, the bridge connecting Europe to Asia, the Dancing Dervishes, the ancient cave dwellings of Cappadocia and the history and ruins of Ephesus and Troy all held us spell-bound. However, the highlight for us was the visit to the shores at Gallipoli.

Margaret and I were the only Australians on the bus so I asked the Tour Guide if I could say a few words about the significance of Gallipoli to Australians. I told them that in 1915 we had a population of less than five million and with the loss of eight thousand dead at Gallipoli and a total of sixty thousand for the war every village and family was affected by loss in some way. Everyone had a close friend, neighbour, or relative who died in the Great War.

In every town and city in Australia people gather at a memorial site at dawn on the 26 April, the anniversary of the landing at Anzac Cove, and take part in a solemn ceremony. A soldier brought home some seeds from the pine tree at a place to be called Lone Pine and propagated the seeds. The progeny are now planted at many memorials and other relevant sites to signify the sacrifices made. After the Great War the ceremony was the beginning of a day of mourning but nowadays it is more a day of remembrance.

My talk was well accepted and appreciated as many of the other tourists came over

to us and made positive comments, wanting to know more. At Lone Pine, a small site where over a thousand Australian lives were lost we were asked by others on the bus to be included in photographs.

The beach at Anzac Cove seemed so small and insignificant with a short beach and around the edge was a steep embankment with low but thick vegetation. In the dark this vegetation would have been so difficult for the attacking soldiers to penetrate. The vegetation was also hiding the many steep ravines and gullies the Australians and New Zealander soldiers had to negotiate. Above the position looking down on the beach was Chunak Bair. It was a very imposing hill looking like a giant rock sentinel dominating the landscape. From this dominating hill the Turkish soldiers would have been able to observe and fire on the attacking forces.

The terrain at the cove where the Anzacs were landed at Gallipoli was such that it was impossible for the attacking force to spread out. Thus they were confined and their failure was inevitable.

There were no obvious indications that this was where thousands of Australians had lived and died for eight months back in 1915. Apart from a couple of scattered small cemeteries and monuments, nature had reclaimed the trenches, command posts, and shell craters. Margaret and I were at the place we had heard so much about at school, read about in newspapers and seen on television. It was hard to believe that we were at that famous place. We felt like pilgrims at a sacred site.

On our return from overseas I decided to join the local RSL Sub-Branch. I had met and known some of the members through participation in the gym programme. I had enjoyed their company very much so it seemed the obvious thing to do. The Sub-Branch is not to be confused with a licensed club. We have a formal meeting once a month in a local community hall. We are non- political and are involved in such matters as welfare issues concerning ex-service men and the remembrance of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice. We organise a table at our local shopping centre to sell pins and badges for Anzac Day and red poppies on Remembrance Day. For Legacy we raise money by cooking on a barbeque and selling sausage sandwiches outside the Bunnings Hardware Store. A current ambitious project for all the local RSL clubs and schools is to raise money along with a lot of community and business support to send a group of local school students and teachers to Gallipoli for the centenary celebrations in April 2015. All the activities are satisfying with a bit of fun and a sense of belonging to a team.

At one of the RSL meetings I raised the issue of Dale Abbott from 1RAR who was killed in action at Coral. In 1973 when the Australian War Memorial contacted the family checking on the spelling of his name, et cetera, the family objected to his name being placed on the Wall of Remembrance. Inexplicably the War Memorial Council gave in to the family's wishes. As ex-members of 1RAR knew nothing of these communications they were unable to get involved.

More recently ex-members of 1RAR campaigned to get Dale's name inscribed on the Wall. They felt strongly that the War Memorial Council did not have the right to reject the name of a person who had sacrificed their life for Australia on personal or political

grounds. I raised the matter at our local RSL Branch and it planned to send a letter to the War Memorial Council supporting the ex 1RAR efforts to place Dale's name rightfully on the wall. Before the letter was mailed we heard that the efforts of Dale's mates in 1RAR have been successful as the War Memorial Council has relented and agreed to add Dale's name to the Wall of Remembrance. The controversy of Dale's name being on the Wall of Remembrance further demonstrates the divisions within families and society that was caused by conscription and Australia's involvement the Vietnam War.

