



Support Company

SUPPORT COMPANY provided the battalion with the specialists so necessary for successful operations.

Elements of the company were spread throughout 4 RAR/NZ(Anzac)Bn.

Not only did it have four platoons which, by the very nature of their tasks, were far more independent than rifle company platoons, but the company also administered several smaller elements. These included the intelligence section, the regimental police section, regimental aid post personnel, members of C Section, 33 Dental Unit, and battalion headquarters personnel.

Three of the platoons were the normal ones associated with any support company—Signals Platoon, Mortar Platoon and Assault Pioneer Platoon. The fourth was an interesting one, consisting of soldiers trained in tracking and also manning the battalion's medium anti-tank weapons, the 106mm and 90mm recoilless rifles. The tank threat to the battalion was non-existent, but the devastating anti-personnel rounds fired by both weapons were extremely useful in the defence of a base. This platoon was known as the anti-tank/tracker platoon.

Three of the most popular soldiers in the company were black and had four feet—Trajan, Milo and Marcus. Their value was proved continually and more on their exploits is contained in the section on the anti-tank/tracker platoon.

This platoon and the signals platoon had no New Zealanders in their ranks. But Kiwis were to be found in the mortar platoon, assault pioneer platoon and company headquarters.

The company arrived in South Vietnam under the command of Maj T.R. Sullivan MBE. In January 1969 he changed places with Maj J.P.A. Deighton, OC D Company.

The officer commanding Support Company had the important role of battalion operations officer and, as such, was the commanding officer's right hand man in planning and conducting operations.

Capt E.I. Manuera MC, a New Zealander, was company 2IC until January 1969, when he returned to Malaysia and was replaced by another New Zealander, from RNZIR Component, Capt. L.D. Grant MBE.

The company sergeant major, WOII F.D. Tilbrook, returned to Australia on 12 February 1969 and was replaced by Sgt L.W. Wilmen. There was a two-month gap between the departure of WOII Tilbrook and the arrival of Sgt Wilmen. Sgt W.E. O'Brien, Signals Platoon, and Sgt Huish, battalion headquarters, carried out the CSM's tasks.

Other people in company headquarters were the CQMS, Sgt F. Galvin, the company storeman, Pte H.H. Ward (replaced by Pte G.J. Sutton, 21 February 1969), the company clerk, Cpl C.A. Fletcher (later to become the officers' mess sergeant), Cpl M.J. Heffernan, who took over from Cpl Fletcher, followed by Cpl I.M. Smith who, in turn, was followed by Cpl M.W. McEwen.

Looking after the company pay was Pte P.M. Cowan, and the driver was Pte C.H. Seery. The cooks of Support Company were Sgt R.M. Wearne, Cpl K.W. Rideout, Pte C.J. Banks, Pte D. Richardson and Cpl C.B. Fieldler.

Signals Platoon

THE SIGNALS PLATOON worked effectively throughout the battalion's tour in Vietnam, keeping communications open under all conditions.

The platoon manned the battalion signals centre, maintained a line section and met a heavy radio operator commitment. Never more than three men strong, the line section systematically replaced all lines in the battalion area at Nui Dat.

An NCO and two operators were detached to each Australian rifle company and Administration Company for the duration of the tour, and re-transmission stations were effectively brought in when required.

The signals store was under the effective control of our man from the Emerald Isle, Lcpl M.H. "Paddy" Wilson. The only item not issued was the Blarney Stone, though at times his mates suspected that Paddy had it hidden out the back.

Radio mechanic Cpl Don Blair faced a big job when he arrived, but within two months had most of the vast quantities of unserviceable equipment ready for use. The arrival of 106 Field Workshops at Nui Dat in December 1968 was a great relief. It meant he could cease attempting to perform miracles and concentrate, instead, on the impossibles.

Credit for the line system went to ace begger, borrower and barterer, Lcpl "Wallaby" Willoughby, who was forced to use all his talents to scrounge the cable necessary to do the job. Cpl Rick Soelburg was stolen from C Company, and before taking over the signals centre finished the work Cpl Willoughby started.

The battalion worked closely with 104 Signals Squadron during the tour. Sgt Cec Jurd was attached to 4RAR/NZ (Anzac)Bn for 10 months. The platoon believed it finally managed to pass on to him some of the finer points of field communications.

Years of playing rugby finally caught up with Cpl Jack Edwards when his cartilage went in January 1969 and he was medevaced to Australia. He served for many months with D Company in two roles. He believed his primary job was running activities associated with the turf, and secondary job was communications.



If there was a happy-go-lucky prize it would undoubtedly be won by the irrepresible Pte Doug Whitton. If nothing else, he will be remembered for his coiffure.

There were many funny incidents which brightened the tour and no doubt they will be discussed whenever Vietnam comes into conversations.

The platoon sergeant, Sgt W.E. O'Brien, was a tower of strength to the platoon and to Support Company as a whole. By his efforts at Nui Dat the signals tasks were made much easier.

The signals platoon's efforts are reflected in the battalion's record.

Medical Platoon

PLAYING AN unglamorous role, but nevertheless one of the most important in the battalion, was Medical Platoon.

Consisting of the doctor, Capt E.D. Lewis, nine medical assistants and a number of stretcher bearers, it was the platoon's duty to look after the sick and wounded on operations and in Nui Dat.

The medical assistants and stretcher bearers were allocated one to each rifle platoon, company and battalion headquarters.

