

B Company

PROMPTED by the effects of Australian ale or not, many many warries are going to plague mates, wives, girlfriends and buddies for years to come.

Many of these stories will have been handed down from sections and platoons, becoming progressively more colourful.

The hell in which one lived, writing letters by the glow of the M60 barrel, killing Charlie on every track, fighting off snakes, scorpions and centipedes to get into shellscrapes and building great dikes to hold out the afternoon flash floods!

Then the humour of company boxing tournaments, concerts, times at the Peter Badcoe Club or post-operation barbecues.

But the old memory will require the odd jogging after a while, so, from my armchair, beer in hand, I take the liberty to reminisce.

The "Foul Fourth" are first — they would be disgruntled otherwise—led by Lt Gary Kendrick. Moving into ambush near Bien Hoa just after curfew, they spotted three "civilians." Instantly Cpl "Ton" Harrington had his team at work. The valley assumed a carnival air as tracer decorated it from top to bottom. Officially, one civilian was killed, but those children with thumbs up and, "Uc-Dai-Loi number one, you shoot VC," made the day.

Ambushes were tedious, maybe, but rewarding. On Operation Goodwood a group of three Charlie decided to do a compass march—right into company headquarters and Six Platoon, where the sentry nailed one. The rest fled slap into

an expertly sited ambush of the "Filthy Fifth," at that stage led by Sgt Bill Fields, and that was that.

The "Sleazy Sixth" had their moments, particularly when Pte Bill Poppell and Cpl Ken Knowles found themselves right in the middle of an enemy bunker system. Careful aim and good control accounted for three VC before the section beat a hasty retreat. Charlie must be thanked for deciding not to be around when we returned.

The move from AO Birdsville to AO Wagga (Operation Merino) was a day of trauma. Four Chinooks placed the OC and half the company in 3RAR's location and the other half in FSPB Chestnut. The wily OC commandeered a troop of tracks and rejoined the company.

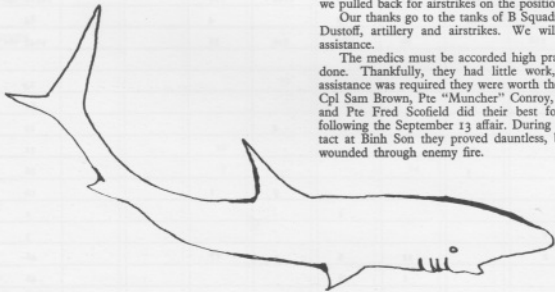
Instead of moving south to the Firestone Trail, circumstances had us moving north of it into 3RAR's AO, with a warning about civilians. A forward scout confronted four "civilians" who fled, with a burst of M16 fire following them, leaving rice and AK47 rounds behind. Simultaneously a contact rear occurred and Cpl Gary Jones winged the closest "civilian", who later died of his wounds.

Few of us will need reminding of our most expensive contact. The tanks led across open paddy into the trees south of the Binh Son rubber, a pause to reorganise, Support Section led into the company harbour and all hell broke loose. Charlie in bunkers with RPGs aren't the most friendly people to meet so close to a truce being declared.

After 45 minutes the situation was somewhat clearer and, having consolidated the position and evacuated the casualties, we pulled back for airstrikes on the position.

Our thanks go to the tanks of B Squadron, W Company, Dustoff, artillery and airstrikes. We will remember your assistance.

The medics must be accorded high praise for a job well done. Thankfully, they had little work, but when their assistance was required they were worth their weight in gold. Cpl Sam Brown, Pte "Muncher" Conroy, Pte "Ned" Kelly and Pte Fred Scofield did their best for Seven Platoon, following the September 13 affair. During the company contact at Binh Son they proved dauntless, bringing back the wounded through enemy fire.





Our signalmen were always a varied bunch. Cpl "Lofty" Byrne and Pte Graham Spiers will be remembered for their feud on where acrias should go, while standing waist deep in the middle of a creek during a thunderstorm.

Pte Barry Campbell finally got his stripe for constant intelligent signalling and quick mind-reading.

