

THE EYES and EARS

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Detachment 131 Divisional Locating Battery RAA

Unit Citation for Gallantry (UCG) awarded to the Detachment and those who served at
The Battles of Coral/Balmoral in South Vietnam, 1968

2022 – 56 Years and the Detachment 131 Spirit Lives On: 1966 – 1971



DET. 131 DIV LOC BTY NOTICE BOARD

Seasons



Greetings

Have a great shared
time with family,
friends and mates!

Art work: Ernie Newbold
Page 1 of 30



RTA'ers 19th November, 1968

Bob Wilson's photo's caption in the photo above does capture the moment....

The members who returned home on the 19th were - Iain Kennedy, Frederick Kruimink, Peter Binns, Ken Piesley (Late), Peter Whitaker, Bob Wilson, Ian Finlay and John Bayford

...the 'Journey' continues - Here's more...



At left from left – Not sure, Iain Kennedy, Not sure, John Bayford and not sure



Not sure



Bob Wilson

**On board – Window... "Blue" Peisley
Centre?
Aisle...Jim Kruimink (I think)**

Ed – Don't you laugh at "Blue" Peisley enjoying a fag!



Now here's a fairly "full" RTA month...

RTA Project for 2022

WE continue on with the project commenced in January this year.

Here's a list of the RTA'ers that I have for Novembers -

1966 – Allan Campbell (Late), William Bullen (Late), William Crowther (Late)

1967 – Maurice Arch (Late)

1968 – Iain Kennedy, Dennis Dye, Frederick Kruimink, Peter Binns, Kenneth Jones, Ken Piesley (Late), Peter Whitaker, Brian Black (Late), Robert Wilson, Ian Finlay, Vaughan Millar, John Bayford

1969 - Arthur Dove, Russell Jackson, Brett Rainsford, Graeme Owen, Michael Quinlan, Robert Pelham, William Doyle (Late), John Smith, Randal Jones, Stanley Patterson, Ivan Mills, Leslie Robinson, James Merchant, Michael Delaney (Late), Peter Larkin, John Henshaw, Harold Little (Late)

1970 – Olaf Asmanis, Luigi Lanera, Donald Perry, Norbert Kroll, Peter O'Donnell, Maxwell McPherson (Late), Joseph Losiak, Robert Etherington, John O'Neill, Peter McGann, Leslie Bates (Late), Geoffrey Macaulay (Late)

1971 – Allen Robotham, Laszlo Falkai, Peter Suckling, Kevin Browning, Ian Yerbury (Late), Kevin Benans, Anthony Turner, John Jaggard, John Homer, Peter Barry, Garry Grimwood, Jeffrey Evans (Late)

1972 – Alan Cleasby

Special Mention – William Taggart US 1st/83rd - 1967

That's Novembers' group complete, I think – let's see what our final month, November, will produce.



Give me a Name?

The "Lost Locator Project"

This Project is being re-ignited for 2022

Our current list contains the names of **117** Locators (as at 01.01.22) that we have not had contact with since basically commencing communications in 2012, so, we thought this year is as good as any to try and reduce this number.

However, this doesn't mean that we still have contact with the total number of Battery/Detachment members we have Located over time as continuing correspondence has lapsed in a lot of cases.

We regularly check bereavement/funeral notices and this does not locate members in the way we really want to. So, we're appealing for YOUR help in scouring all sorts of sources – local RSL's may not a good starter.

I can send you the total list of names or, if you prefer, by years in SVN to give you a starting point. I will keep an update and publish monthly results in *Eyes & Ears* and the Associations Facebook page on the web site.

Paul Dickson

Get in touch with me via 131eyesandears@gmail.com

. **The "Detachment Album Project"** – This project is sponsored by the 131 Locators Association and is in need of some photographic and by-line input from our members/Readers.



. Remembrance Day - 2022

Bill Wight – “Attending the service at Thuringowa Cenotaph, Townsville.
Great turn up.
Regards
Bill Wight “



Paul Dickson – a slightly smaller group at St Pauls in San Miguel de Allende. The weather was pleasant and the service matched it.



. Insights and Recollections...

This topic/s have raised so much interest – we’re still in the middle of some really great discoveries with some remarkable memories being brought to life.

The series will continue on the receipt of more Insights and Recollections, so if you would care to contribute, please send your Insights and Recollections –

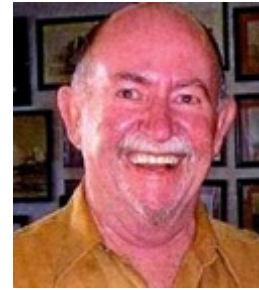
Paul Dickson at - 131eyesandears@gmail.com

Ed – The following is a continuation of a series, commenced in June’s *Eyes & Ears*, taken from an unfinished book by Jeff Evans. Jeff gave the contents to Kevin Browning and he has made it available for us to publish in *Eyes & Ears* and to be archived on the Association’s website.

NB – Please note that the contents are Jeff’s words and have not been edited/alterd. You will see his “notes” and markings (eg. xxxxxxxxxxxxxx etc) needing further attention by him and so on. Please accept the fact that Jeff was fastidious in his research and still had so much information to follow up on, which included research of documents and interviews with fellow Gunners.

Paul Dickson – a pre-note – to read the comments contained in this chapter made by Detachment members who served during this operation brings home the intensity of the activity incurred in FSB Coral.

"Gunners in Vietnam, 1965-1971" aka by Jeff initially as – “the book”



By Jeff Evans

Edited by Paul Dickson
in conjunction with Kevin Browning,

Chapter 12 FSPB Coral

Background

The term 'Tet', for those who served, conjures up a time of intense fighting throughout most of South Vietnam. Tet is short for Tet Nguyen Dan, the Vietnamese Lunar New Year, a time of festivals and fireworks, family gatherings and worship of important ancestors, and preparing to enter the New Year in a correct manner. The period of festival is sometime in the last 10 days of January through to the middle of February. In 1968, Tet was 29-31 January. With both North and South Vietnam celebrating Tet, the holiday period was generally a time of truce between the VC/NVA and the South Vietnamese. In 1968, the VC/NVA attacked in the South during Tet, giving rise to the name 'Tet Offensive'.

The North had three broad aims for the Tet Offensive in 1968:

To accelerate the public's increasing opposition to the war, especially in the USA during the Presidential Elections to be held in 1968. North Vietnam was well aware of the home population's dwindling support for US and Australian troops, and were determined to add fuel to the fire with a decisive victory (or several) over allied forces.

To add pressure to, and hopefully dominate, the Peace Talks in Paris, scheduled to commence on 10 May 68.

By attacking the major towns and cities of the South, the North hoped for a 'general uprising' in the South - forcing the collapse of President Thieu's Saigon regime - in support of the North.

On 31 January 1968, during the Tet period, the VC/NVA attacked all major southern cities and Provincial Capitals, some 80 cities and towns, as well as the large military bases of Bien Hoa and Long Binh. They also attacked Khe Sanh, which was planned to stretch US forces to the limit prior to the commencement of Tet. General Giap (Commander of NVA forces), wanted this to be a US disaster, equivalent to the French disaster at Dien Bien Phu. The siege of Khe Sanh lasted from 21 January to 6 April, a total of 76 days, and was a disaster for Giap.

Commencement of Tet for the Task Force was Operation Coburg (4 Fd or 12 Fd?? Dates??), centred on the protection of Bien Hoa air base and the Long Binh logistical area. Both 2 RAR and 7 RAR patrolled aggressively in their area of operations, supported by elements of 3rd Cavalry Regiment and the guns of 12 Field Regiment.

The Tet Offensive as a whole was generally considered to be a failure. There was no 'decisive victory', no general uprising in the south, and the north lost more than 50,000 soldiers. However, the ferocity of the Tet Offensive, and the attack on the US Embassy in Saigon hit home with the American public, adding to the groundswell of opposition to the war. On orders from the North Vietnam, the VC/NVA then 'went to ground' to consolidate and rebuild for a later offensive aimed to actually coincide with the Paris Peace Talks in May.