The platoon medics, initially stretcher bearers drawn from the band, carried the brunt of the work, for which they had gained a wealth of experience in Malaya and Borneo. Before they were withdrawn from their sub-units to re-form the band they looked after the minor sick and wounded in the field, treated casualties and performed normal rifleman duties. They were extremely popular members of the battalion.

In August 1968 several medics had left the theatre for a variety of reasons and it became necessary to train replacements. Companies called for soldiers who were interested in the job and these were trained at a special course. In early September they were in the field and demonstrating they were every bit as capable as their predecessors.

Several senior NCOs acted as hospital visiting officers, travelling daily to Vung Tau to take mail and personal effects to members in hospital and to provide liaison between the battalion and the medical staff.

Most Australian casualties went to 1 Australian Field Hospital in Vung Tau. However, on occasions soldiers were evacuated to 24, 36 or 93 US Evacuation Centre or 7th (US) Surgical Hospital.

The helicopter casualty evacuation system was superb, by standards set in other wars, and the sick or wounded in most cases were in hospital less than an hour after being incapacitated. RAAF and US Army helicopters were responsible for this feat and the effect on the soldiers' morale was almost tangible.

The system was so successful, in fact, that only one member of 4RAR/NZ(Anzac)Bn, who arrived at a medical establishment alive, died from his wounds. Many were literally brought back to life.

The unit hygiene representatives carried out their jobs unostentatiously but efficiently.

Assault Pioneer Platoon

AFTER CONSIDERING all the incidents which befell the assault pioneer platoon in Vietnam, they were all either too detrimental, too true or too rude for publication. We had many who wanted to tell their stories, but Australian censorship is strict, and with the doubtful words cut out the incidents took on an aura of fantasy.

The pioneers of 4RAR/NZ(Anzac)Bn were unusual. Anyone would agree with that. However, their main claim to distinction was they were organised into six sections. There was a platoon headquarters, four Australian sections of seven, and two Kiwi sections of six and five men.

The platoon completed a great variety of tasks. One section was always detached to the company occupying the Horseshoe. When the battalion was on operations one section remained in Nui Dat to carry on pioneer tasks there as the materials became available.

Of the remaining four sections, at least two and platoon headquarters were deployed with battalion headquarters, while the remainder were deployed with the rifle companies. They carried out exactly the same tasks as the engineer teams which were allotted to companies on occasions.

The tasks of the pioneers ranged from laying concrete and constructing buildings in Nui Dat to patrolling as normal infantry, demolition of bunkers, and construction of command posts and wire fences at fire support bases.

All sections came into contact with the enemy, but the platoon escaped without casualties. The only Koalas in the platoon not to be shot at were the platoon commander and the platoon sergeant, whose efforts to this end were only frustrated by some very determined friendlies. There was, in fact, a certain hole on the way from the canteen to the pioneer lines which claimed more casualties between 9.30 pm. and 10.30 pm. nightly than the rest of the incidents combined.

The platoon was similar to other pioneer platoons which have served in Vietnam in that it had to be fit. This prerequisite stemmed from the speed with which it had to leave demolition areas. American safety fuse burned at anything from a foot in two seconds to a foot in three hours. The way we worked our time out was to take the square root of our post code, subtract how long we had been in country, and multiply by the speed with which we could cover 100 yards.

Battalion noticed we preferred to maintdem for explosives rather than carry them. Not that we didn't carry explosives, but certain members liked proving that C4 made better heat for brews than hexamine.

Members of the platoon were proud to claim at the end of the tour that they still had the pair of socks they were issued with on arrival in Vietnam.

And now for some of the lower than average personalities who inhabited the platoon. Pte "Rocks" Stone gets special mention as the slow talking, slow moving platoon commander's batman. We just can't understand how he didn't win the best-batman-in-Vietnam award.

Then there was the best educated medic in a pioneer platoon, Pte "Prof" Moore. Cpl "Tubby" Darlington, the only storeman in Vietnam to volunteer for field work, found himself forward scout in a rifle company first day out.



Of our Kiwi sections, and here we come to some really outstanding personalities, we were happy to number among us: "The Benevolent Mexican," Cpl Jim Davis, Spr Wiki Kahika MID, and "The Prince," Pte Monty Malietoa.

We don't like to say that pioneers were sleepy, but Pte Ron Blood deserved a medal, or something, as the only man to sleep through a contact. Last, but not least, we also had for a spell, the great "Bear" Winchester, comedian at large (who let him out?) who was forced to transfer to D Company to win a medal as have all the Winchesters.

Incidents were many and varied, but no matter how cynical we were, we will always remember the assault pioneer platoon of 4RAR/NZ(Anzac)Bn in Vietnam.

Mortar Platoon

TWO NEW ZEALAND SECTIONS joined the mortar platoon when it arrived in South Vietnam, increasing the platoon's operational scope.

Originally, it consisted of a platoon headquarters and five sections, but after a reappraisal of the unit's needs the platoon was reorganised to provide two mortar fire controllers for each company. By using the artillery assistant forward observers there were enough fire controllers to supply one to each rifle platoon.

This change forced one Australian section to disband. A Kiwi joined platoon headquarter and Australians merged into the Kiwi sections.

On operations the platoon normally deployed two fire sections, leaving one section at Nui Dat for base defence. The fourth section was based at the Horseshoe and rotated with the companies.

At times a section took on the role of a rifle section to protect battalion headquarters, a task which permitted the Kiwis to carry enormous quantities of weapons and ammunition, something they apparently enjoyed.

During the tour the platoon fired many missions in support of contacts, while harassing fire and defensive fire tasks provided constant activity.