



**SURVEY
EX-SERVICEMEN'S
ASSOCIATION**

SOUTH AUSTRALIA



NEWSLETTER No 40
SEPTEMBER 2005

Newsletter No 40 September 2005

Welcome again and greetings to all. Distribution of this edition is a bit later than intended, but I do have a few other jobs in hand that also require my time, which most readers can relate to, however, our third newsletter is scheduled for pre-christmas delivery.

My thanks to Laurie Sutton for a quick response in printing a few front covers, sufficient to cover our needs until a new format for our newsletter is decided.

Also thanks to members who have contributed news or items, so please remember that this modest publication is supposed to be a NEWSLETTER, so how about some or an item of general interest. Believe me when I say members like to hear about the activities of others.

Newsletter Format

Alan Adsett and I have discussed changing the present format to A4 size, to be perhaps more e-mail compatible and easier to produce. No decisions have been made as yet to make any changes, but we would like your views and suggestions, so please give it some consideration and I hope this amounts to more than a big fat zero.

The present format was based upon that produced by the NSW Association and I know that many members like the A5 booklet as it is, however, the matter must be considered overall to change or retain.

Social Reports

FIRST FRIDAY DRINKS First Friday in September was a bit lean, just Stevo Hinic and me to enjoy our schooners, which was good, in so far that we could brag on without interruption, but extra souls do add variety so make the effort if you can.

My apologies to anyone attending in July, as all the regulars were absent in Bendigo.

BENDIGO BASH 1st and 2nd JULY The Friday night dinner and the Saturday BBQ, were extremely well attended by former Survey Corps members from all over Australia

90th Anniversary Dinner 90 years since the formation of the Royal Australian Survey Corps on 1st July 1915 was certainly celebrated in full, with the dinner held at the very swish 'All Seasons Quality Resort' in Bendigo.

Attended by about 300 souls, all intent on enjoying themselves in the company of friends, not seen generally for many years, so the function was in party mood, still going strong at midnight.

Although with such a huge number attending, there was plenty of dining space between tables which permitted easy movement, creating pleasant conditions. I was told that the hall could seat around 600 guests.

There were the normal formalities for such an occasion, apologies announced, speeches by Gary Warnest as the Dining President and others, and finally the birthday cake cut by Ruth Ridge. A pleasant dinner which went all too quickly.

Amongst the Adelaide contingent over for the weekend, I did notice Neville Pappin, Ken Jeffery, John and Joanne Scharber, Neville and Dianne Stone, Arthur and Barbara Henson, Laurie and Pam Sutton, Ken and Lorraine Talbot-Smith, Stevo Hinic and Pauline Mannix, also John Whitburn and his wife, hoping I didn't miss anyone. A consolidated list of guests has been requested, and will be included if it arrives in time.

There was one minor hiccup during the formalities, caused by the head table being along one side of the huge dining hall, plus the sound system not fully adjusted for volume, meant that the occupants of several tables in the far corner to one side were probably unaware of the proceedings, so carried on with normal party chatter, which was a pity and a nuisance. A few photographs are included, although good photography was difficult given the hall lighting conditions

BBQ at Fortuna Most readers should be aware that Fortuna is now a secured premises, so special permission had to be obtained to allow the function to be held within the confines of the former Officers' Mess/Ballroom/OR's Mess and outside lawns.

John Phillips vetted guests through the security staff, and unfortunately cameras were not permitted

The weather was fine and the arrangements well prepared, with everything set for a great function. The lunch provided was a bit above the normal BBQ standard, being abundant and with lots of variety.

The afternoon passed by all too quickly, so I'm sure every one enjoyed the occasion to the full, except for the old problem with such a large gathering, in finding the time to chat with all old friends and acquaintances.

There were a few minor problems throughout the weekend, but mostly everything went as planned by the organisers. To organise a full scale dinner followed by Saturday morning activities and an afternoon BBQ, was a huge undertaking, and the committee of the local Association are to be congratulated in organising such a successful anniversary reunion.

90th ANNIVERSARY DINNER-ADELAIDE Held on Saturday 23rd July 05, to be well clear of the Bendigo dinner, in the Sergeants' Mess at Keswick Barracks.

A happy crowd arrived on time at 6.45pm for pre-dinner drinks in the ante-room, of sherry, champagne and orange juice, etc. I almost had a heart attack, when the mess supervisor advised me that the souvenir menu produced by Dave Irving did not agree exactly with what the cooks were preparing. A hasty visit to the kitchen discovered that the civilian organisers had not advised the cooks correctly, so with profuse apologies and a compromise or two, they were able to present reasonably close courses during the dinner. Not good overall, but the cooks did well considering circumstances.

The function was of an informal nature, with formalities kept to a minimum, as apologies received were read out, a brief speech and toast to the memory of the Corps, a toast to H.M. Queen Elizabeth, and a toast to the ladies present ended the official part, although a couple of private toasts followed, pretty usual proceedings you might say.