The Setting

From 19 February to early April, US and ARVN conducted an active campaign to evict under-strength VC/NVA units from around Saigon. 7 NVA Division and 9 VC Division plus other formations totalling 11 Regiments had been operating in the Saigon – Bien Hoa area. Most 1 ATF personnel thought the Intelligence Estimates had been overstated; on this occasion, they had not.

On 19 April, Colonel Dac, an assistant political officer in VC Sub-Region 1, surrendered to the ARVN/US forces. Dac warned his captors of a new offensive to start in a few weeks' time, with 12,000 reinforcements per month pouring down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Dac's information supported Intelligence Estimates for renewed offensives to commence soon, and Saigon was a prime target.

'Mini-Tet' began on 4 May with ground assaults and rocket attacks on expected targets. For the period 4-9 May, the VC/NVA lost 4135 counted dead. US forces were operating under intense pressure, protecting the US bases of the Bien Hoa – Long Binh complex. On 10 May, HQ IIFV requested 1 ATF deploy to AO Surfers, about 30 km north-north-west of Saigon city, with the aim of blocking VC/NVA resupply and withdrawal routes around Saigon.

Known as Operation Toan Thang (Complete Victory), it was a US operation to crush the VC/NVA 'Mini Tet' in May 1968. *"The region proposed for the operation lay on the border of Bien Hoa and Binh Duong provinces."* This was an extremely hostile area, which the VC/NVA had dominated for some time and they were well entrenched. To have the Australians and new Zealanders land and occupy one of the prime movement routes was totally unacceptable. Paul Ham describes the plan as, *"The allies were to be dropped into country thick with communist forces, and used as bait – as 'tethered goats' – to lure the enemy into the open."* PH p363

Two days before the arrival of Australian units in AO Surfers, US units had been in very heavy contact with five enemy Main Force Regiments – 2 x NVA regiments, 3 x VC Regiments, plus Local Force units from platoon to battalion strength. Although called 'Mini Tet', it was costly; *"In one week during TOAN THANG the US Army sustained 625 killed and 2,225 wounded – the worst seven days of the American war."*¹ (PH p)

The 1 ATF Commander's Concept of Operations was:

3 RAR to land by helo on 12 May to secure FSPB Coral for the fly in of 1 RAR, and then move to establish blocking positions and patrol in the west of AO Surfers.

12 Field Regiment, HQ 1ATF and 1RAR fly in and establish FSPB Coral on 12 May.

TFMA, heavy artillery and armour join on 13 May.

1 RAR block and patrol to the east on 13 May.

The Deployment

Confusion caused by lack of recon

Delays -

Leading to lack of preparation of the base

Development of a base 2-3 days

Reconnaissance of the area was conducted by helicopter from 1500 metres altitude (almost 5,000 feet). The reconnaissance was conducted by LTCOLs Phillip Bennett and Jim Shelton, both veterans of Korea. The US pilots refused to fly any lower due to the high possibility of receiving ground fire. This was by no means due to lack of courage - US chopper pilots displayed plenty of courage in the coming days – it was a fear of 12.7mm AA Machine Guns which were known to be throughout the area.

From 1500 metres, jungle and rubber plantations were obvious, but 'open' areas were more deceptive. What looked like open areas with low scrub were in fact covered with trees and shrubs to about three metres tall. The reconnaissance group was therefore unable to determine the 'lie of the land' with any degree of accuracy, and so when the helicopters arrived to deposit troops and guns, the trees made it impossible to land without some prior preparation of Landing Zones.

The result was that the deployment was delayed from the first insertion. Infantry units, sent ahead to secure ground, were deposited not where they were supposed to be, but in areas where helicopters could actually land. These units then had to travel on foot to secure ground for the insertion of guns and remaining units.

More on confusion of poor recce

Coordination on the ground was virtually non-existent. Reconnaissance parties from the battalions and the gun regiment made little contact. Gun sites, selected from the 1500m high aerial reconnaissance, had to be changed substantially. 161 Bty went in early and reported "Ready" at 10.45am. As time moved on, a less than acceptable position for 102 Bty was adopted, resulting in a gap of some 1500m between 102 and 161 Batteries. They were intended to be in the same Fire Support Base, with an estimated diameter of about 500 metres, but somewhere along the line, this concept was lost. 102 Bty recce party did not get to decide their location until 2.00pm, and the guns finally arrived about 3.00pm.

Expand on this – the development and things missing. With the late arrival, there was only time to develop the Command Post and earth bunds around three guns before darkness fell. There was no time to construct wire or mine defences. Two early warning listening posts, with machine guns, were deployed to the north and north-east of 102 Battery. *"Captain David Brooke, the 102nd's Battery Captain was responsible for the defence of the position and had worked hard getting his gunners to dig fire and sleeping pits."* DH p486

To a degree, Brooke's pressuring of the soldiers was in vain. With a combination of lack of time, and a lack of fear of attack, many of the soldiers' pits were hardly sufficient to conceal a soldier. (The morning following the attack on the gun position, there was no problem getting soldiers to dig weapon and/or sleeping pits – they were first priority for many, and suddenly, steel helmets were in fashion again.)

HQ 12 Field Regiment, HQ 1 RAR, the Anti-Tank Platoon and 1 RAR Mortars, some Engineers and Signallers, and a Det of 131 Div loc Bty Mortar Locating Radar were co-located with 102 Battery. HQ 3 RAR and D Company 3 RAR were about 800 metres from the 102 Battery group. Other Inf locations. The Centre of Arc for the guns was 1600 mils – due East. At some stage, a fire mission was called and the guns supported the infantry. Following this fire mission, the guns were left facing generally east. (Enemy reconnaissance parties noted this fact.) PH p364

The mortar locating radar and detachment deployed to Coral with 102 Bty and were ordered to set up to the rear of No ... gun, with the vehicle and generator behind the bund of No ... gun. Both the vehicle and generator were found to be riddled with bullets on the morning after the attack.

"Lieutenant Colonel Jack Kelly, CO 12 Field regiment, had never had faith in the ability of the mortar-locating radar, and had recommended against its purchase. ... Kelly, determined to get some use from them, placed them in a visible position so the enemy would fire at them." (BOC p151 3/1) This seems a very odd decision for the CO of a regiment to even suggest, let alone implement.

No doubt everyone at Coral on the night of 12/13 May was in great peril, but to purposely place a major equipment in jeopardy, just to draw some small arms fire, was borderline ridiculous. If that was the aim, then it was achieved. The radar was hit by small arms and shrapnel in both the nights of 12/13 May and 15/16 May, and was out of action for some time. Detachment members who were present at the time recall that the radar site was not the best for locating, and that suggestions to change the location were overridden by someone senior to CAPT Phil Perrin, the 131 Detachment commander at the time.

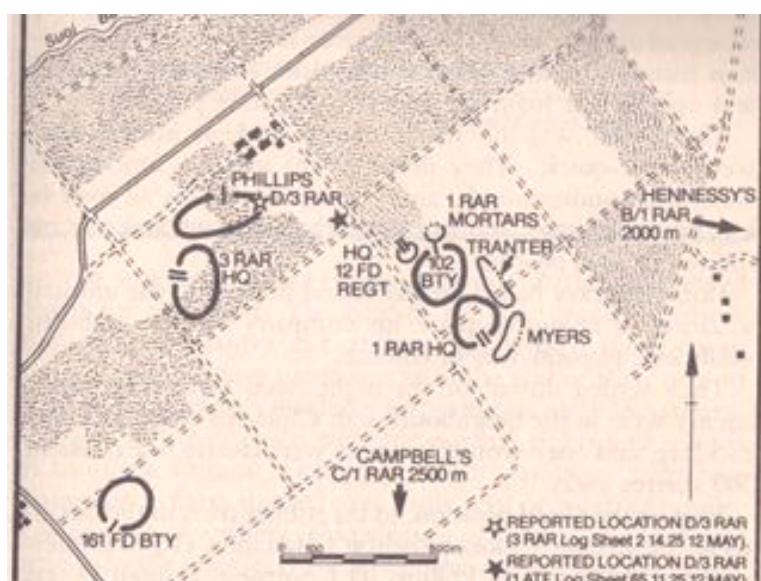
During the Coral deployment, a "very spit-polished helicopter" with an "equally spit-polished US Brigadier General" (Deputy Commander of First Infantry Division) arrived on the scene. He explained that his Division (the 'Big Red One') had been in contact in this area for some time, and had on occasion 'suffered casualties in the hundreds' in clashes with the VC/NVA units. His final words were, *"Tell your CO that you won't need to go looking for them. They'll come looking for you."* The Task Force was facing an interesting time.