Seeing I had enjoyed participating with the ex-servicemen in the RSL and that many of the guys were also members of the Maitland Branch of the Vietnam Legion I also decided to join it. This organisation is not to be confused with the Vietnam Veterans Association. The Legion is non-political and is purely an organisation established as a social and recreational club for Vietnam Veterans. Members are mainly involved in regular golf days with an annual championship and fishing excursions. These two activities do not interest me much but I have this year co-ordinated a successful raffle, raising about $1000, and represented them on a committee that organises coach trips and tours for the various veteran organisations in Maitland.

The Vietnam Legion planned to have a fishing trip for four nights on Lake Macquarie just south of Newcastle. I decided to go for one night and share a tent with Steve Hanson who while in Vietnam was in the Royal Australian Engineers repairing and maintaining motors on small boats used on occasions by the infantry. The Legion had a small tinny named HMAS Nui Dat which they were selling and Steve wanted to try it before he purchased it. The tent was an igloo type and Steve had not erected it in years. They say igloo tents are easy to erect. However on this occasion that was not the case. After consulting a few people, getting some help and borrowing extra parts it was finally erected. Maybe the next time we will have more success.

The guys arrived with all sorts of accommodation. Some had up-market caravans with a matching fishing launch, some had smaller caravans with tinny to match, and some slept in cars, trailers and tents. Then there was the large covered communal area with tables, chairs, cooking equipment, and fire place.

It was time to launch HMAS Nui Dat. I left the starting of the engine for Steve as he should know a lot about boat engines and I knew very little. We launched the boat successfully but the engine would not start. Some of the others floated over to give expert advice but it still would not start. Steve had been standing in waist high water and his arm was getting sore from pulling the starter cord. He was just about to admit defeat when someone asked if the fuel was turned on. What a difference some petrol makes. HMAS Nui Dat went like a dream. No fish were caught as I had it on good authority that the fish don't bite when the wind changes to the south. Fishermen always have an excuse for failure. However, some unfortunate blue swimmer crabs got tangled in the traps and they were cooked to perfection when the boats returned to shore.

That evening we sat at a long table under the shelter to have pre-dinner drinks followed by the cooking and eating of dinner. There at one end was Bob Foot, ex 1RAR, bragging about his cooking efforts while eating the burnt snags he had just cooked. Peter Margetts, ex 4RAR was stoking up the fire and telling the story of how he caught some big fish at Forster last week. The longer his story went the bigger the fish grew..

Meanwhile, down at the other end of the table Taffy another from the Engineering Corps was more interested in pouring or was it spilling wine into some glasses. They all kept reminding Steve how he should turn the petrol on before attempting to start the boat's engine. Tony Mulquiney ex 3RAR loves cooking and loves eating so he sat down to a gourmet plate of food with the appropriate wine to complement the dish. Eric Johnson who was with 4RAR on their second tour kept telling jokes to anyone who would listen. Garth, a stoker from HMAS Something or Other, was asking without success about his missing lamb chop which he left on the barbeque plate.

In amongst the conversation were comments about our experiences in Vietnam so long ago yet so fresh in our minds. I enjoyed my meal but it was secondary to the banter, the sledging, the tall tales, the 'good' advice and the camaraderie that ensued.

A reunion for the 12th Field Regiment (Vietnam) Association was arranged for Anzac Day in 2012 at Adelaide. When Margaret and I arrived at the motel in Adelaide we bumped into Greg Ayson and his wife in the reception area. They were going into the dining area and we were checking-in. We told them that we would join them as soon as we had settled into our room. We returned and began enjoying their company over a nice meal and a few drinks. A little later we were joined by Blackie and his wife who had travelled from Western Australia. Blackie had been and I imagine still is a mischievous rogue. In Vietnam he was a radio operator with Captain Ernie Jacobs who was one of our Forward Observers. After a couple of drinks Greg got him telling us some of his stories and yarns about his adventures in Vietnam. Country boys seem to be so much better at telling yarns. One of his stories went like this:

Blackie was sleeping in his tent when Captain Jacobs shook him:

Jacobs: Wake up Blackie. I have a job for you.
Blackie: Go away I'm sleeping.
Jacobs: I want you to return the Land Rover to Major Murtagh but don't let him see you.
Blackie: Er what?
Jacobs: If you do this I will forget about all the charges you have pending. No more charges.
Blackie: Oh alright.

