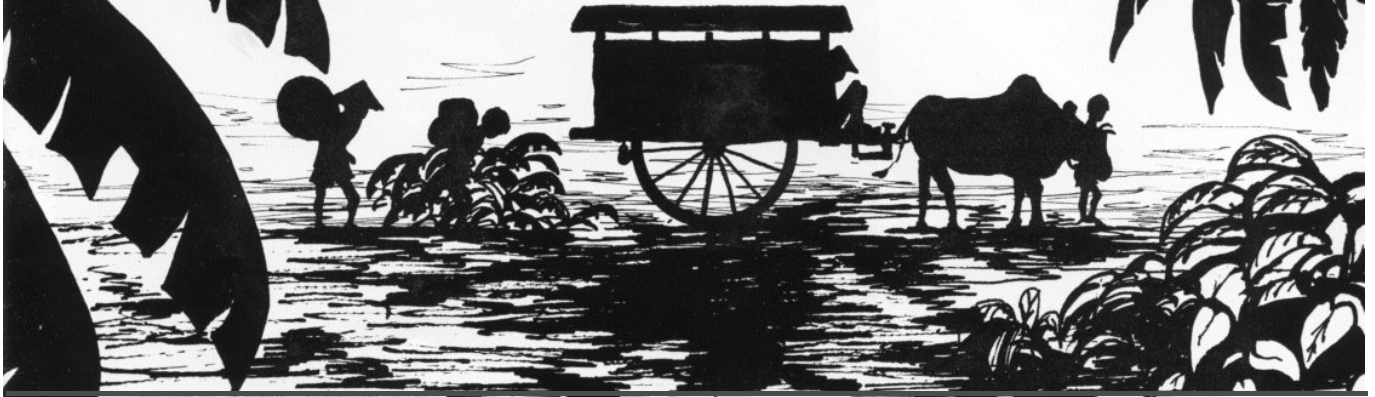


THE PHUOC TUY NEWS



RAE Vietnam Association Incorporated Newsletter
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November 2011



A TIME TO REMEMBER

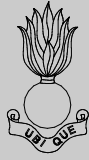
This Remembrance Day due to a little bit of serendipitous timing, I found myself standing out in front of Young & Jackson's on the corner of Flinders and Swanson Streets just as the eleventh hour was about to toll. I spotted a small gathering of people that included a couple of policemen and a fully uniformed digger with a bugle at his side. Realizing something was about to happen I decided to hold my ground and see what was about to take place. Then as the hour came the Cathedral bells chimed out in solemn tone the eleven gongs.

The police moved out and stopped the traffic and much to my surprise the trams even came to a halt. This is a very hard thing to get happen in Melbourne but this time they managed to pull it off. Everything and everybody came to a complete stop and then the bugler marched into the centre of the intersection and halted facing the Shrine, as he was doing this a flight of aircraft flew down Swanson St and on down and over the Shrine.

The Last Post sounded followed by the minute silence and the call of Reveille. The crowd was brilliant and the respect being paid was most moving. During the Silence my gaze wandered over to the steps beneath the clocks of the station and the crowd gathered there. There were all types gathered including young ones with shrapnel in their tongues, ears and eyebrows and the knees out of their trousers. Red streaks running through their hair and looking pretty much unkempt they gathered there in a clump that in its own way had a sense of brotherhood that had a strong whiff of fraternity that is so familiar to all service men and women. It would not have taken too much stretch of the imagination to have placed these as young diggers in any war one cared to choose – so I withheld my judgement. They did not let anyone down especially themselves; they were very respectful and certainly to my mind were fully aware of the sense of the occasion and responded accordingly.

Melbourne and its people did us all proud. It was a very moving moment and one I will not forget in a hurry. Merry Christmas to you all. *Ed.*

VALE



George Burger	17 Const Sqn May '68 - May '69
John Culkin	1 Fld Sqn March - May '67
Allan 'Tuggy' Tugwell	3 Fld Tp '65 1 Fld Sqn Oct. '67 - Oct. '68
Robert Russell	1 Fld Sqn Aug. '67 - June '69

"stand down those men"

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

2010-2011

Another year has come and gone and we are still here and we won't talk about the footy.