See page 366 of Ham for the 102/161 fly in debacle.

1600 – 131 personnel arrive at 161 Bty, having walked from 102 Bty.

1700hrs – 1 RAR mortars arrive in location. Some coordination of machine gun arcs of fire, initiated by the Mortar Platoon commander, had been agreed at the local (platoon level) before darkness.

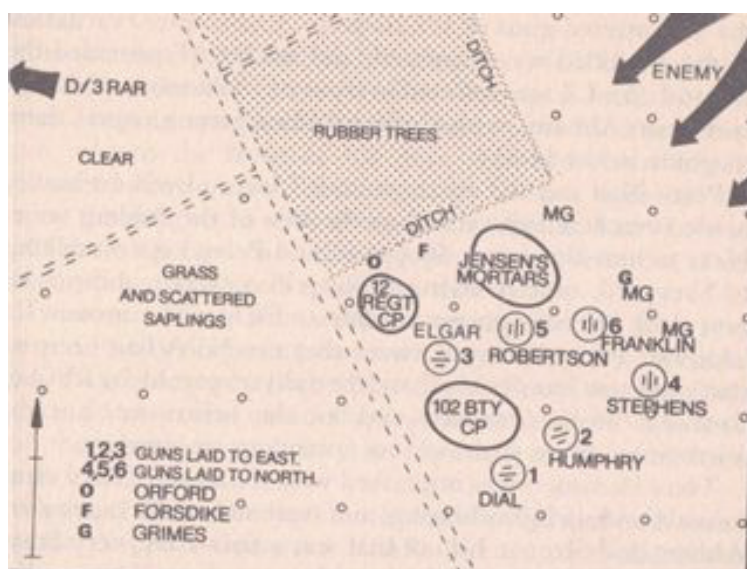
Night of 12/13 May 68



After a long day of movement, digging holes and command posts, filling sand bags, erecting covers, preparing ammunition and sundry other tasks, the soldiers were exhausted. Many had the shallowest of shellscrapes from which to fight if things went bad. Knowing that at some time they would have to take a turn on radio watch or manning the machine gun, they were keen to get to sleep.

Alan, this could be 'an aside'.

Protection of a Fire Support Base was normally the responsibility of infantry, cavalry or sometimes even armour as with 2LT Peter Kilpatrick's base at while providing the protection, the troop of three Centurions provided an unnecessary wake-up call in the form of an Unauthorised Discharge (accidental firing) by the troop



commander. The main armament, loaded with canister, fired accidentally. The ensuing explosion wiped the FSB toilet from the face of the earth. Fortunately, there was no-one in residence at the time.

At about 8.00pm it started to rain. Exhausted, some slept through, while others had to rearrange their hutchies and bail out their shell scrapes. At about midnight, the rain ceased. Two soldiers manning the machine gun thought it a good time to 'relieve themselves'; they stepped away from the machine gun and a burst of machine gun fire cut through the trees with Green Tracer. Following a heated exchange of words, it was realised that this was not friendly fire – the Australians were using Red Tracer – Green was the enemy (in fact, NVA 7 Div).

Kennedy, E&E newsletter – where does it fit???

At about 1.45am, shadowy figures were seen near the Mortar Platoon, and at about 2.00am there was a sudden burst of machine gun fire from the machine gun facing north east. The enemy retaliation was swift; several Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPG) were fired, accompanied by machine gun and small arms fire. The results for the Mortar Platoon were devastating – 11 soldiers required evacuation and two others had been killed – this was 40% of the Platoon strength.

102 Battery then fired a mission in support D Company, 1 RAR, who had made contact with the enemy and had suffered a number of casualties. Three guns were used to support D Company (Numbers 4, 5 and 6), and at the end of the mission, these three guns were left facing basically north.

Then, *"Everyone froze as a green flare followed by a red flare went high into the sky and all hell broke loose."* (BOC? P....) 400 NVA soldiers swept in from the north, overrunning the Mortar Platoon and No 6 gun of 102 Bty. The members of No 6 gun, realising that they were about to be overrun, removed the firing lock from their gun before retiring behind the No 5 gun bund. No 6 gun was seriously damaged by an enemy satchel charge, and was withdrawn for repair later in the day.

Expand on these:

161 Bty fired a DF in front of the mortar platoon.

Soldiers in the mortar platoon ordered to stay below ground level while the artillery was adjusted in close.

The mortar platoon area was engaged with Splintex from 102 Bty.

0230hrs – 161 Bty ordered to cease fire while Light Fire Team and Spooky took over the close support.

Expand on This. The NVA line of approach took them directly into the line of fire of the three 105mm guns facing north. The NVA were engaged by small arms and by No 4 and 5 guns firing Splintex and High Explosive rounds directly at them. No 5 gun was raked by machine gun fire. No 2 gun was hit by an RPG flattening its tyres and damaging the trail. No 1 gun ammunition bay was set on fire by another RPG. Fortunately, there was no explosion, just a searing hot fire as the cordite bags burned furiously, accompanied by massive volumes of smoke. An ammunition resupply to No 4 gun was being organised.

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Over in the Anti-Armour Platoon, the platoon commander had received permission to engage 'opportunity targets' with the 90mm Recoilless Rifles. This they did with the left-hand weapon, engaging enemy to the front of the gun and mortar positions using Splintex rounds.

"I remember the first night, sticking my head out of my little rabbit hole and wondering what the hell was going on as the RPG hit into the tent we had put up for our radar control room on the first night." The tent was shredded, and replaced the next day by a dug-in CP. (GNR Iain Kennedy)

"... keeping your head down and digging deeper, was the order or the day." (GNR Gordon Malcolm)

"When that jet flew over and napalmed the dug in heavy machine gun is indelible in my mind as the bottom of it was lit up by the flames of everything burning." (GNR Gordon Malcolm)

GNR Phil Sheedy recalled, *"I can still hear that jet scream in and feel the heat of the napalm on my flesh"*.

This is about Phantoms and Napalm in front of the position

Nah

It was the 1st night: I was only there for nights 1 & 2, so I have no idea whether there were other drops subsequently, but

Phil Sheedy

Gordon,

You are right I remember that fighter coming over and dropping that napalm that was later in the action. That we didn't use as we had the Cat from Arty int come in and do a big scrape and we put the pallet we use transport the radar across the top.

I think the Napalm was about the third attack? John D, John B, Ian A, Ken J what are your recollections?

Regards

Iain K

21/03/10 4:41 PM Gordon Malcolm

Regarding what we were doing at the time of Coral, saw Iain's response and am amazed that he would think I could remember more. Like him I think you'll find that the memories of every one there are different even though you were next to each other. However, I can't remember whether it was the first night or a few nights later. Gordon

Expand on This. Helicopter Gunships in the area were called to assist, as were friendly artillery units, and Puff the Magic Dragon (AKA Spooky). Gunships and Puff were delivering fire to within 10's of metres of the Australian positions.

Under the withering fire, and after more than four hours of fighting, the NVA began to withdraw just before dawn.

Morning – expand on these:

The bulldozer was riddled with bullets and had to be replaced.

Howitzers were replaced and repaired.

Dustoffs arranged for dead and wounded.

Defences reorganised; wire laid.

Road convoy from Bearcat arrives – who was this???

0738hrs – LTCOL Bennett informed 1 ATF of his intention to relocate his companies in defence of 102 Bty.

Go back to 161 Bty book again – any reference?