Blackie was approaching Major Murtagh's tent so he decided to turn off the engine, pull on the hand brake and jump out while the car was moving. The car nearly crashed into the tent but stopped in time. As Blackie was making his get a way he heard a voice.

Murtagh: Hey soldier stop!

Blackie kept walking, then.

Muragh: Hey Gunner Black, stop!

Blackie stopped and went back to the Major.

Muragh: Gunner Black, were you driving this car?

Blackie: No sir!
Muragh: Place your hand here on the motor. Does it feel warm?
Blackie: Yes sir!
Muragh: Well can you see anyone else around here that could have driven the car?

At that Blackie looked around hoping to see someone else who he could blame.

Blackie: No sir!
Murtagh: The last time I saw my car Captain Jacobs was driving it.
Blackie: Well sir Captain Jacobs said that he would let me off my charges if I returned the Land Rover.
Muragh: Is that right? Well you tell Captain Jacobs that he is now on a charge.

With that Blackie returned to his tent and tried to sleep again. Next thing Captain Jacobs gave him a shake.

Jacobs: How did you go Blackie?
Blackie: Excellent sir, I've returned the vehicle, I'm off all my charges and guess what you're on one. Things couldn't be better.

We had a laugh and Blackie began his next yarn. That is what reunions should be about.

Leonie Jones came to the reunion and wanted to interview a few more veterans including Trevor who had been with me in the Command Post on the second attack. Trevor said that he was too busy with organising the reunion and suggested that she interview me.

I was not keen on doing the interview but as she was our guest and that she had asked me personally I thought it best to agree. I thought that I would make an accurate contribution to the information on what happened at Coral.

I went to her room with Margaret and Leonie took a while to set up the lighting and the camera. For her first question she asked what I did in Vietnam. Immediately a picture of Trevor and me working in the Command Post on the night of the second attack flashed into my mind. I just choked up and could not talk. It was the situation when the Command Post was hit by mortars knocking out the tannoy and some of the radio network and I was told to cock my rifle and aim it at anyone who came through the entrance. The interview continued with some pauses. At the end of the interview I was surprised at how emotional I became. From my point of view I did not feel that the interview was a success.

On my return home to Maitland I made an appointment to see Doug again so that I could tell him what had happened in the interview in Adelaide. I also told him the reason why I had stopped taking the medication. Then I asked him if he could prescribe a medication which I did not need to administer daily but rather to take when I thought that it would be warranted.

The committee on which I represent the Legion organised a three day coach trip to Canberra to visit the Australian War Memorial and other sites that the group wished to see. We drove down by bus and stayed the first night in our motel at Queanbeyan.

The next morning before breakfast I swallowed the pill that Doug had prescribed in preparation for what I was planning to do on the bus. After breakfast Margaret and I joined the others in the bus which was to take us to the Australian War Memorial. I thought that this would be an opportunity for me to speak about our Foxtrot Gun in the Memorial and give the story a Lower Hunter Valley connection. I moved down to the front of the bus and asked the driver if I could speak on his microphone.

Then I told the passengers about the gun displayed in the Memorial and that on the attack when the gun was captured by the enemy there were two local boys present, Errol Bailey from Kurri with the mortars and Russell Ruygrok from Maitland with the artillery. Errol was a school teacher called up for National Service and his wife was expecting their first child. Russell had joined the army as an apprentice motor mechanic and his parents operated the Dutch Chocolate Cake Shop which was in the centre of Maitland. On the morning of the attack Errol did not survive. Russell on the other hand, did survive and on his return to Australia opened a car mechanic business. Then I suggested that they may think of those two local boys when they saw the display. I felt very pleased with myself as I had talked about it in public with my emotions controlled. Margaret put her hand on mine and the bus took us to the memorial.