Following the dinner, we all retired back to the ante-room for a fruit and cheese board, coffee and tea, etc, and a catch-up on conversation, to round off an enjoyable and A total of 32 members and partners accepted the invitation, with only Luke Mills unable

to attend because of a severe head cold, with the guest list as follows-----

Allan & Judyne Adsett, Bob & Pam Ballard, Frank & Naomi Bryant, Bob & Rhonda Cooper, Jim & Rita Dunn, Peter & Julie Elverd, Bob Griffin & Pam Richards, Bill & Jan Griggs, John & Pam Harrison, Arthur & Barbara Henson, Stevo Hinic & Pauline Mannix, Dave Irving & Pam Illert, Simon & Elaine Lemon, Bob Mills, Alex & Joan Munro, and finally Ken & Lorraine Talbot-Smith

TEA PARTY A special invitation was extended to all ex-service organisations by the Premier, Mike Rann, for their members to attend a commemorative service and tea party on Sunday 14th August 05 in the Adelaide Convention Centre, to celebrate the 60th anniversary VP Day. Several members of our Association attended the function, but unfortunately not me, as I was a bit slack in replying to secretary Dave Irving, a few days after he had sent names to the organisers, so I missed out.

From all accounts it was a very well organised function, attended by many hundreds of ex-servicemen and women, accompanied by friends and family.

Also in attendance were the governor H.E. Marjorie Jackson-Nelson, Premier Mike Rann, Deputy Leader of the Opposition Dean Brown, RSL President Jock Statton, Maj General Neil Wilson and Philip Satchell as the Master of Ceremonies.

Formalities during the afternoon included speeches by the various dignitaries, recollections of WW2 service and conditions, musical entertainment by the Australian Army Band and the Police Credit Union Choir, finishing with Last Post/Minute's Silence/The Ode/Rouse.

I believe the occasion was an enjoyable one, with tea party food and coffee, tea and wine, served throughout the afternoon, although possibly not served in the order that some might like, according to one report I had. Did not matter much, as everything was acceptable and well received.

Association members who attended were Bob & Pam Ballard, Frank & Naomi Bryant, Jim & Rita Dunn, Bob Griffin & Pam Richards, John & Pam Harrison, Bill & Elizabeth Love and Bill & Jan Griggs.

CHRISTMAS FUNCTION To be held in December, but no definite date is available as yet, however, a separate note with all details will be sent out as usual, with plenty of time to decide. The main thing is to make a note in your diary, or on anything handy, but now.

Fishing on the River Darling

George Timmins rang me, around mid-August, enquiring if I would like to go fishing with him on the Darling near Wilcannia, in north-west N.S.W. I was a bit hesitant to accept straight away, being bogged down at the time with other tasks, so agreed to let him know later.

Thinking about it later, I was sure that Wilcannia and the Darling area were rich sources of inspiration for Banjo Paterson writing poetry of the outback, which fired my imagination somewhat, besides I had never been up that way before, so what the heck, I rang George and accepted.

On the arranged day I departed Adelaide for Swan Hill, a distance of 530 kms,

arriving at George's hacienda in the late afternoon to stay the night. Leaving my car behind, we left George's place next morning in his AWD Toyota Prado, turning onto the highway to Wilcannia just before 6am, where we arrived well before mid-day having travelled just over 500 kms. Petrol there sold for \$1.43 per litre, while I paid \$1.10 per litre in Adelaide before leaving. For the uninitiated, assuming they know where Broken Hill is located, Wilcannia is about 250 kms from there to the north-east. From there we then travelled about 25 kms down river to Culpaulin Station, to set up camp on the banks of the Darling River, some 3kms from the station homestead.

I was surprised to find the river much wider and deeper than I had imagined it would be, so far inland, also, this was one stream that surely did flow upside down, with clay seemingly in permanent suspension. With an inch of river water in a billy-can, you cannot see the bottom. The rest of the day was used putting the boat into the water, making our camp comfortable, setting up a camp fire, cutting firewood and generally relaxing with a cold beer.

We were there for six days only, a comparatively short stay, but very relaxing the whole time, except for one day only following light but steady rain during the previous night. The rain was a good follow-up from earlier showers several days before, but limited our movements quite a lot, so to walk just ten metres was enough to collect an inch plus of heavy and sticky clay to the soles of our boots.

Bait was very scarce to come by, but we did manage to catch an average of five good size golden perch by rod and other means, each day, sufficient to fill a small portable freezer with fillets for home consumption. I can recommend pan grilled perch.

I had the pleasure of being introduced by George to Arthur and Marlene Davies, the owners of Culpaulin Station, and receiving a very hospitable cuppa on three occasions. Arthur told us that before him, his father transported station stores by paddle steamers, that plied the river until the early 1930's, probably losing out after that to improved rail and road transport.

In between fishing, George introduced me to bent carving. A bent is a lump or hump growing naturally from the trunk or branch of a large tree, shaped like an inverted bowl.