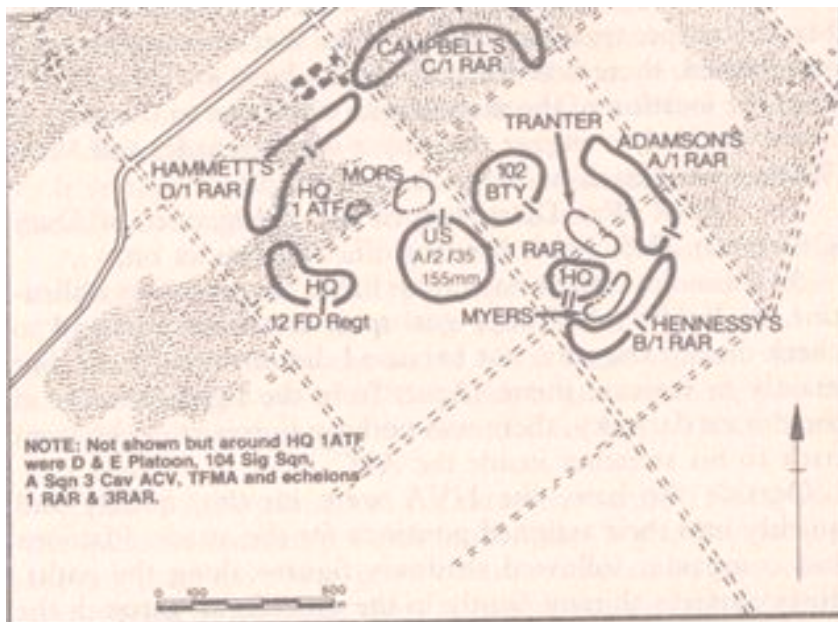
The mortar locating radar had suffered quite a bit of damage, together with one Landrover and a generator. On the morning of 13 May, BDR Keith Ayliffe at Nui Dat, was told to load an Antenna, Transmitter/Receiver, and several cables to replace those damaged in the attack, and to join the Task Force Maintenance Area (TFMA) convoy to Coral.

Accompanying him were 2LT Gordon Williams the Radar Section Commander, his driver GNR Brian Mitchell and radar mechanic CFN John Strautins. They joined the convoy and arrived at Coral around midday. Ayliffe immediately went to the radar detachment to see if all were OK, and to inspect the damage to the radar. (KA email 14 Sep)

At about 8.00am on 14 May, BDR Ayliffe was ordered to redeploy the radar to a location forward of the guns. While they were dismantling the radar, and filling in weapon and sleeping pits, Ayliffe dispatched Frank Pepper to see if he could find the 12 Fd Regt bulldozer and bribe him to dig their new CP. Pepper set off, armed with a carton of beer held in reserve for such occasions. He managed to secure the assistance of the TFMA Engineers bulldozer, which was much larger than the 12 Fd Regt dozer. *“Not only did Frank arrive back with the dozer but a truck load of defence stores to cover the hole ... possibly the largest CP for a radar in SVN ... Into the side walls were built three sleeping bays; one for the on-duty NCO and two for the on-duty mechanics.”* (KA email of 14 Sep 11)

“Jack Kelly recalls the pilot ‘brought it down between parallel lines of guns, dropped his napalm on that thing and knocked it out without stopping a single round of artillery fire. That’s what we always try to achieve; never done it before or since, but we did it then.” BOC p163 3/2

Night 15/16 May 68



During the afternoon of 15 May (at about 4.00pm), the TF Comd, Brigadier Hughes, directed Major 'Blue' Keldie (Armoured Corps) as follows:

“You are to lay out a defence of this fire base. It will not be penetrated. You are to co-ordinate and command the local defence.”

Keldie set off on reconnaissance around the 400m by 700m area on foot. He decided that the most likely approach for an attack was the north and north-west. An Orders Group was called, sector commanders appointed, call signs on a separate net were allocated, and Keldie set up his CP in the centre. With 1 Tp APC as the counter-penetration force, lines were marked, and vehicle commanders walked the paths they might have to follow.

There was some activity throughout the night, and the main attack commenced at 2.15am with mortars and RPG fire. The NVA attacked from the north/north-east, as predicted. 102 Bty was a prime target, and there was a gap (some 200-300 metres) to the north-east, between C Coy 1 RAR to the north and A Coy 1 RAR to the east.

"Once more the chill bleat of Vietnamese bugles touched the marrow of every man. This time, the Australians were ready. Bennett's headquarters and his fire support control centre were poised to send a firestorm at the enemy. When the forward artillery observers called in 'unlimited' fire support, no less than sixty cannons, pre-planned air strikes and even naval gunners opened up on the enemy charge. The result was carnage: hundreds of North Vietnamese troops ran at the combined firepower of almost nine gun batteries, eight mortars and three helicopter gunships." PH p375

Expand on this. By 3.15am, all companies of 1RAR were in contact. Gunships, Light Fire Teams, Puff the Magic Dragon were everywhere. From 4.37am air strikes with napalm, bombs, Gatling guns and rockets were everywhere. Ammunition re-supply, to the company positions, went on throughout the night. The mortars ran out of ammunition. The heat given off by the 105mm gun (which guns, which battery?) was like being sunburned. Dusters were supporting the right flank of B Company.

"Bennett who carefully monitored the company radio net, called Weeks and proposed the use of mortars at close range. The decision, however, rested with Weeks. In an echo of Buick at Long Tan, Weeks agreed and called mortar fire down on himself – the third time in Vietnam an Australian soldier had called fire on his own position. Bennett warned that it may cause Australian casualties. 'I have no alternative,' Weeks replied. His men dived underground as the 'friendly' mortars, perfectly positioned, burst just metres away. The shrapnel lightly wounded one Australian, yet destroyed the Vietnamese machine-gunner. Twenty enemy dead were later found around Weeks platoon. PH p376

"Ernie Jacobs, the artillery Forward Observer with A Company, relayed the artillery and mortar fire corrections radioed by Weeks (2LT Neil Weekes) ... Weeks stood by his pit ... and walked the pattern of shell bursts ... between him and Campbell's company. 'I simply had to plug the gap'. ... When shrapnel hit the tree high, he went to his knees and bought it in until it was hitting the tree lower down, then he went to his belly and moved it back out. Later, Jacobs told him he had controlled over 2500 rounds that night." BOC p157 3/2

"By what can be catalogued as 'fortunes of war', an eight-inch artillery shell from distant US guns fell short, landing some 30 metres in front of the company positions. A group of NVA were obliterated, exactly as wished fervently by the infantry, who were most appreciative of the timely effective artillery support." BOC p156 3/2

"In the 1RAR CP, Mick Bindley heard an American voice come over the artillery radio net, from a distant heavy battery, informing the Australian the 300 rounds had been fired in support of Coral. Bindley's first thought was, 'My God, does this mean that you are about to turn it off?' He said, in a deep American voice, 'I'd just like you to know that I have a whole heap left.' BOC p161 3/2

"Not all artillery was falling exactly where it was called for, and on one occasion Mick Butler saw 'a blinding flash and enormous concussion' from a salvo arriving just in front of his tanks. Later he was told that there had been an error of 1000 mils in laying a distant battery of 155mm guns, for a battery fire mission." BOC p277

Geoff Grimish, on No 2 gun, felt that 'we fired so much that the heat from the guns would have given you sunburn.' BOC p169/170 3/2 Grimach was also the battery bookmaker and nearing the end of his tour, had accumulated a good deal of money. "At the end of the battery's tour (at Coral), while waiting to be flown out to Nui Dat, Geoff decided to run the books one last time. Sergeant Skeeter Humphry was known as an astute judge of horseflesh, and bet on 'Bright Promise', at 33/1; everyone followed him; the horse won. Geoff returned to Australia broke." (BOC p 308)

D/1RAR was attacked at 6.05am by an estimated NVA battalion. But the position was not penetrated, and the counter-penetration force was not required. At dawn, the attack was gone as quickly as it had come.

"In the CP itself, Colonel Dunstan was 'full of admiration for Gavin Andrews and Jack Kelly, enormously impressed with the calmness and competence of those two fellows handling something like six batteries of guns {with shells falling} right outside the perimeter." BOC p202

In the dawn light, helicopter pilots reported 100's and 100's of soldiers, women and farmers were using ox carts to evacuate the dead and wounded from the battlefield.

Unfortunately, on the night of 15 May, *"We were again attacked heavily ... the radar suffered bullet and shrapnel damage to many parts and was again out of action ..."* (KA email 14 May) following more repairs, the poorly sighted radar failed to make a location of any of the (mainly 60mm) mortars fired at FSB Coral. Some locations were made later on mortars firing into Balmoral, and CB fire was applied.