The Anzac day reunion had another excellent turn up at the march and with the number of spectators still growing and I must say it was definitely the quickest we have ever had without one stop, but again this year we had to put up with being caught in the middle of two bands miles apart playing two different tunes which made it a bit hard to march to.

Returning to the Prahran RSL this year was a bit easier this time and because of the quickness of the march a bit earlier than normal and again the members of the RSL had gone out of their way to get things set up to suit everyone with the downstairs hall set up for the caterers so that the main area upstairs wouldn't get too crowded when people were eating.

The caterers let me down a bit this year not with the quality of the food but with the under supply as we had a few people that didn't get a

meal that they had paid for so we had to give them a refund, hopefully next year we can sort that out.

Again the raffles were a great success with around 30 prizes and no problems with the ticket sequence this year and the prizes were well spread out so we had a lot of happy customers by the end of the draws.

Again I would like to thank all those who donated prizes for our raffle and a special thanks to John Wertheimer again for donating another copy of the book, Paving the Way, and to Roger Herrod for organizing our other prizes and vouchers and Les for his bits and pieces.

Vietnam Veterans day this year saw another great turn up even with the weather not looking the best but it did hold off and everything went well and I must say that the guest speaker did a good job of keeping his presentation precise, to the point and not too long especially with the way the weather was, it is getting better organised each year in some aspects with again everyone marching up behind all the banners and a band and then forming up around the main forecourt, it looked great but again the wreath laying got messed up.

With no disrespect to the dignitaries and representatives from other countries but it's the Unit and Core associations and the RSLs that do most of the work for the Veterans and it is their day and they are the ones that should be recognised as they lay the wreaths for their mates not just sending them up in a blob to place their wreaths, and I will say this again maybe they should start with the associations and finish with the dignitaries that way they might get everyone on the list.

after the service some of us went back to the Prahran RSL where again they put on a great afternoon with plenty to eat and free beer and again they made us very welcome and again it was just good to get together and I hope that this will become our regular meeting place, I would like to hope that more people would come back to Prahran.

Again I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone that helped out during the year with our different functions and donations for our

raffles and other things and special thanks to the Secretary Treasurer for all his hard work during the year maintaining the books and handling the many different enquires that come through including the newsletter and also to the committee for all the effort they have put in over the past twelve months and their hard work on Anzac Day with the raffles and trying to make sure the day goes as smoothly as possible.

I would also like to thank Roger (Vice-Pres) for all his efforts during the year and also helping with Anzac Day and Vietnam Veterans Day and his co-operation and assistance throughout the year.

Well that's about all for this year, I hope in the future that the Association can continue and I know we only have two gatherings per year one on Anzac Day and then Vietnam Veterans Day but I hope we can make our reunions bigger and better as I said before none of us are getting any younger.

ALAN R BROWN

PRESIDENT.

PROFILE

Allan "Blue" Rantall

1 Troop

1 Field Squadron

Oct 1967 – July 16 1968

I was posted to 1 Fld Sqn from 18 Fld Sqn Wacol Qld. I had only been in the army long enough to have done Corps training at SME and a couple of months out bush at Tully working on the range at field engineering tasks, the OC there was John Wertheimer and the 2IC was 'Flex' Fittock. I arrived in Nui Dat on the 10th October 1967; I was 22 years of age.

When I first got there the Sqn was involved with building the new village of Ap Suoi Nghe which was located a couple of 'clicks' out from the end of Luscombe airfield. At the same time the 'House of Horrors' was being put together under the direction of Sgt. Brett Nolan and Cpl. 'Snow' Wilson and we were there first pupils in learning the 'tricks of the trade' as to how the sappers operated in Vietnam.

My first operation was with C Coy 2 RAR and we were delivered to the start point by APC, I remember that I was so scared that I tippee toed around the place for the first day or two until I started to relax. Of course I started off as a brand new fresh face #2 to Barry O'Rourke my #1. We had not been too long into the op when the Company came upon a big tunnel complex, quite a bit of fighting went on to clear the system and then we were given instructions to blow it up. The task was much too big for just the Splinter Team so we called in the Combat Team that was waiting at the FSB. It was a pretty gruesome task as there were dead bodies scattered throughout the complex. In one nook I came across a decomposed corpse that had obviously been there for some time. Between the splinter and combat teams it took us about half a day to rig it all up for demolition, it was a very big complex.