A group which is seldom mentioned is the forward scouts. It was always a pleasure to be behind a good one, but the thought of doing it oneself opened the sweatbuds a little. Not only should there be a combat infantryman's badge, but also a forward scout's badge.

NCOs have always been the backbone of the Army and B Company was no exception. They certainly proved themselves in our company. Their attributes were many and varied. Most of them stepped up during their tour, including Cpl Hans Fleer, Cpl Jim Morris and Cpl "Indian" Jensen and they will step further, too. Cpl "Stoney" Bourke will probably end up a bosun and Lcpl "Lofty" Palmer a wealthy bookmaker.

Of our sergeants, only Dave Peden remained to the end. We regretted seeing old hands Sgts "Blue" Dryden and Bill Fields go, but youngsters John Burns and Garry Lea took over their jobs admirably.

Solid CQMSs were our luck. Ssgt Bob Pearson filled this position until he took over the CSM's position. He was delighted to hand over to Ssgt Danny Cook.

Platoon commanders? To tell their tales is unnecessary. Of them we had the best.

Each Anzac Day, in particular, we will remember our two mates who didn't return with us; Vic Petersen and "Blue" McGuire. Both fine fellows, Vic was a great shutterbug and Blue had an indefatigable sense of humour. We miss them a lot.

Finally, there were two other men who deserved the utmost respect.

WOII Jock Richardson MM, the CSM, was a soldier if ever there was one.

Ah yes. The last. He should have been first, but I'll just sit back, sip my beer, and listen to the interminable warries until it comes to commanders. That's where I'll brook no argument whatsoever. "The Boss," Major Bill Reynolds, was the paragon of company commanders.

Four Platoon

*The story of Four Platoon has yet to be told,
Thirty-odd men, all brave and bold;
In a company of greats, they were a good crew,
Let me introduce them in a line or two.*

*Lt Poynton, our skipper, never showed fear,
In all but one contact he kept to the rear.*

*Dave Peden, our sergeant, had had enough of the bush,
He wanted to get to a CMF push.*

*"Muncher" the medic, or Conroy to some,
Chattered incessantly when work was to be done.*

*Kearnes was the sig and sad to relate,
Found it difficult to carry the extra weight.*

*Westy, the batman, had plenty to do,
Looking after the skipper and making his brew.*

*"Stoney" Bourke was the leader of a band,
"Little Red One," best in the land.*

*Max was with us for eight months or so,
Then his time was up and he had to go.*

*Ron Fisher liked arguing with one and all,
But for a Tasmanian he was right on the ball.*

*Our man from Ceylon, D'Costa by name,
Eating curry and rice was his claim to fame.*

*Wayne Campbell, unfortunately, did not get a kill,
But while on Four X he had his fill.*

The luckiest gambler in the whole platoon,
Pete Flynn loved playing a game of pontoon.

"Chook" Fowler's shooting caused more than a snigger,
When he shut his eyes and then pulled the trigger.

As batman, JC had little to do,
Then he worked hard with "Stoney's" crew.

A. M. Williams had a really proud boast,
It was that, of everyone, he talked the most.

A reo, Noland, he did come,
To reinforce the "Little Red One."

"Ton" Harrington couldn't handle the pace,
He went home and Harry filled in his place.

"Gomer" would landclear just for fun,
If the Army allowed him a Ferguson.

Darryl Ward must win a prize,
For getting more mail than the rest of the guys.

Paul Henry loved to drink and shout,
A real comedian — till the beer ran out.

For weeks in Australia George Hancock did stay,
Looking for his house which a storm blew away.

Once Kev McKeown used to scout up ahead,
Then Scotty did the job instead.

While on sentry one fine sunny day,
"Frenchy" scored a Charlie coming his way.

A British provost he used to be,
Then Rennie joined our infantry.

"Lon" Chainey had a very good year,
Then became an assault pioneer.

Though he wasn't much good at navigation,
Mick Wade proved to be the section's salvation.

A boxer he could prove to be,
But "Duck" preferred being section 2IC.

Bruce Pawley was a man of parts,
A good drinker and a champion at darts.

Sid just loved a bar room brawl,
He hooked right in, boots and all.