Insert the facts on 'Tunza Guts'.

Further Activity in AO Surfers

"Artillery from Coral and 3RAR's own mortars were firing in support of Balmoral, though Coral itself was under fire. Because of the need to fire high explosive and illuminating rounds, there were periods of darkness outside the bases, and the enemy used these to clear the battlefield." BOC p234

"The effect of the artillery could not be easily calculated, but Tony Hammett presumes it had some effect on preventing the enemy from reacting as they normally did, attacking the flanks of intruders. Later he found that just over a 1000 rounds were fired that afternoon ..." BOC p253

"He (Gerry McCormack) was very impressed with the fire support the battery gave him. He walked around the position and talked to the gun detachments, giving them a description of what had happened, and how accurate and responsive their fire had been." BOC p255

On 22 May Coral was subjected to yet another rocket and mortar barrage, but this time the NVA troops were dispersed by return fire from 1RAR's mortars as they formed up to attack.

Although there were further bombardments on 26 and 28 May, and patrols sent out from the base came into contact with the enemy, Coral was not seriously threatened again. During fighting on 26 May, the base's defenders even turned the tables on the NVA by sending a troop of Centurion tanks from C Squadron, 1st Armoured Regiment (which had arrived as reinforcements three days earlier), outside the perimeter wire with infantry support; these engaged and destroyed most of a NVA bunker system that had been discovered.

Artillery from Coral and 3 RAR's own mortars were firing in support of Balmoral, though Coral was itself under fire. Because of the need to fire high-explosive and illumination rounds, there were periods of darkness outside the bases, and the enemy used these to clear the battlefield." BOC p 234 3/2

"In the artillery position, a gunner had an equally close shave; the mortar bomb hit the roof of his pit, penetrating the sandbags, but did not explode. The man looked to see the nose of the mortar only 130mm from his head." BOC p261 3/2

Enemy efforts on 26 May were primarily focused on another FSB named "Balmoral", which was established about 4.5 kilometres further north on 24-25 May by 3RAR supported by tanks. The defenders easily threw back assaults launched against Balmoral on 26 and 28 May. On the latter occasion, the attacking NVA regiment lost at least 42 killed and seven prisoners, but again casualties were thought to have been higher. One Australian was killed and six wounded.

"His (Major Horrie Howard's) artillery Forward Observer called him over, saying he would not hear anything like it for a long time: on the radio, they could hear the massive Corps artillery around Bien Hoa firing on the orders of the 161 Battery Commander." BOC p276

"On 3 and 4 June platoon-sized patrols swept the areas around the base, with no contact. At 1130 on the 4th orders were issued for the abandonment of Coral." BOC p311

FSB Coral had grown enormously during the three and a half week deployment, with the result that, "Blue Keldie's APCs were deeply involved in escorting convoys back to Nui Dat, in all shepherding 300 vehicles along the dangerous roads." (BOC p 311)

"The hapless radars (sic) had a minor disaster on the flight out, when the machine itself was somehow dropped from beneath its Chinook, just outside the Fire Support Base, and did not survive the fall." (BOC p 313) The radars were designed to be 'portable' by vehicle, and able to be floated across water (with a lot of preparation), but airborne delivery was not one of the specifications.

The Aftermath

"At Coral, for the first time since the second World War, gunners had to defend their artillery pieces in close-quarter combat." (AWM website – see Ch 10)

"Bob Carbury, 102 Battery Q-Store man, had twice had much of his stores destroyed in the attacks, but was pleased to find that his job was understood by the quartermaster sergeant, Staff Sergeant Bushby, who sent up from Nui Dat all the requested items, with no red tape involved for Carbs. When he could, Bushby also included beer and soft drinks for the gunners." BOC p261

"Geoff Grimish, 102 Battery, who had taken the red and green tracer as an omen, and bet on South Sydney to win the Rugby league premiership, was also the battery bookmaker. 'After having lost most of my pay to the bookmaker during the two years I served in Malaya, i decided to run the book whenever we were able to get the race fields over Radio Australia. At the end of the tour i had accumulated a good deal'." BOC p308

"Stan Carbines, 102 Battery, thought 'we were all very pleased to leave Coral. It left us with memories to last a life-time. The think was that we had come under pressure and had done the thinks we were trained for. We felt pretty pleased with our efforts'." BOC p314

P252 of BOC. Hammet's company and the tanks are attacking bunkers. At 3.30pm it began to rain and the company and tanks were ordered to break contact and head back to Coral.

"Using the power of artillery to assist the move back, Gordon Alexander kept the shellfire some 100 metres behind the company, to prevent the NVA from following along the tank-made paths, 'so there was still dead shrapnel flying through the trees, raining down on us, as we moved back'." BOC p253 3/3

"Later he (Hammett) found that just over 1000 rounds were fired that afternoon ..." BOC p253 3/3

BOC p255, Ahearn remembers the tanks coming back in with lots of superficial damage. Troop Commander Gerry McCormack, "...was very impressed with the fire support the battery gave him. He walked around the position and talked

to the gun detachments, giving them a description of what had happened, and how accurate and responsive their fire had been." BOC p255 3/3

"Lieutenant Colonel Jack Kelly, the artillery commander, decided it would be better to expend the accumulated artillery ammunition rather than carry it all back to Nui Dat, so ordered it to fire on likely targets. The sudden increase in gun activity, plus the noise, bought Colonel Dunstan into the artillery CP. When he found, it was simply to get rid of ammunition, he put a quick end to the firing. The sudden sustained artillery fire had also caused concern among some in the rifle companies and other units, who presumed heavy contact was in progress." BOC p311

"Lieutenant Colonel Jack Kelly, CO 12 Field Regiment RAA, considered that 'we caused a reaction. It was obviously important to them, and we must have caused numerous casualties. I do not think the 7 NVA Division would have been a viable force for some time afterwards. It was one of those few places where the enemy was prepared, not just to stand and fight, but to come and seek us out, which made him very vulnerable. Once we got over that first night, and the shock of it, we were never in doubt about our own ability'." BOC p321

"A very capable enemy, but inflexible' said Ian Ahearn, 102 battery Gun Position Officer. What robbed him of success that first night was inflexibility. Without communications and the ability to react to a changing situation he was operating to a fixed timetable. I have no doubt they saw us turn the guns around, and knew they were assaulting into the muzzles, but because the operations had been set up on original reconnaissance information, it went ahead'." BOC p326

"The men of the artillery, infantry and tanks, both as groups and as individuals, came out of the operation with a deeper appreciation of the realities of war. The soldiers now understood the reason for many of the lessons and the points the more experienced members had tried to make. For many, the fighting at Coral was seen as a turning-point or benchmark in the tour of duty. After it, there was much more professionalism, a more serious acceptance of the business of soldiering." BOC p315

"The hapless artillery radars had a minor disaster on the flight out, when the machine itself was somehow dropped from beneath its Chinook, just outside the Fire Support Base, and did not survive the fall. BOC p313

"The initial lack of co-ordination of the local defence of Coral on 12 May is what remains with Colonel Dunstan. 'It taught me a lesson. You've always got to have a local defence commander'." BOC p 332

"For Tony Jensen, 1 RAR Mortar Platoon, it is the determination to hold their ground and call in artillery rather than leave it; the NVA officer who peered over the mound of spoil at him, then 'strolled away'; the accuracy of fire from Spooky, the armed DC3, from which the rain of machinegun fire would be placed to within twenty metres of friendly positions, at night, amid the lights, flashes and glares below the plane." BOC p 333

"The same feeling of uselessness under bombardment springs to mind for Matt Cleland, 102 Field Battery, as he waited in his pit for the mortar barrage on the night of 15-16 May to cease, so he could go to the guns, and begin doing something." BOC p334

"Compassion surged in Neil Lloyd-Jones, battery surveyor in 102 Battery, on the morning after the first attack, as the casualties were being loaded in the helicopters. 'I really felt sorry for the mothers that day'. I never think much about those sort of things, but my immediate reaction was to think that some poor mother, at lunch-time today, or afternoon or something like that, is going to get some really bad news." BOC p335