When cut from the tree, hollowed out by chain saw and carving wheel, bark removed, sandpapered and polished, they become highly decorative sideboard bowls and very useful. I believe Gordon Lowry has also been hooked into the hobby.

According to George, Wilcannia was a thriving town with four hotels and other facilities, about 20 years ago, but now it appears a bit run down, with boarded up buildings, no pubs that I could see, all a bit decrepit. There are a few interesting examples of colonial architecture, circa 1870, in particular the old post office and adjoining postmaster's residence, very handsome buildings but now looking a little sad. There did appear to be a preponderance of indigenous locals about town, but that might have been coincidental.

The return trip back to Swan Hill was uneventful, although the recent rain had churned up the road in parts, so thank you George for my introduction to the inland Darling River and look forward to a revisit. Well folks, I hope this improved your knowledge of our great country

Reunion on the Murray.

As a follow on to my Darling River trip, and while in the mood, a reminder about our proposed reunion somewhere on the Murray. Around three or four members, the latest being Neville Stone, have indicated in principle their willingness to participate, but there would need to be a few more to make it worthwhile.

Acceptance at this stage is not binding, so be a devil, and give me a ring on 82777074.

People News

Max Coletti. Janine rang to pass on the news that Max had surgery on Tuesday 27th September in Flinders Private Hospital, to remove a regrowth of the tumour taken out last December. The operation was not without some risks, but was successful as such. He will probably remain in hospital for about a week before going home, and then faces the possibility of further treatment by chemotherapy. Strangely, his condition did not show up in routine blood tests, during regular checkups following his first operation.

Max, hoping this makes you feel a little better, but numerous friends have asked about you over the months, several being during the recent Bendigo Bash, so be sure our members are hoping for a good outcome.

Gary Warnest. Gary attended the Alex Laing Memorial Dinner recently, held in Brisbane at the Sergeants' Mess, Enoggera Barracks. The dinner was organised by 1 Topographic Survey Squadron, RAE, and was well attended.

One reason Gary attended was to reciprocate visits, in appreciation of those members from Queensland who had attended the Bendigo Bash

Neville Stone Neville has been retired since March this year, after selling his Bob Jane T-Mart franchise, at Alberton.

He and Dianne have certainly been on the go-go since then, towing their caravan on one trip throughout northern South Australia, visiting Ayers Rock, travelling the Oodnadatta Track, etc, for about two months. They also travelled for six weeks around Victoria and southern N.S.W, sight-seeing Melbourne, the Snowy Mountains, the Great Ocean Road, and everywhere else it seems.

Not content so far, they intend leaving Adelaide for another month in early October, with the first stop being for the Bathurst 1000 car race, then Sydney, Newcastle, the Blue Mountains and numerous other places in between.

Neville, I see no point in wishing you well in retirement with all this going on, however, best of luck.

News For All People

If at first you don't succeed, stay away from sky diving.

Rita and Jim Dunn Rita and Jim were in Japan from early to mid September to attend the wedding of their son Steve, to his Japanese sweetheart Yuki. Steve has resided in Japan for some time now, working as an English tutor.

Being a family affair, they were accompanied by their other son Chris, daughter Anne

and their grand-daughter. The wedding was held in the city of Kyoto, in central Japan. It was a traditional Japanese temple ceremony, lasting around thirty minutes, after which everyone changed back into western garb, for the reception, a magnificent affair according to Jim, of seven courses.

The couple intend to visit Adelaide next January with Yuki's family, for a traditional Australian wedding, to encompass both cultures. Get the cheque book ready, Jim!!!

The Raging Lot Well not exactly, with a bit of extra age under the belt, everything was a shade more subdued than in former years. I shared a self-contained unit at a Bendigo caravan park, for the duration of the recent Bendigo Bash, with Barry Lutwyche, Alex Cairney, George Timmins and Bob Cosgrove I certainly had a ball, as I'm certain the others did too, unfortunately get-togethers like this are now rare.

We even found time to visit Sam Chambers. Friday morning started things rolling, with a visit to Brian Firms at his motel, which by chance was opposite the Golden Square hotel, and with the sun at least approaching the yard-arm we adjourned there. It seemed no time later, when a few more visitors for the bash rolled in, either by coincidence or thru smoke signals via Alex Cairney. Brian Partridge and Jim Gill are all I remember. Anyway, it was a pleasant start for the dinner and BBQ to follow.

The Corps flag was hung from the verandah of our unit, from arrival on Thursday until departure on Sunday morning, a rare opportunity not to be missed, ending a great weekend.

Bob Cooper. I was told from a usually reliable source, that Bob was recently appointed as president of Bowls S.A. Well done Bob.