A few days after this another tunnel complex was discovered but this time there was a bit of a snag. The infantry engaged with hand grenades at first but when we started to go down we discovered that a lot of the grenades had not gone off. Barry was a very good #1 and he was not going to take any unnecessary risks so he got a bit stropy with the OC of C Coy and insisted that we would neutralize the enemy with our very own home made grenades. So, that night, we worked into the wee hours of the morn and using slabs of American TNT (not C4) we rigged up hand grenades using detonators, det cord and very short lengths of fuse cord so the VC could not neutralize them in time. Whilst all this was going on we had another unpleasant incident. Barry and I were having a well earned brew while waiting to move down into the tunnels when all of a sudden a VC popped his head out of a well hidden bunker and started firing on us. We were the closest to him so the CSM of B Coy ordered us sappers to do a frontal charge and take the position. All that was scary enough but what really pissed me off was the fact that in our mad haste to do the 'gung-ho' stuff I knocked over my brew and being in the middle of the dry season I didn't have enough water to make another one. Around the same time we had to go down the tunnels yet again and I ended up having a really nasty experience. With this particular tunnel it was my turn to go down first with Barry following. I had only gone in about ten or twelve feet when I felt I had knocked something hard and metallic, turned out it was a CS gas canister – about the size of a kerosene tin.



*Allan Haywood building the
3 RAR area in 1967.*

Photo: Blue Rantall

*A wild ride on an APC while
on patrol out of
FSB Andersen—Feb. 1968.*

Photo: Blue Rantall



Jock Quinn 1967 - out on ops.

Photo: Blue Rantall



The boys pour a slab outside the hospital at Nui Dat 1968.

Photo: Blue Rantall

It had been lying dormant and my knock must have been enough to set it going. I was in a lot of distress and choking to death very quickly, fortunately Barry had enough wits to grab hold of me and pull me out by the ankles. It must have been a Herculean effort from him as he too was affected by the gas. When we got out I was very sick for an hour or so and did a lot of vomiting while trying to get my lungs working again. As to how it got there all I can think is that the canister must have been left over from a U.S. operation or the VC had put it there themselves. But which ever way they nearly got me – thanks Barry.

When we got back from that operation the whole of 1 Troop was swung into action to build a massive Armco culvert to run across the full width of the newly built KANGAROO PAD. We finished this just in time for Christmas. Just before the big day one of the planties let off a CS grenade that spread throughout the whole of the Squadron. Nobody would own up to the deed so the OC declared a dry camp until the culprit put his hand up, we hung out for two days but as Christmas was coming he finally gave himself up and thus prevented a major catastrophe. Christmas Day started off with the 1 Tp CO Mike McCullum coming around with Brett Nolan and giving us Coffee Royale as we lay in our beds suffering hang overs from the night before. Then later in the morning it was off to the Luscombe Bowl to see a show featuring Lucky Starr, Lucky Grills and Lorraine Desmond. The highlight of the show was when one of Lorraine Desmond's boobs fell out while she was doing a dance – it was great. Years later I met up with her at a function and was indiscreet enough to remind her of it. Guess what? She is still embarrassed about it all.

Christmas was good and I was looking forward to New Year's Eve when that morning four of us got ready reacted out bush. Apparently the SAS had come across a number of M16 mines scattered on the floor of the jungle. We were choppered out from WOMBAT and winched into the area carrying mine detectors. It was all so crazy as none of us had ever been winched into anything before, I don't know who was controlling it all but we were told to run for a couple of hundred yards before we set up the kit. There were no Grunts with us and we didn't see anyone else so I can only assume that the SAS were in the background somewhere. We located about half a dozen mines and then we were winched out and

back to Nui Dat in time for the celebrations.