"Alan Floyd, gun number in 102 Battery, has never forgotten the bravery of 'the 21-year-old gunners who stood by their guns in the face of the enemy, particularly the boys on No. 4 gun, who should have been recognised." BOC p335

"The ability of the young officers employed as Forward Observers, who 'did a great job' around Coral, remains the most vivid memory for Major General Jack Kelly, then CO of 12 Field regiment RAA; of his gunners, 'living in the gun position like infantry. They would breed their own rats and run their own rat races, and all that sort of thing. Always something happening, always amusing themselves, and therefore always a joy to go and talk to them." BOC p336

"Bullen later inserted: '13/5/68 was the day that Australia nearly suffered its greatest catastrophe in the whole war. Although realised by very few at the time, the Task Force HQ ... came within an ace of being wiped out by North Vietnamese Army. The political consequences of this would have been disastrous ...' "

"Meanwhile John Delacca, of the detachment of 131 Div Loc Battery, had already returned to Nui Dat, and was surprised to find that some people did not realise the large scale of actions being fought by components of their own formation, 1ATF, at Coral." BOC p303

Check out the movement of the battery back to Nui Dat (and the Kiwis) from other sources – no Comd's diaries so will have to be word of mouth – Scrub Ahearn and Bob Lowry

See p 483-4 of DH for LT Neville Clark on Adjustment of arty, and shrapnel

The VC/NVA action of removing dead, wounded, shells and cartridge cases from the battlefield made it impossible to determine exactly how many of them died over these two nights – 12/13th and 15/16th May 68. (IS THIS NECESSARY???)

The Task Force was deployed in AO Surfers for 26 days.

Known Enemy losses 12 May to 6 Jun in AO Surfers were: (AND THIS NECESSARY???)

267 KIA (body count)
11 POW
2 Surrendered.

Australian casualties were:

Night 12/13th May – 9KIA, 28 WIA

Night 15/16th May – 5 KIA, 19 WIA plus 2 US WIA.

Altogether, for the period 12 May to 6 Jun, 25 Australians were dead.

There is no benefit to anyone from a comparison of this battle with that of, say, Long Tan. They were totally different scenarios, in different settings, with vastly different time frames, with different troops under different command arrangements. For the gunners in particular, at Coral they were in the thick of the battle, fighting for their lives, while at Long Tan they were providing intimate fire support from a distance. This is not to detract from the guts and determination of either occasion; very simply, they were different. Perhaps the only things in common were the enemy attacking forces and their (inflexible) tactics and equipment.

Timeline 1968 – FSPB Coral

Jan/Feb

Tet is celebrated from last 10 days of January to mid-February.

VC/NVA attack many towns and cities.

No important military objectives are held – few are taken.

January 21st – NVA attack Khe Sanh.

While the world watched Khe Sanh, thousands of VC/NVA infiltrated southern cities – some five battalions made their way into Saigon.

By 29 January, half of US forces and Allied units in the region are positioned within helicopter range of vital areas.

By 19 Feb, the first series of battles are over. The cost to the VC/NVA for the Tet Offensive, country-wide, was about 45,000 dead.

Feb – Apr

February 19th to early April, US and ARVN troops conduct a campaign to evict VC/NVA units from around Saigon.

April 19th

Colonel Dac, assistant political officer in VC Sub-Region 1, surrenders to ARVN. He warns of new offensive to commence early May.

May 4th

Mini-Tet commences with many attacks.

4-9 May, VC/NVA lost 4135 counted dead.

May 10th

Peace Talks scheduled to commence in Paris.

HQ IFFV request 1 ATF deploy to FSPB Coral, in AO Surfers, about 20 km north-north-west of Bien Hoa.

US units' report having been in contact with five enemy Main Force regiments – 2 x NVA regiments, 3 x VC regiments and Local Force units from platoon to battalion strength.

May 11th

Reconnaissance conducted of the area by helicopter from 1500 metres altitude.

Night of 12/13th May – the First Attack on FSPB Coral

May 12th

Fly in was to commence at 7.00am and be complete by 1.00pm.

0722 – Recce party airborne

0725 – Delay of 20 mins – Recce party to return and wait.

0930 – Appears to be at least a 1 hour delay.

1045 – 161 Battery reported "Ready"

1200 – 3 RAR reported complete on the ground at Coral.

After Midday – 1 RAR start to arrive in the vicinity of Coral.

1400 – Recce parties decide the location of 102 Battery.

Deputy Commander of First Infantry Division – his words – "Tell your CO that you won't need to go looking for them. They'll come looking for you."

1600 – 131 Battery personnel arrive at 161 Battery, having walked from 102 Battery.

1610 – 1 RAR last sortie on the ground at Coral.

1620 – A/1 RAR arrives at Coral.

1637 – 1 RAR to 1 ATF – clear of FSPB Harrison.

1640 – A/1RAR depart for night location.

1700 – 1RAR Mortars arrive in location.

1800 – D/1RAR see enemy watching them.

1820 – D/1RAR in contact.

Last Light – Int Sect, 1RAR noted the following locations:

102 Bty is to the north-west of HQ 1RAR
1RAR Mortars were to the north of 102 Bty.
HQ 12 Fd Regt was north-west of 102 Bty
To the north-east of HQ 1RAR and east of 102 Bty is the Anti-Tank Platoon
South of the Anti-Tank Platoon and east of HQ 1RAR is the Pioneer Platoon
161 Bty is 1500 metres south west of 102 Bty
D/3RAR was thought to be north east of 102 Bty, but in fact HQ 3RAR and D/3RAR were some 700 metres west of 102 Bty
1925 – B/1RAR contacted 10 enemy who withdrew south.
1941 – A/1RAR reported red flares to the north.
2000 – It began to rain.
2400 – The rain ceased.

May 13th

0010 – Two soldiers thought it time to 'relieve themselves' – fired on by machine gun using green tracer – thought to be friendly fire, but, we were using red tracer.
0145 – Shadowy figures near the Mortar Platoon
0145 - Enemy launched a brief but heavy RPG and mortar attack on FSPB Coral. This was closely followed by a ground attack of approximately battalion strength. The enemy moved in about 50 metres behind the fire support and overran the mortar position and one gun of 102 Bty in the first five minutes.
161 Bty fired a DF in front of the Mortar Platoon.
Soldiers in the Mortar Platoon were ordered to stay in their pits, below ground level, while the friendly fire was adjusted in. The Mortar Platoon area is engaged with Splintex from 102 Bty.
0230 – 161 ordered to cease firing the DF, and LFT and Spooky (DC3 with Mini Guns) took over the close support. (This continued until after dawn.)
Until about 0700, the mortar platoon area had been shared by both enemy and mortar-men.
First light – clearing patrols did the rounds, clearing bodies and booby traps.
Day May 13th:
An RMO plus two assistants flew in to organise casualty evacuations and the treatment of wounded. The RMO established a holding area for future casualties and the Engineers dug his Aid Post.
Mortars were brought up to strength temporarily.
The bulldozer, riddled with small arms, had to be replaced.
Howitzers were replaced and repaired.
Dustoffs for dead and wounded were arranged.
Defences were reorganized; wire was laid.
The road convoy from Bearcat arrived.

0720 – 1RAR reported their own and enemy casualties for the night.
0738 – LTCOL Bennett informed 1 ATF of his intention to relocate his companies in defence of 102 Bty.

Casualties:

NVA – 52 KIA, one POW
Aust – 9 KIA, 28 WIA

Night of 15/16th May – Second Attack on FSPB Coral

May 15th

1500 – APC's return from convoy protection duties
1600 – Major Keldie (OC APC) appointed to coordinate and command Local Defence.
Units to be coordinated for Local Defence included:
35 x AFV under Keldie.
1RAR
102 Bty
A Bty 2/35 US Arty (M109, 155mm)
Engineers – about 50 personnel
TF Signals Sqn
Group of about 50 personnel, including a 106 RCL
Counter-penetration force was to be 1 Tp
1730 – more barbed wire laid; all sectors had Claymore mines
1907 – companies of 1RAR report Standing To
2000 – light signals, flares and rockets reported to Keldie's CP
2100 – LP's brought in; green tracer seen in sky
2100 – The moon came up – "Yeah, bloody perfect night for them."
0215 –
mortar barrage; accurate, moderately heavy
followed by salvos of RPG
"Crazy nightmare of tracers covering Coral like a king-size spider's web."
3 Tp APC – mortars exploding in a row along the line of carriers

LTCOL Bennett – noted two things: “... virtually used the same line of attack (which was pretty stupid) ...”, and “... little evidence of diversionary activity ...”