Brian Firms. I report with sorrow the passing of Brian's mother, in late September, in Perth. I'm sure all friends will join with me in offering our condolences to Brian. His address is 59 Thompson Rd, Nth Fremantle, W A 6152 and home telephone number is (08) 9335 6825 Mobile number is 0427888445. Thanks to Brian Mead per e-mail

Australian Defence Medal

As notified in our last newsletter, former servicemen and women with six years service are eligible to apply, which would include almost all former members of the Corps. The medal will be issued progressively from 2006 onwards, so it might be wise to apply soon. Details certainly required would be your full name, regimental number, date of enlistment and discharge, which corps you served in, and your postal address plus phone number, not telling you how to suck eggs, etc.

Applications can be posted to----

Directorate of Honours and Awards TCC-I-49

Dept of Defence, Canberra, ACT 2600

or

By e-mail to dpe.honours@defence.gov.au

or

by enquiring through Freecall 1800 111 321

The list might be fairly lengthy, so be prepared to wait, perhaps.

Bob Mills-----Super Bikie

At the age of 62yrs, Bob came out of semi-retirement several months ago, to manage the Cycling Information Centre in Hurtle Square, Adelaide, a project fostered by the Adelaide City Council and Bicycle S.A. The idea is to make Adelaide a bike friendly city, so if you wish to get around town on the cheap, you can hire a late model bike providing you have some acceptable ID, with the first two hours for free. What a great idea, especially for tourists, but as a cyclist still, I reckon the project needs expanding to be successful.

However, about Bob. His exploits as a dedicated cyclist have appeared in our newsletter, going back some time, but also his riding on the Mawson Trail, two appearances in the 450km Simpson Desert classic, not to mention finishing the length of the Canning Stock Route in W.A., a tremendous effort for a charity fund.

A recent headline in the Sunday Mail caught my eye, 'Bob powers up for solar trek' headed an article written by journalist Lauren Novak, detailing Bob's entry in the bi-annual World Solar Cycle Challenge, an event being run as I write this.

14 teams have entered the race, with teams from Australia, Italy, Nigeria and Malaysia competing on 'solar assisted, human powered' bicycles, starting at Ceduna on the far west coast and travelling to Adelaide, a distance of 1500kms.

Bob's team is the smallest of all, called the 'Wayward Bob Team' and supported by the Wayward Bus Company, having one rider only (Bob) and one support vehicle, although he is not actually a competitor as his cycle does not comply with the eligibility rules, however, the organisers felt that it was important to encourage innovation, so Bob was invited along for the ride.

He is riding an Avanti Electra Cycle, an off the shelf model, fitted with a battery-driven motor to the front wheel, with the battery charged from two solar panels, one behind the seat and the other on a lightweight trailer behind.

The nine day race will end on the 2nd October in Victoria Square, Adelaide, so we can look forward to Bob's comments in our next issue. Thanks to Lauren and the Sunday Mail for details.

Vale

John Gaskell John died peacefully in his sleep at home, on the 7th September 05, aged 79 years. Coming from the Riverland area originally, he was a much older recruit than the average when he enlisted in the Corps, about 1958, serving for nine years full time, then as a reservist for a further three years. He was respected as a field surveyor, working on mapping operations in the Northern Territory and South Australia, with 4 Fd Svy Unit at Keswick Barracks. Following his discharge, he joined the former South Australian Railways.

Better known as 'Blue', he was something of a bushy character, and thought that billy tea was not brewed properly unless a spoon would stand up in it.

On one occasion he amazed me by volunteering for a special guard duty, considering he was not regimentally inclined. Before the Adelaide Cup was a public holiday, the

Governor attended the running of the race at Morphettsville racecourse, escorted onto the course by mounted police, to a formal welcome including a Guard of Honour mounted by troops from Keswick. Following these formalities, the guard was dismissed and the troops given the day off at the races, and Blue did love a flutter on the horses. Once in Katherine, NT, a group of us were drinking with some police officers in a pub, well after closing time, where Blue was betting on some absurd game of flicking a threepenny piece into a glass, playing against some coppers. I left with the others about midnight, to return to our camp at the Katherine River low level, and Blue returned around two hours later courtesy of a police van. Still fully dressed next morning, he struggled out from under his mosquito net, with notes dropping out from under his shirt, revealing his winnings from the night before. A quick count showed 120 pounds, about seven weeks pay in those days.

A Mass was held in Christ the Worker Church at Mitchell Park, followed by a burial service at Centennial Park, attended by friends and family including John Harrison, Lou Bear, Arthur Henson and Joan and me, representing our Association.

Our condolences to Pat and her family with their sad loss.

RA Svy Keyring

Noel Sproles forwarded this email from John Bullen.

See the Corps may be out but it is not yet completely down! The Australian War Memorial is selling pewter RA Svy key rings for \$10.50 and a photo of one is attached. Not every corps has one so it is curious why we rated, but I guess that it is a Memorial after all.