In February of 1968 a large element of the Task Force including all of 1 Fld Sqn moved out to FSB ANDERSEN and took over that position from the Americans. Shades of WW1 for us in 1 Tp when, with the help of a dozer, we built one very big and deep bunker that was able to house the whole of the Troop. Other than the fact that it felt like one huge grave, it was quite cosy. One of the tasks we had to do was to provide a night time standing patrol about one and half 'clicks' out from the FSB over looking the village of Trom Bom. The standing patrol consisted of about four of us sappers moving out at dusk each night and keeping a watch from beneath a tree. The VC was very active in the area and attacked the village on an almost nightly basis. We would watch all the firing going on and houses being burned then the next day join clearing patrols to detect for mines and booby traps before the infantry went in. On the night of 18th it was 3 Troop's turn to provide the standing patrol. Unfortunately the VC had zeroed in on the spot and launched a mortar attack at the tree the same time as mortar attacking the FSB. L/Cpl Garrett and Sprs' Pattison and Steen were killed. After the attack which was in the early hours of the morning I left our shell scrape to check on the surrounding area for casualties. I came across an artillery digger from 131 Div Loc Battery who had taken a direct mortar hit. It turned out that he was an old school mate of mine from Alexandra. We had actually flown into country on the same flight, James Menz was his name and he had only just got married two weeks previously while on R & R. So it was a very tragic and upsetting time for all of us on that particular night. Not long after this the rest of the Sqn returned to Nui Dat but I and a few others stayed behind for about another three weeks. It was during this time I was part of a Mini Team on an APC that decided to throw itself into a ditch right in the middle of a rubber plantation (see photo).

When we left FSB ANDERSEN it was back to Nui Dat and then almost straight away we were out to FSB CORAL. It is said that the convoy that went to FSB CORAL was the biggest Australian convoy since WW2 and I have the distinction of being on the first APC into the location. But first we spent an over night stop at Bien Hoa where I had my first taste of spirits and pizza. Mighty strange place was CORAL, at first we had to

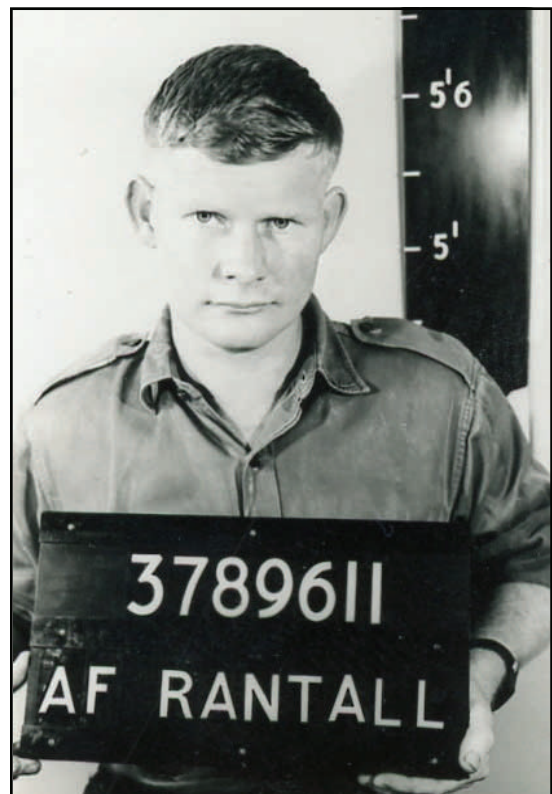
crawl around on our hands and knees so the VC wouldn't pop us off and at night they would creep up close to us and throw rocks so as to get us to return fire at them and then pick us off by firing at the flashes. Someone in authority had the bright idea that we should mount a guard up a big tree that was beside our gun pits. That was a scary job and I reckon the song Bad Moon Rising was written about that bloody tree. Within days the dozers had pushed back the tree line to give a bit of clear space between us and the enemy. We had been issued with a Starlight Scope by this stage and were able to observe the enemy as they moved around on the perimeter. For those who ever used those things they will remember that as you looked through them everything was a bright green – spooky stuff. Then I had a bit of luck. Somehow I and John Wills from 2 Tp were selected to be choppered back to Nui Dat one morning and provide the Mini Team to escort the Tanks up to FSB CORAL, with once again a stop-over for more spirits and pizza at Bien Hoa. Most likely that was one of the longest trips the Tanks ever made during the war and I along with John got to make the trip with them.