"Fatty" Balzer used the gun with much finesse,
But never could claim any great success.

"Skinny" Williams, another from Tasmania,
At home in the bush, in 'Nam or Australia.

Stan Bowman thought the Army fine,
But cutting cane was more his line.

Young Webster's name must be filed,
Simply as the man who smiled.

Melrose came and filled a gap,
And put Mick's section back on the map.

Five Platoon

Aid to Big Red One

FIVE PLATOON, or the "Fighting Fifth" as we preferred to be called, in early March 1969 carried out what we considered a suicide mission.

We had arrived to take over protection tasks at FSPB Betty, only to discover our friends in combat, Big Red One, the 1st Infantry Division, US Army, needed our assistance.

Nothing daunted, we quickly mounted tracks and rushed to the assistance of the division. We took over a position occupied by a company so that it could have a few days off just south of Saigon.

It left with us a mortar platoon which we could use as a last ditch effort against the division of enemy we knew was creeping inexorably toward our wire. There was also a jeep with which we could ferry reinforcements if the need arose.

Quickly we rearranged the bunker system to suit our style of fighting and settled down to the nerve-racking wait.

The first night proved very quiet, the only significant occurrences being constant probing by enemy dogs and frequent bursts of machine gun fire whistling overhead, by courtesy of our other mates in peril — the ARVN, fishing in a nearby river.

The following day the men of the fifth were harassed constantly by the enemy's psyops organisation. Slightly troubled by this type of warfare, we had to call on our limitless courage to drive off the beautiful, but deadly, "Freedom from Frustration Forces."

The attack was launched the second night. However, our deception plan paid off, exceeding all expectation. Our fishermen friends bore the brunt of the attack.

The following days and nights were, to say the least, worrying, and each man was overjoyed when the company from Big Red One returned from its R and C to relieve us.

The following award was made as a result of what was termed "The Fighting Fifth's Final Fiasco:"

Pte Ho Chi Minh — Mentioned in Dispatches, for his support of humanitarian ideals.

FIVE PLATOON



"All right, who stole our Hook in sign?"

Six Platoon

Battalion attack, or bug out?

THE END of the operation was in sight. We had moved from the scrub to the fire support base. "Lofty" Palmer and "Hoss" Szepanowski were debating how many beers they could sink between opening time and the evening meal.

V Company had hit a large enemy position a couple of days ago and was calling in artillery and air strikes. Confident of our chances of returning to Nui Dat, we discussed their chances of taking it out.

Battalion must have had long ears, because from being critical onlookers we suddenly found ourselves preparing for a battalion attack. Out of the blue we received an O group and within the hour found ourselves on the start line.

Von Kurcz and Bill Lewis were our left flank stalwarts. Von was, as usual, carrying more gear than a Christmas tree. Seeing he had carried the M79 and M72 from camp, he was determined that if anybody was to fire them it would be him. The artillery was still going in when we moved off.

Someone asked if we were receiving shrapnel. My oath we were! Not from the artillery, but from Von. His casually slung M79 shot a shell vertically which fell about 15 yards

away. Von was the only bloke ignorant as to the cause of the explosion. We soon let him know.

Knowing we were advancing on a strong enemy position made everyone tense and keyed up. Everyone, that is, except Von.

Somehow he had collected a bug in his ear and could be seen shaking his head violently to try to rid himself of the persistent buzzing inside.

Von was no martyr and soon enlisted the platoon's sympathy. Suggestions of poking it out with a stick did not amuse him. Cursing the bug, enemy and attack in that order, he wandered around the platoon bemoaning his fate. His cursing volume increased in proportion to ground covered.

When we got there the enemy position had been flattened by shells and bombs. During the turnaround Von cornered the medic. His graphic description of his ailment overcame that worthy's usual scepticism and he syringed out the offending insect.

That's how the first battalion attack since the Korean War took second place to a bug in an ear.

SIX PLATOON

The Peter Badcoe Club

CRIES OF "I can fly, I can fly, wheeeeeeeeeee!" are most unusual, to say the least.