My father had asked me to speak about my Vietnam experiences at his RSL not long after I came home but I could not do it. Then my School Principal asked me to speak at an Anzac Day Dinner in Kiama but I side stepped it and spoke about something else. Leonie Jones wanted me to speak to her about my experiences at Coral but it was not a success. However in the bus I had spoken in public with success, it was short but it went fine. Things hopefully must be improving.

Being called up for National Service has guided the direction of my life down a different track. Instead of being a school teacher in some isolated town in New South Wales I spent two years with thousands of other guys my age confronting the experiences and challenges which the army offered.

On the completion of my army service I gained a teaching appointment in Sydney. This meant that I was able to take advantage of the offer from the Department of Veterans' Affairs to support the continuance of my University studies. My restlessness and inability to adjust after my discharge resulted in me seeking a school appointment away from Sydney. There I met Margaret, got married, and after training in Sydney to be a School Counsellor we were both appointed to a school in the lower Hunter Valley. We have stayed all our married life with our three children in the Maitland area. Without conscription and National Service I may not have had University training, would not have gone to Kiama, would not have met Margaret, may not have visited Europe and would not be living in Maitland. I am very happy with my life and maybe I should be thankful for my National Service. I have mixed with many returned Vietnam veterans and I have virtually found that they all have no regrets about their army service or disappointment at being conscripted. They tend to look upon it as a unique adventure.

My adventures continue but with a mellow touch to them. As said earlier, many times have been enjoyable, some rewarding, dangerous, or humorous and some unpleasant but providing experiences one could not forget and in the most part cherish. In the meantime I will keep going twice weekly to the gymnasium with the Vietnam veteran

boys for a physical work-out and to develop the core muscles to strengthen my troublesome back. I will also attend the monthly meetings with the RSL to support other veterans and continue to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice, Lest we forget. The Vietnam Legion meetings are also a must, and I look forward to the next fishing trip to launch HMAS Nui Dat again with Steve. They're all good opportunities for a laugh, camaraderie and support.

Like all veterans my story has been unique but I feel it is representative of the men who went to fight the war in Vietnam. Many say that our efforts were for nought as the North Vietnamese overran the South a few years after we left. I do not agree with this assessment.

I agree with a view which has been well explained by Paul Ham in his book, Vietnam. The Australian War. He argues that the Vietnam War was part of the worldwide conflict called the Cold War. Communism after the Second World War had spread from the USSR to most countries in Eastern Europe, China, North Korea, North Vietnam and Cuba. Our near neighbour Indonesia had the largest Communist Party outside a communist country and many countries in the world had active communist guerrillas fighting regional wars. There were large armies facing each other and the world was on the brink of a nuclear war. I believe the Vietnam War was part of the global containment of communism and the actions were vindicated when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 and the communist intentions of global domination came to an end.

I have written this story for a few reasons but two of these stand out. Firstly, Doug thought that by writing down my experiences it may have some positive effect. The other reason was to tell the story of the mortar men and artillery personnel at Fire Support Base Coral who without any infantry support, or established defences held at bay an attack by an overwhelming enemy force. It is an action worthy of retelling.

Our Lieutenant at the time Ian Ahearn has tried to correct the official reporting of these events. In an article in Cannonball, Journal of the Australian Artillery Historical Company, he has written a true account of the movement to Coral and actions in the two attacks at Fire Support Base Coral in early May 1968. Like my father's trip to Greece and the events at Gallipoli my unit's movement into Bien Hoa was ill-conceived, ill-planned and poorly executed. The reputations of those responsible for the shambles of a move to Fire Support Base Coral were only saved by the outstanding performance of the soldiers they sent on that mission.