0240 – A/1RAR under attack – mortar and small arms fire – “3 Platoon, Fix Bayonets”

Keldie – first attack from due East:

Almost at once, a fire mission was called

Communications wires from CP to Guns were cut by mortar shrapnel

Mortar bombs hit around No 2 gun (Sgt Humphries), flattening tyres

Sgt Robinson (No 5) hit by shrapnel; lost an eye

0250 – Light Fire Team (LFT) and Spooky requested (this had been anticipated and two LFT and Spooky were already on the way)

0315 – 1RAR – all Companies in contact

An 8-inch shell fell short, only 30 metres in front of the company position, obliterating a group of 8 NVA

LT Weekes, 3 Platoon, controlled the fire of over 2500 rounds of Artillery (thru Jacobs, the FO) to cover the gap between A and C Companies

Gunships were everywhere – Major Alf Garland, LO to HQ IFFV at Long Binh, reported that Commanding General Weyand was in the Ops Room at Long Binh, making sure the Australians got everything they asked for, and more.

0437 – Air Strike (Napalm) requested on two 12.7mm HMG:

“... the shape of the fighter, like a giant bat, swooped across from out of the darkness, into the light (from Spooky), and out of it again, and behind it the 12.7s were destroyed.”

“Such was the accuracy and determination of the pilots, this remained one of the epic memories of Coral.”

0505 – action:

Three aircraft delivered napalm and strafed the front

Gunships strafed up and down the front

Just to the north, Spooky was strafing as well

“... two F4 Phantoms thundered past, firing Gatling Guns mounted under the wings”; each made two passes

There were 40mm Dusters firing at the right flank of B/1RAR (to the south).

“The air was absolutely choking with smoke.”

1RAR Mortars (4 tubes) had fired 750 rounds.

Gun crews still operated – “... we fired so much that the heat from the guns would give you sunburn.”

The effect of the artillery was “... like living through a continuous electrical storm.”

0605 – a third attack, on D/1RAR, by an estimated NVA Battalion

Dawn:

Helicopter pilots report “... 100’s and 100’s of enemy soldiers, ox carts, women and farmers being used to evacuate NVA dead and wounded.”

“Everybody was plain bloody tired and plain bloody thirsty; clean worn out.”

Aust Casualties: 5 KIA, 19 WIA and two US WIA

NVA Casualties:

12 May to 6 Jun – 267 KIA

Intelligence info gained later indicated that only 100, of 790 involved in the attacks (where? when?), survived death or wounds.

Lt Neil Weekes Platoon position took 75 x 82mm Mortar rounds and 30 x RPG hits.

Do I need this to go in at the beginning?????

Operation Toan Thang (Complete Victory) was a US operation to crush the VC/NVA ‘Mini Tet’ which was expected to occur in May 1968. The original Tet offensive had been a crushing failure for North Vietnam costing some 58,000 lives. Mini Tet was intended to make up for those losses, and to bring pressure to bear on the United States, at home, through the media. Although called ‘Mini Tet’, it was costly; *“In one week during TOAN THANG the US Army sustained 625 killed and 2,225 wounded – the worst seven days of the American war.”*¹

The Operation “... ran from April to June 1968 and involved seventy-nine combat battalions and 70,000 American, South Vietnamese, Thai, Korean, Australian and New Zealand troops ...”¹ The role of the Australian Task Force was to provide a blocking force, with US troops, to stop the NVA entry to and exodus from Saigon. To meet this role the Task Force had to deploy outside Phuoc Tuy province to the border area of Binh Hoa and Bin Duong provinces. This was about xxxxxxxxxx km from Saigon.

¹ Ham, P. 2008. Vietnam, the Australian War. Harper Collins. p363

¹ Ham, P. 2008. Vietnam, the Australian War. Harper Collins. p363

¹ Ibid p362

The book continues next month, December, with “Chapter 13 – Lessons Learned”.

As the series continues, you are invited to submit your own recollections and as Kevin mentioned to me there is a bit of a lack of information as to activity in Artillery Tactical HQ (Arty Tac), so efforts of recollections there is more than welcome.

Also, please feel free to submit to me any factual errors you detect.

Paul Dickson: 131eyesandears@gmail.com

AN INVESTIGATION
181 Days



. The Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal (RVCM)

This is just a continuing update with regards to the progress being made with the submissions on behalf of Defense Force Members, who for no reasons of their own, were not awarded The Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal (RVCM) –

Allen Morley – forwarded the following correspondence from the MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS MINISTER FOR DEFENCE PERSONNEL in response to his submission.

OFFICE OF THE HON MATT KEOGH MP
MINISTER FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS MINISTER FOR DEFENCE PERSONNEL

Ref No: MC22-002274

Mr Allen Morley President 131 Locators Association 119 Riverview Street RIVERVIEW NSW 2066

Dear Mr Morley

REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM CAMPAIGN MEDAL

Thank you for your correspondence of 27 August 2022 regarding the eligibility criteria of the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal. The Minister has asked that I respond on his behalf.

I appreciate that the eligibility criteria of the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal has been a matter of longstanding concern among Australia's Vietnam veterans, especially those who were conscripted into the Australian Army under the second National Service scheme. Service rendered in Vietnam by National Servicemen is held in the highest regard by the Australian Government and the broader community.

I am aware the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal has twice reviewed the eligibility criteria of the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal. The Tribunal found the Australian Government does not have the legal authority to change the eligibility criteria.

Minister Keogh's office has received Mr Barry's submissions and correspondence from others supporting his campaign to have the eligibility criteria of the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal amended or for the government to exercise any discretion in awarding the medals to other recipients. The matters raised in Mr Barry's submissions are complex and are still before the Minister, I can assure you that Mr Keogh is considering those submissions very carefully.

It is important that our veterans are appropriately recognised for their service. Next year we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of Australian involvement in the Vietnam War. This significant anniversary will afford all Australians the opportunity to acknowledge the service and sacrifice of our Vietnam veterans in a solemn and dignified manner.

Parliament House CANBERRA ACT 2600 *Ngunnawal and Ngambri Country*

Telephone: 02 6277 7820

ministeria.dva.gov.au

Thank you for taking the time to write. I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Nicola Gordon-Smith Chief of Staff

(3 October 2022)

Paul Dickson

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained."



. **Ian Campbell** has an interesting question arising from Jeff Evans' continuing story above –

“Hi Paul

A quote from the Jeff Evans document in *E&E* 15/10

‘We could not advance even a step to eliminate the remainder of the Australian force, as a result of the “artillery rain”,’ states the D445 history.”

Is there a written history from the North Vietnamese perspective that is available to read?

Take Care,

Regards, Ian.”

. **Grahame Dignam** – sent in the following link to a ‘fun’ website displaying some great images – read on...

MUSEUM OF ARROGANT HUBRIS - <https://www.contactairlandandsea.com/museum-of-arrogant-hubris/>

Here’s an intro to what it’s all about -

“Welcome to the **Museum of Arrogant Hubris**.

Most of the images and designs in this collection were worn proudly as morale-boosting emblems on shoulder patches or PT shirts in informal settings.

They were mainly only sanctioned and/or tolerated as informal, good-natured, internal representations of unit or even sub-unit camaraderie – otherwise known as esprit de corps.

But, these are all now **banned** in the Australian Defence Force – especially Army – yet still remain as fond memories – and treasured ‘illegal contraband’ – for many serving and ex-serving Australian military.



This Horney little devil comes from 108 Field Battery (“Hot Stuff”) from the 1970’s.

More submission wanted.