Collecting name badges at the registration desk

90th Anniversary Dinner Adelaide



L-R: Rita Dunn, Jan & Bill Griggs, Bob & Pam Ballard, John and Pam Harrison



Pam and Laurie Sutton



R-L: Jim Dunn, Dave Irving, Pam Illert, Arthur & Barbara Henson, Bob Mills



L-R: Dennis Marshall, Rusty Williams, Joy Marshall, Stevo Hinic, Jill Black, Pauline Mannix, Bill Black



Elaine and Simon Lemon



Dining Room at All Seasons Quality Resort Bendigo

90th Anniversary Celebrations at Bendigo



L-R: Alex Cairney, Bob Cosgrove, Barry Lutwyche, George Timmins



L-R: Arthur Henson, John Scharber, Don Ridge, Bob Williams



L-R: Brian Firms, Brian Partridge, George Timmins, Bob Cosgrove, Alex Cairney, Barry Lutwyche,



Ruth & Don Rids



L-R: Simon "Andy" Capp, Terry Edwards, Mick Dempster



L-R: Neville Stone, Noel "Nesty" Coulthard, Dianne Stone

The Wanderings of the Wickers

I won't go into all the details of the trip but give you an overview of the places and dates so you will get an idea of where we caught up with the ex-members of the Survey Corps and some of their relatives.

I am surprised at the number of people that we have ran into over the last 5 years we have been travelling that were old acquaintances or relatives of members.

We left Stansbury in late May 05 and caught up with our travelling companions for the next 4 weeks at Pt Pirie. Rob & Jenny have a Caviler Camper and we have a Kimberly Kamper and we had intended to travel the dirt roads and bush camp where possible allowing the women the odd night in a caravan park to plug the hair dryer in.

So up the Birdsville track via Marree. A drink or 4 at the Mungerannie Pub were we came upon the Great Aussie Outback Cattle Drive. Anyway on to Birdsville with of course a night in the pub or was that two. Through Bedouire, Boulia and Mt Isa. On up to Lawn Hill National Park. Rob took a helicopter flight over the Gorge and one of the passengers was the ex wife of a Litho guy still living in Bendigo but I didn't write her name down. I swore to do so for the rest of the trip.

On to Burketown and then Karumba for some good fishing. Next stop Cloncurry and down to Winton to see the Matilda Centre and Longreach to see The Stockman Hall of Fame and the Qantas Museum. I would recommend all those if you haven't seen them.

One day three at Longreach the rain finally stopped (in the middle of the dry season) and discussion started about driving on the black soil plains and getting bogged. Some where in the conversation Army and Survey was mentioned and this fellow came over and asked which one of the Wicker's was I. He had recognized the face. He also looked familiar but 20 odd years made it difficult. Anyway some of you may remember Terry Danger and wife June still living in Bendigo. Terry was 6 years grunts before becoming a Carto Tech. Retired after 20 years. They are out travelling Australia. While all this was going on another guy came over and said he had heard Survey Corps mentioned and introduced himself to us. Geoff Clements No 5411626 Printer who served in Bendigo from 1966-1969 Unknown to both of us.

Rob and Jenny then left us to return to work in Adelaide. Lea and I started heading east. Over night in Barcaldine and a great happy hour (5 hours actually) we had a young lady that sang real good with some backing music and out came my guitar and this character and I got stuck into a few songs. John Opdam was his name and he was on his way to Tennant Creek where yes brother Hank (some of you would know him) was waiting for him.

On to Emerald and then Blackdown National Park. We decided it was too cold so drove north to Sarina 36km south of Mackay. Stayed at Armstrong Beach CP for 7

nights. First night at the happy hour a bloke saw me drinking out of a School Military Survey stubbie holder. He introduced himself to me as Peter Marks better known as "Groucho" SQMS School of Survey 1985-1987 Still lives in Wodonga retired and has been travelling Australia for the last 4 years going home for 1 month each year. He was at the school when the CO was Corless and the RSM was Ken Slater followed by Gordon Lowery.

Groucho was telling me about the fishing trips to Swan Hill and George Timmins and a great story about Gordon Lowery who went to the old Kangaroo Store (I am sure you all remember that) where the owner (I think he mentioned Anderson) had some fishing lures for sale. They were \$2-50 each or 3 for \$10-00. Gordon thinking that was a bargain brought the 3 for \$10-00. Anyway great nights and fishing at Armstrong Beach and a Christmas in July party on the Saturday. Great place great people.

Down the East coast bush camping and some caravan parks catching up with relatives and friends 3 nights on Rainbow Beach fishing of course and finally down to Brisbane after a day at Steve Irwin's Australia Zoo. I had my doubts but it was excellent. Caught up with Mike & Lyn Coventry. A few drinks and dinners and a trip to Moreton Island with them for the day. Mike says hello to anyone that knows him and hopes to be down later this year. Also caught up with Barry Millar "Slim" a Sgt Medic from the old RAP at Keswick 1985-1989. Further south and stopped a few nights with Paulene Chilcott of the Wally fame at Yamba Northern Rivers region NSW and a night with Peter & Lesley Presser in Mildura on the way home. Peter showed me a copy of the disc he purchased at the July function in Bendigo. Sorry I missed it looked like a real Hoot.