I feel that the men who were with me at Fire Support Base Coral on the morning of the 13 May 1968 all have a story which should be told. It is a story which has been over looked whether deliberately or accidently by people who had the opportunity to tell the whole story. History has shown that when a story is left to army leaders to explain, the events can get caught up in egos which are manoeuvring to protect and promote their own self-interest.

Next Anzac Day I will be in Hunter Street Sydney to having a beer with the artillery boys before the march and enjoying their companionship for the day. We will give an eyes right and place our right hand over our medals as we march past the Cenotaph in Martin Place and remember Gunners Scott and Sawtell, the mortar boys and the

others who did not return. All of us had parents who were involved or affected in some way by the Second World War so we will also be thinking of them on that day. Each of us will have our own personal things to remember and two of mine will be the cemetery scenes at Gallipoli and Villers-Bretonneux.

We will do a left wheel to go along George Street where we will wave to the War Widows and the Legacy representatives who sit on their seats at the same place each year. Further along George Street businessman and adventurer Dick Smith always stands with a cardboard sign saying “Thank You’. He always gets a wave or an acknowledgement from us. All through the march we will get positive calls from friends, relatives and strangers. We will try to keep in step but many now have knee and hip replacements and arthritis in the joints so we will do the best we can. We will pass the television cameras and Town Hall before doing a left wheel and marching the length of Bathurst Street to Hyde Park.

Look out for the banner with 102 (Coral) Field Battery. We will be marching proudly behind it.

Margaret and the other wives and partners will join us later down at the Quay to continue the day. We will sit down to a dinner with a glass of wine and excellent company. There we will reminisce on the past, speak about the present and ponder the future. Hobbies, activities, holidays, children, grandchildren, dreams, wishes and an occasional reference to our experiences at Vietnam will all get a mention. It is all part of a duty of care. No one will be driving their car home. The following day we will all be at home or somewhere else doing our usual activities and looking forward to meeting the gang again sometime in the future.

Stan Carbines *2785732*
Gunner 102 Field Battery, 12th Field Regiment, Vietnam 1968

HONOUR NAME ADDRESS

102nd
{CORAL} Field Battery

The honour title 'CORAL' is awarded to 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, 141 Regiment, 7th North Vietnamese Army Division, against the Battery and the 1st battalion 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 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 on 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 Gunners patrols cleared the position, recaptured Foxtrot Gun and gave assistance to the Mortar Platoon. The enemy left 52 dead and evidence of a significantly higher number of casualties.

The gun position defence was a close quarter infantry-style battle fought by Gunners and Mortarmen to defeat a conventional North Vietnamese Army Battalion [plus] assault. Whilst fighting against a sustained ground attack, three Battery guns remained in support of 1st Battalion's 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 at 1st Battalion's Alpha and Bravo Companies, a heavy mortar and rocket barrage was directed at the battery and 'A' Battery 2nd/35th United States Artillery. The companies repulsed the attack supported by fire from the battery and other gun batteries, mortars and close air support from the field, medium and heavy artillery, and close air support which was controlled by the Battery's forward observers.

Although Fire Support Base Coral was never seriously threatened after the second attack, the battery continued to support the 1st Australian task Force until 6th June when it was redeployed in the Phuoc Tuy Province. These operations encountered heavy resistance and required Battery fire support of the highest calibre.

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 Battery made in supporting 1st Battalion Royal Australian regiment, on operations in South Vietnam.

His Excellency Major General P. M. Jeffrey AC, CVO, MC

[Original Signed]

Governor General
14th May 2008

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GLOSSARY

6th Intake
The 4th and last group of National Servicemen for 1966.

7th Intake
The 1st group of national Servicemen for 1967.

8th Intake
The 2nd group of National Servicemen for 1967.

9th Intake
The 3rd group of National Servicemen for 1967.

1RAR
1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment.

3RAR
3rd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment.

7RAR
7th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment.

12th Field Regiment
Consisted of 102 and 104 Batteries Royal Australian Artillery plus the Royal New Zealand 161 Battery and the American 155mm mobile Battery.