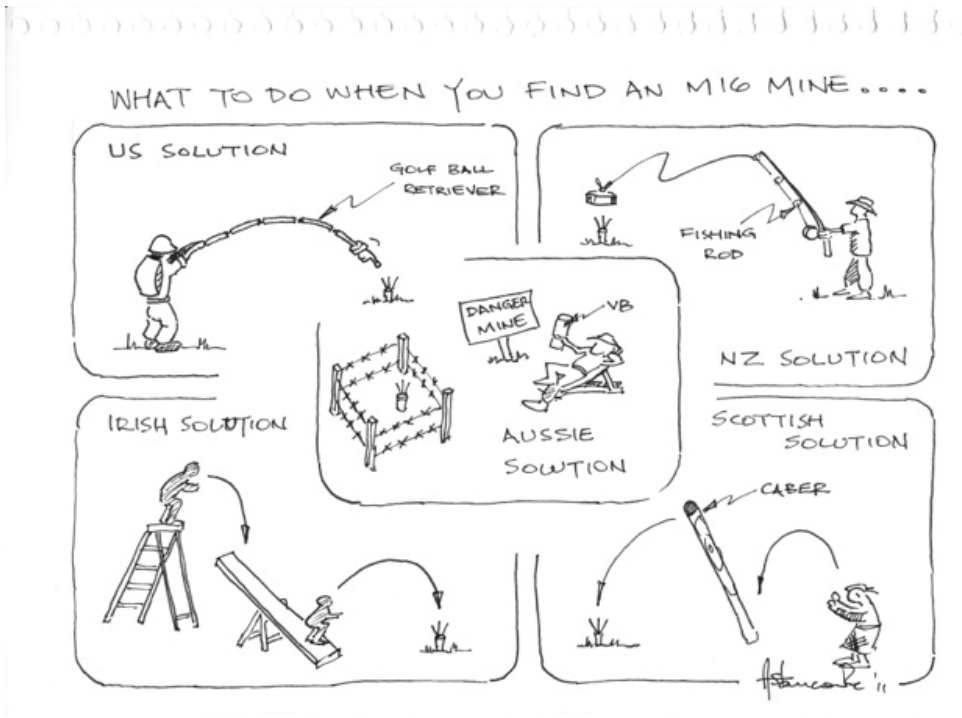
Sgt Brett Nolan loved mucking around with explosives and at one stage he was devoting a bit of time to see if he could make the M16 mine jump higher. He was pretty keen on this and had even gone to the effort of creating his very own subterranean workshop in the bunker next to the Troop store. It was not unusual to see him opening up a mine with the use of a hacksaw. However, this all came to a sudden halt one day when for a reason that will remain a mystery, smoke started billowing out of the bunker followed quick smart by a very nimble Brett Nolan. Just as well for the next moment the whole bunker just exploded sending dirt and debris all over the place.

Not long after this Brett's tour was up (just as well - for his sake) and he was replaced by Col Campbell who soon made his own mark on the Troop. Col didn't like all the explosive and paraphernalia that was spread throughout the tents – pretty typical of 1 Fld Sqn, so he got it in his mind to have it all cleaned up. I was one of those put on the detail to go around with a wheelbarrow and collect all the slabs of C4 and det cord stored under the stretchers. By the time we had finished we had collected four wheelbarrows full of the stuff. But then Col really set about making his name; a few of us were put to the job of raking up

all the dead leaves that had piled up around the lines. Bit of a hazard you could say, we had the job done just before lunch so Col told us to set fire to the piles before we went to the mess – this we obediently did. Unfortunately while we were at the mess a bit of a breeze sprung up and the fires spread across the path to the Plant Tp lines and before anybody could react four of the tents with all their gear had burnt completely to the ground. Ah well, the planties were getting a bit uppity anyway.

Most of us tend to think that the Splinter Teams were used by the battalions as de facto grunts – which we were. But I am not sure they got great value out of me, I remember once patrolling out somewhere dark and green when a 5 min. halt was called. I promptly went to sleep only to be awoken by a vaguely heard “let's go”. Trouble is I headed off in the wrong direction to the rest of the platoon as I was still in a half awake state. Then another time somewhere out in swamp land I went arse over tit after tripping on a tree root and my rifle ended up sticking out the mud in a perfect vertical stance with the muzzle six inches into the mud. You could have stuck a slouchie on it and it would have made a good marker. But, I wasn't as bad as the forward scout who was carrying an F1 and did the same trip as me, don't know how he did it but he actually managed to shoot himself in the arse. Explain that one to the folks back home.





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