94 days in all and a great time.

A Girl Called Coral

by

Noel Sproles

It is appropriate that I commenced writing this story on Anzac Day as it was in Vietnam on this day in 1968 that the story began. The Task Force HQ was being deployed forward to 'Bearcat', the former home of the US 1st Division or the 'Big Red One', to control operations in Bien Hoa Province. As our helicopters lifted off in the early dawn light, we could see columns of soldiers below us snaking their way through Nui Dat base to assemble at Luscombe Field for the Anzac commemoration ceremonies. While we anticipated a routine operation that would see us back with them again within a few weeks, we were not to be back until the beginning of June. And far from being just a repeat of recent operations, we were about to experience a nasty taste of conventional warfare in Australia's largest action of the Vietnam War.

Our initial expectation of a routine deployment seemed justified when the operations out of Bearcat began to wind down early in May and we started to prepare to return home to Nui Dat. But, quite unexpectedly, on 10 May we were directed instead to prepare to reposition ourselves to the north of Tan Uyen to help block the North Vietnamese moving against Saigon. Amongst the details that had to be covered in the planning was the

choice of a name for the firebase that was to be our new home for the next few weeks. I was sitting at the duty officer's desk in front of the main battle map as the task force operations officer and his off-sider deliberated on this. After some discussion, and amidst a few chuckles, they chose 'Coral' as it was the name of the girl friend of a colleague of theirs from their previous unit. Such is the stuff of which history is made!

Prior to our move to Coral, I accompanied the task force intelligence officer to Tan Uyen for a briefing by the local Vietnamese and American commanders. I sat next to him during the briefing and it was a sobering occasion as we were left in no doubt that we were moving into a very active area. At one stage the American briefing officer said that they would only go there with a force of company strength or more and then only if supported by armour. I left the briefing with my heart somewhere down in my boots and shared my feelings with the intelligence officer on our flight back to Bearcat. He assured me that he had heard all this before and was not concerned with it. In short, he considered it to be another case of 'crying wolf'. Hind-sight shows that the warnings were not only correct but perhaps a bit understated.

A small element of the Forward HQ, what is called a 'step up', went with 1RAR into Coral as part of the initial move on 12 May. I was charged with packing up the Command Post (CP) and to move with the rest of the HQ the next morning. When I came in to do this early on the 13th, I was to learn that our new home was under assault by a large enemy force. We quickly packed up and we were loaded into US Army Chinooks for the move to Coral. Crammed into the Chinooks would have been a better description than loaded as the Americans considered this to be a 'hot' insertion and 'combat loaded' the aircraft. This was, I felt, a euphemism for operating the aircraft to its limits. There was gear and bodies everywhere in the Chinook including some people, standing and holding onto the steel winch cable running along the cabin roof, just like commuters on a bus. When we arrived over Coral, we had to circle for a while as fighting was still underway. Once it was clear, we landed and quickly unloaded the aircraft. The detritus of battle was laying everywhere and soldiers were starting to move around looking for mates or to commence restoring order. I came across one of my very good mates whom I had known for years. When I spoke to him he looked straight at me without recognition and went on his way. I don't think that he even remembers our encounter to this day. The sun was an enormous red disc trying to break through the dust and smoke and, in the background, sporadic firing could still be heard as the enemy tried to break contact. Whenever I hear or read General MacArthur's 1963 farewell address to the cadets at West Point, his reference to 'the strange, mournful mutter of the battlefield' always draws me back to that morning.

I found the HQ step up operating from a hole in the ground with the radios placed along a fallen rubber tree. John Collinson, a Kiwi infantryman and an OCS classmate, was on duty so we agreed that I would find where we were to stay before relieving him. After some disputation with three majors who each thought that they

had the responsibility to lay out the local defences of the HQ, I started to dig our new home amongst the rubber trees. In the meantime the engineers had dug a large hole and erected a marquee in it as a temporary home for the CP and it was to here that I eventually reported to relieve John Collinson. That night the heavens opened and at one stage our off-duty signallers came into the marquee looking as if they were half-drowned, begging shelter. I was confident that John, being an infantryman and a Malaya veteran, would have completed my work and that our hole in the ground would be dry and secure, but my confidence was ill-founded. When he did not arrive to relieve me next morning, I went to get him and found him sound asleep in our flooded hole. All I could see was this seemingly disembodied blonde Kiwi head 'floating' in the muddy water that filled our foxhole. To add insult to injury, he had wrapped himself up in MY gear! I was not amused at the time but can smile now at how ludicrous it all was. His exhaustion was so great that he could still sleep under such conditions. Lack of sleep was our continual lot on a fire base under a regime of six hours on duty and six off. In the time off we had to dig and improve our pits, prepare food, scrounge water, and sleep. It was near impossible to sleep during the day due to the noise and the heat and so the only real opportunity to get sleep was after midnight when it cooled somewhat. Even then we could not get completely comfortable as we had to sleep with our clothes and boots on in the event of an attack.