But these words were often heard at Vung Tau, scene of B Company's few days' leave during the tour. It was a paradise for boys, a place where many a stunt often ended in grief for the experimenter.

The second floor of the Grand Hotel was a popular choice of launch sites for "The Fur Coat", who was fortunate to finish up with little more than slight structural damage.

The Peter Badcoe Club was designed to give the tired Digger a chance for a couple of days rest. But after those two days most felt worse than they did after one or two months on operations. A period of rest and much recreation was needed to recover from R and C.

RTA, a very popular medical decision, was the case for one of the lads after a visit to Vung Tau. The bloke in question wasn't broken hearted — he was broken jawed. "Teddy" Rose claimed the fracture was caused by excessive jaw movement imbibing massive quantities of Budweiser beer.

The wire surrounding the club was a constant challenge to the boys and work for the already overburdened members of 1ALSG, browned from many a days work in shorts and no shirt under the cruel sun.

Canunga had nothing on that place for wire, but Canungra was never attacked with so much enthusiasm, either. I mean why pay a cab when we could walk through a tangled maze of uncontrolled bastard wire at any hour of the day or night? It was usually after 9 p.m., anyway. Guess it had something to do with a curfew.

While on the subject of cabs, the cabbies, known simply as "John", were subject to many a gruelling journey at the hands of Australians. After having his cab stood on end by some enthusiastic fare, John was faced with the problem of fare collection. Here John was usually subjected to the hit and run method — hit him with 20 piastres for a 100-piastre fare and run. Worked every time — when there were no MPs about.

1968 was certainly the year of the Olympics, but the last place we expected to see them was on the Vung Tau beach. The leader was "Snow" and a short head behind was the dreaded "82 Bravo", B Company's most feared weapon (by B Company) and Charlie's most feared enemy. In third position, but drifting off course, was a baton (no, nothing to do with relay) wielded threateningly by an MP. The local sprint stars soon outdistanced the fuzzi and the victors were seen celebrating shortly afterward. No heads bowed and gloved clenched fists raised here. Fists clenched, yes, but round a can and head thrown well back.

While on sport, another popular participant sport was drag racing. The vehicles were horse-drawn carts propelled by drunken jockeys complete with whip and lager voice. Although the races were enjoyed by most, the MPs had other ideas and invariably spoiled the fun. No serious accidents occurred, but minor ones were common.

Even cooks had their share of danger. Perhaps the most perilous of all occasions was "Combat's" drunken drag through the suicidal Vung Tau traffic. Reports indicate the right-hand drive rule was not always adhered to. Right up to May 18 the bike could be seen around the Dat, complete with Combat and suspected fake plates.

The bars were a source of wonder to us and if we lost points it must be in this avenue. We NEVER EVER learned from past mistakes. Perhaps we didn't want to, as we were always returning to joints where we had been fleeced before.

On the credit side, however, we did learn a few bars of the local national anthem, "Uc Dai Loi, cheap Charlie....."

But we didn't learn, for example, that Vung Tau watches have bamboo springs to make them tick and beetles to make the hands revolve. A word of advice to a serviceman on his first tour — Vietnamese watch beetles have a very short life span.

The bars were a constant source of trouble. One lad, after being overcharged (slightly) for a Saigon tea, thought the best way to break even was to demolish some of the surrounding furniture. It sure was an expensive drink. Rumour has it that it amounted to 14 and 14.

A popular game in the bars was "heads in the fan." The idea was to stop the fans by slowly poking your head into the centre hub of the churning blades. This sometimes went astray and the gendarmes appeared. Even more common was an error of judgment and a splitting headache.

A Pom can be a hindrance at the best of times and such was the case here. The US R and R centre at Vung Tau was out of bounds to all but US servicemen on in-country R and R.

However, armed with American accent and a borrowed R and R pass, an Aussie and his Pom mate managed to infiltrate successfully. All at once the distinctly British accent bellowed out above the din of proceedings. He was having trouble with those awfully long American service numbers. The two offenders barely managed to escape minus the MP escort promised them by the staff.

But for all this, the trips to Vung Tau and the Peter Badcoe Club went down in most memories as welcome escapes from life in Nui Dat.