Adjutant
An army officer who assists the commanding officer.

Agent Orange
A potent mixture of chemicals which was sprayed from aeroplanes to defoliate the trees.

AK47
A Russian designed assault rifle.

Battery Net
A radio frequency on which members of the battery could communicate.

Bracketing
A technique of giving directions to artillery to hit a target by first landing a shot in front and one behind the target.

Chinook
An American twin engine, twin rotor heavy lift helicopter.

Cobra Gunship
An attack helicopter armed with rockets, missiles and machine guns.

Cold War
It was a period of time after WW11 of sustained and intense political tension between

the Western Powers and the Soviet Bloc.

Domino Theory
An analogy stated by President Eisenhower to explain that if one country fell to Communism then the neighbouring countries would fall.

Forward Observer
A person who communicates directions by radio to the artillery to hit a target.

Fox Hole
A hole dug to sleep in or from which to fire a gun. It was protection from enemy fire. In the artillery we had the one fox hole for the duration of an operation. For that reason we often referred to them as sleeping holes.

FSB
A Fire Support Base. Its proper name is a FSPB- a Fire Support Patrol Base is a position from which the artillery fire in support of the infantry who are seeking out the enemy.

Greens
Every day clothing worn by a soldier, also worn into combat.

Harbour
Is an act of forming a secure position for patrolling infantry.

H and Is
Stands for harassment and Interdiction fire. It was fire intended to annoy and impede the enemy.

Hutchie
A plastic covering to protect a fox hole from the weather. Generally an A frame formed by using two star pickets and a rope.

Moratorium Marches
Mass protests organised by those opposed to the Vietnam war.

M60
A portable belt fed machine gun.

M2A2
105mm howitzer used by Australian Field batteries.

Nashos
a shortened form of the phrase National Servicemen.
Over Open Sights
Means the sights on the gun are not being used. The operators are relying on their eye sight to see and hit the target. To do this the target has to be within eye sight and so is very close.

Operation
A planned movement of troops for combat lasting 2 to 5 weeks.

OR's Mess
Abbreviation for other rank's mess. A dining area where soldiers below the rank of sergeant eat their meals. Eg. Privates, Corporals, Gunners and Bombadiers.

Panza
A German word for an army tank.

Polyesters
More formal clothing worn on special occasions, eg. When going on leave.

Regimental Net
Is a radio frequency on which all the artillery batteries and members in the regiment can communicate.

SLR
A Self Loading Rifle [a gas operated rifle issued to most Australian soldiers in Vietnam].

SP
Starting Price, represented the odds which the bookmaker offered a punter.

Splintex
Anti personnel artillery munitions which carried a large number of small individual bullets.

Stand To
Taking up a position ready for any enemy activity.

TAB
Stands for Totalisator Agency Board. It is an agency which provides a means of placing bets on dogs and horses away from the track. In recent times their marketing has widened to many other sorts of gambling.

Tannoy
A brand name for a loud speaker system.

Vietcong [or VC]
A member of a guerrilla organisation created to escalate the armed struggle in South Vietnam.

A DUTY OF CARE

MEMOIRS OF A VIETNAM VET

**I wish to thank the following
for their advice and encouragement**

Trevor Bryant
Michael Hearne
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A DUTY OF CARE

MEMOIRS OF A VIETNAM VET

I called this story A Duty of Care as this term indicates an important obligation in my life. It applies to my role as a parent, my experiences in the army and my work with the Department of Education. As a parent I have cared about the happy development of my children and grandchildren. As a teacher and school counsellor I have cared for the safety, welfare and best education of students. I have met men and women who have cared enough to offer their time, energy and lives for the defence of our nation. I have also seen officers and other ranks in the armed services make the best decisions for the safety and care of men under their command.

Many soldiers experience life threatening situations. On these occasions the actions of their mates often determine whether they live or die. This caring for one another in the heat of battle does not disappear. As a result a bond is formed. This is something we see on Anzac Day and reunions. It is a duty of care.

STAN CARBINES

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