Around 2:30 in the morning of 16 May, we were woken by an unfamiliar sound but one with which we would become only too familiar. The noise was that of the rocket propelled grenades of the 20 minute or so opening barrage that preceded a regimental size attack by the North Vietnamese on Coral. As in most of these barrages, our area received its fair share of the impact. I believe that the signals towers poking up over the tree line was the reason. The rockets were coming over so low that they were dislodging leaves from the canopy of the rubber trees. At that time we did not have overhead protection and so we were soon covered with a thick blanket of leaves. As we lay face down in our pit trying to press our bodies as deeply into the earth as possible, I was overcome with a sense of complete helplessness. No matter how much you wanted this to go away, it would not. It would finish when someone else decided and nothing that you could do or say would make one iota of difference. It was not a pleasant experience, but John and I spoke more to each other during that barrage and in the subsequent few hours than we did in a whole year at Portsea!

But eventually it did stop and we put our heads up over the edge of the pit. As we discussed the situation, we heard another sound but this time it was strangely familiar. We did a double take when we both recognised the sound as bullets zipping low over our heads, just as we would hear in the butts at the rifle range. Someone was firing an automatic weapon at us! We ducked back into our hole once again and took up firing positions. This was one of the few times in Vietnam that I was to actually chamber a round, take off the safety catch, and prepare to fire my rifle. At this stage, John asked me for my spare pistol magazine. It transpired that all he had was his 9mm pistol with just a part-filled magazine. What a strange reversal of roles it was as we prepared to fight whatever was out there in the dark – one virtually defenceless infantryman and

one surveyor armed to the teeth! I had not only my pistol with spare magazine but an SLR with six spare magazines, a bayonet, a steel helmet and flak jacket. My preparedness occasioned some good-natured comments back at Bearcat, especially the helmet, but not at Coral needless to say. Instead, I often received requests for a loan of the helmet or flak jacket and the helmet served us well as wash basin, water carrier and bailer, and in its primary function as morale booster during attacks.

Once the machine gun was silenced, apparently by an MP, John and I sat on the edge of our hole for the remainder of the night and watched the action as spectators. We even brewed up at one stage! We saw the tracers from the 12.7 mm machine gun used as an anti-aircraft weapon against the gunships. The F4 Phantom jets called in to deal with it pulled up right over us and we looked straight into their after burners as they barrelled up into the night sky. The noise was incessant and the lights and colours from tracer, artillery, flares, and the mini guns of 'Spooky' and the helicopter gunships were spectacular. One of us remarked to the other that it was better than a Cecil B. DeMille show. Around sunrise, a light fire team flew across the base straight at us firing mini-guns over our heads towards the perimeter. The spectacle of the great gouts of fire coming from the mini-guns captivated us as the gunships sped closer but when they roared overhead it was back into the hole once more. Cartridge cases dropped from a speeding aircraft are moving very fast and can really hurt, the more so when they are burning hot.

After the regimental attack, we were to experience another three attacks on Coral. Before these eventuated, we developed our pit so that it did not fill with rainwater and it had overhead protection. The latter task fell mainly to me. I used my contacts with the engineers to acquire steel pickets as roof supports for the corrugated iron sheets that I stole under cover of darkness from the pile intended for the HQ bunker. I trust that I am covered by a statute of limitations! I was forced to do this myself as John was that rarest of all creatures – an honest Kiwi not prepared to steal or scrounge!

In recognition of the work load on the duty officers, an extra captain was appointed to work with us in the command post. On one occasion, during a mortar bombardment, we heard voices nearby and stuck our heads up to see 'Tassie', our HQ runner, advising this captain that the operations officer wanted him to report for duty. The officer had no intention of getting out from his foxhole while the mortars were falling around us and was telling Tassie to clear off. Having done his duty, and I am certain that the operations officer meant him to do it only when it was clear, Tassie then took the long way back doing a tour of the area to see how things were going. All this time the mortar bombs were falling. Tassie was a strange character.

During another attack, I used a lull in the mortar barrage to head off to the CP to report for duty. We could only walk slowly in the darkness along a dirt track to the CP for fear of doing a serious mischief to ourselves if we ran into one of the many stay wires from the signals towers. While feeling my way through all this, to my dismay, the mortars started coming in again. I dropped to the ground but then reasoned I was at

less risk completing my journey than if I remained in the open. My head long rush down the steps into the CP was probably misinterpreted by some as enthusiasm to get on with the job rather than the burning desire to get under cover that it was!

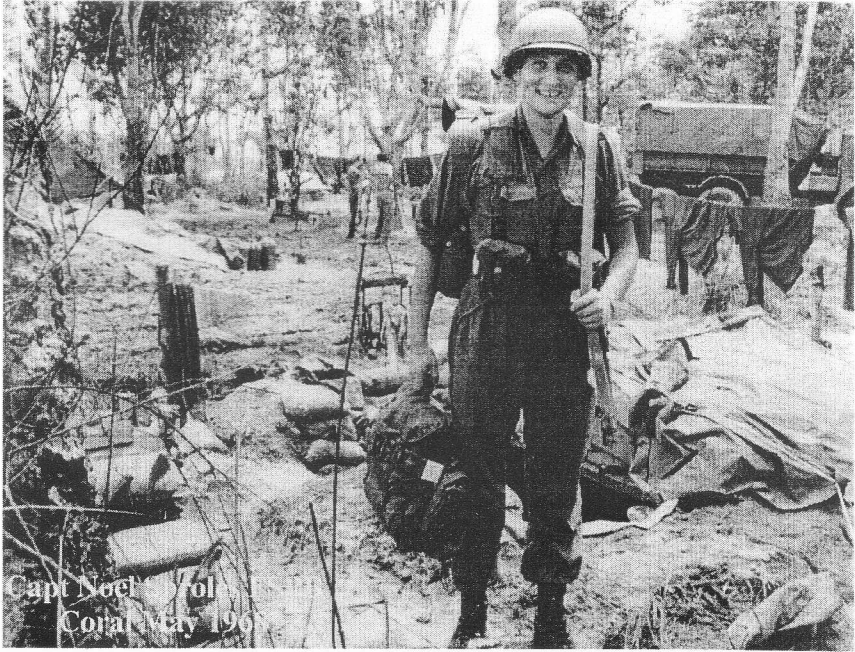
The continued threat of attack resulted in the commander and several of his senior staff sleeping in the CP. About 2:30 one morning, all was quiet so I climbed up out of the bunker and sat outside at the top of the steps in the fresh air. I had not been there long when big rockets started to fly overhead. I raced back down yelling 'Incoming' and grabbed the local defence net radio to warn the Task Force. On the way past, I managed a firm kick to the Commander's stretcher to awaken him. It is not often that you get such an opportunity, so why waste it! He was up in an instant and asking over my shoulder 'Where are they landing?' At that moment we could feel the impacts coming through the ground and it was now my chance to act laconic and say 'Over there', pointing directly into the earthen wall of the bunker.

On another occasion John and I lay in our pit, now covered with three layers of sandbags as protection, while the North Vietnamese 'walked' a mortar barrage across the HQ area. We could hear the detonations getting closer and closer and we braced ourselves for the inevitable. Then they were so close that we could hear the bombs in flight for the few seconds before they landed! The last round of the barrage hit the pit next to ours and only about a metre or so from our heads. The shock was breath taking and the flash inside our pit was blinding and of the purest of pure white. Fortunately the occupant of the next pit was OK but I still have my hoochie cover with the shrapnel holes and the remains of severed tie-downs, and a ration tin with a hole punched neatly through it. Two majors in the pit about four metres from us had bought up big on toothpaste at the PX. It was probably on special. The shrapnel from the bomb peppered their packs stored on the roof of their foxhole with the oozing toothpaste just compounding the damage done to their possessions.

I was on duty on 17 May when General Westmorland visited us and as he watched me go about my duties for a minute or so, I held my breath hoping that he would not ask some in-depth question. To my relief, 'Westy' did not. On 23 May Major George Constable was killed in an air crash while flying escort for a convoy. He was well-known to many in the Corps having flown frequently in support of survey operations. He had the habit of introducing himself by saying 'Call me George' regardless of the rank of the person to whom he was talking. It fell to me to write up his death in the Task Force Commander's log and to also write it up in the 24 hour operations report that went to the Corps HQ (IIFV) each night. A final 'Fini' from Survey.

On 6 June, the 24th anniversary of D Day as it happened, Coral was abandoned. The CP was blown up and filled in and another chapter in our military history came to an end. The intervening decades have dimmed memories somewhat, and John Collinson has since passed away, but I can still close my eyes and see the CP, our pit, and the track along the edge of the rubber just as if it was yesterday. The histories have been written now and different viewpoints and interpretations of events are being debated.

But there is one thing that I am still curious about. Does Coral know that her name is now a proud part of our military history and is emblazoned as a battle honour on the colours of several Army units? I wonder if she would be pleased about that or not as I am suspicious of the hilarity occasioned by the selection of her name.



Nui Dat by John Bullen.

You may have seen the SBS programme recently concerning the laying of the mine-field from the Horseshoe to the coast.

I took a couple of images from it that may be of interest. The joined image is taken from the top of Nui Dat Hill – one taken recently for the film and the other that I took in Jan 1969. The other is of Nui Dat/SAS Hill itself – a little overgrown these days but it looks as if the road works are still visible. Unfortunately, they are not the best having been taken from a tape. The right hand side of the joined photo clearly shows the by-pass road and wire and buildings for the Cav and tank sqns. I feel that they are still there if you look closely at the original image on the left. Who will volunteer to go back and check it out.



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