Please send to editor@militarycontact.com



Mail Out



I started this in September, 2017 and have decided to continue running down the alphabet of names and sending some emails to blokes in general to say g'day and just to generally keep in touch. A lot of the blokes I've never met, so it's just to keep some connection alive. Plus, it's good to keep in touch, even sporadically, it may help to avoid any unpleasant unforeseen surprises.



Mail In - Here are the responses...

. **John “Kanga” McFadden** - Dicko,

Thanks for the catch up. Good to hear you're on the go.

Gnr Mac's passing a real shock. Very sad affair. Well done *E&E* assembling thoughts & pictures of Gnr Mac at such short notice. Conscription picked a rip snorter when they drew his marble.

Keep Safe Keep Healthy

Kanga.”

. **Russ Jackson** – “Hello Paul, Thanks for the contact and it is good to hear that you are still enjoying reasonable weather. We have had an extended and very wet winter. Our forecast for next week though is very promising with temps in the mid to high 20's.

Our home team Geelong won the AFL grand final which gave the city a real boost during our unseasonable weather.

Parts of Geelong have been flooded but we haven't experienced the flooding that has been seen in the north of the state.

Once the warm weather comes gardening will become a full-time activity as growth will be substantial after all the rain.

I have been laid low with my lung condition and am in hospital yet again. I am hoping to get out this week so as to enjoy the sunny days that are forecast.

No trips planned for us and in fact we are bracing for the next wave of COVID which means public mask wearing is still with us.

Enjoy your time in Mexico City.

Regards Russ."

. **Ron Mason** – "Hi Paul,

'rain, rain go away - and give us a break before you come again.' Be to dry next!!!

We have been fortunate to be above current flood levels, water over our road for about 100 metres and possible only a foot deep - not a great issue for the Landcruiser, but we did leave the car at home. Yes, I guess Mexico City would be an amazing place - even Shepparton has too, too many people for my liking and Melbourne is to be avoided if at all possible - but that's me.....

With any luck, I will make it to the zoom meeting in a few days' time so may see you then.

Hope your travel plans work out, we don't have any trips in the planning at the moment other than down to Gippsland and even that has been put on hold a bit with so many roads closed.

Our last little escape was over to the Mallee Sunset desert area with a few friends, camped in the bush - admired the pink lakes and the bush, sat around the campfire at night & enjoyed the company - that's a holiday.

Enough for this time

Stay safe

Ron M."

. **Philip Mulgrew** – "Hi Paul.

Nice to hear from you again. There's plenty of rain around as you say, and the people of NSW would love to share it with you, seeing that you haven't had much of a wet season over there. Central and Western NSW seems to be coping most of the wet weather with the Western Plains Zoo at Dubbo evacuated at one stage.

Helen and I will be having an early Christmas day celebration here in Brisbane as my son and his family are coming up in the middle of December. Brendan has arranged a four-day conference amongst his fellow officers at Enoggera in line with his work in Army Signals, so we are looking forward to their visit.

You mentioned Ukraine in your summing up of the woes of the world, and I find it ironic that the Russian government has been complaining about Western countries including Australia supplying arms to Ukraine. They supplied the SAM's that defended North Vietnam's major infrastructure network and trained North Vietnamese crews in the operation of them, if not manning the SAM's themselves during the Vietnam War. There is an annual get together of those Russian veterans where they talk about old times and wear medallions and souvenirs made from pieces of US aircraft shot down. Karma is great, especially when it bites the perpetrators on the arse as in the Ukraine war.

I had a squamous carcinoma removed from the right side of my neck recently. It was picked up by a skin specialist here in the medical clinic at Narangba. I had a lesion on my neck which I thought was a shaving rash. I tried some of the usual ointments on it, and was rewarded with several painful reactions and the penny dropped that it was more than just a rash. I ended up with stitches on my neck from below my right ear to almost below my chin. That wasn't so bad. The family members were merciless in their reaction to this surgery, with remarks such as, "Igor. It lives!" (Mary Shelley's Dr Frankenstein). or "You're missing a bolt in your neck".

This squamous carcinoma is one of three types of skin cancer I could have been afflicted with. The others are the melanoma, I avoided that one thankfully, and a basal carcinoma that doesn't tend to spread. The squamous one does, albeit very slowly. I guess there is a penalty for living the outdoors life. It did bring back some memories of my major cancer surgery 24 years ago. If there hadn't been a new surgical technique available then, it would have been bye-bye Phil, as chemo and radiation therapy was not an option and still isn't.

Take care."

From the Advocate's Desk...

Ed asked a question as to the DVA's possible involvement in providing guidance in the making of a will and here's Peter's response –

"Paul,

DVA provide "**PLANNING AHEAD**" booklet which is a guide to putting your affairs in order.

A Sub Branch member or a veteran can contact DVA and ask for some copies.

Regards,

Peter Pioro OAM

JP NSW, JP (Qual) QLD / Military Rehabilitation & Compensation Advocate Level 2

Military Welfare Advocate Level 2 / Mentor



Our professional Advocate's contact details: -

Peter Pioro JP - email contact: piorowp@ozemail.com.au

Ken Foster OAM JP - email contact: khfoster1@bigpond.com

Disclaimer: Please note that all correspondence submitted will be treated with the total confidentiality between the sender and our Advocates. Printed submissions and responses that may be published in *Eyes & Ears* will be completely anonymous, just used as examples of help.

Notice Board – Hey, see what's coming up?

There's plenty of room for notices – has anyone got or getting any events planned?
Just send an email and I'll post it. Ed

The problem bulk communicating with @bigpond email accounts/customers continue...

As you can imagine with my sending out **379** emails on average twice a month and have some **117 @bigpond** recipients bounce back stating that they couldn't be delivered – possible spam!

So, this is the reason that @bigpond recipients are not receiving notifications of *Eyes and Ears*, Vales etc.

I have segregated the @bigpond users into small groups, and I'm going to trial it in November (this month), but it is going to be a time-consuming activity.

If anyone wants to be helpful, a new email account with anyone else (hotmail/gmail etc), just for 131 Locators Association (mainly me) emails, would be more than appreciated.

If you do just contact me with the new address and we'll be cooking!

VVAA Victorian State Council...

Rieny Nieuwenhof: Report to **Graham Dignam** on items of interest to members of 131 DLB 8/11/22.

The following are items raised and discussed at the recent VVAA Victorian State Council

A. Discussion occurred around the "presumptive principle" adopted by USA and NZ.

This principle assumes that any American soldier who served in Vietnam was exposed to Agent Orange and can make a claim to USA Veteran Affairs. New Zealand has also adopted that principle for particular medical conditions which were

not previously accepted. VVAA National supports any action for the Australian Government to also adopt this principle. SBs are asked to submit their thoughts/reactions to National. The Department at this time does not accept this principle even in light of the Veteran Health Study that was conducted, the results show a clear association with exposure to chemicals and veteran health status.

B. Discussion on the proposal to include a display at the AWM on the history of the 'Frontier Wars'. The majority of opinion at the meeting was that this proposal was not an appropriate inclusion in the AWM. It was suggested that a purpose - built centre would be a more appropriate place to have such a display. It is understood that \$316 mill. has been allocated for such a facility. It is to be remembered that 250 First Nations soldiers served in Vietnam, that contribution should be recognised.

The proposed construction of the new Vietnam Veterans Museum (Phillip Island) is before VCAT as there have been 5 objections lodged, one from the person who sold the land to the Museum in the first place! The Board are confident that the Tribunal will find in the Museum's favour.

Motions Passed at Victorian State VVAA Council which could be of interest to members of 131 DLB

‘That the term ‘veteran’ be restored to the universally understood definition to mean anyone who has been awarded or is eligible to be awarded the Australian “Returned From Active Service Badge”, whether still serving or discharged from ADF’.

Moved: Central Highlands Seconded: Noble Park Carried

‘That the counselling service known as Open Arms; a service founded by Vietnam veterans now for all veterans and families be restored to its original status, funded by the Minister for Veterans Affairs, but operationally independent of the Department of Veteran Affairs.’

Moved: Central Highlands Seconded: Noble Park Carried

‘That the Veterans Affairs Ministry, DVA and Open Arms all be removed from the political and administrative ambit of the Defence portfolio, to stand alone with direct accountability, through the Minister, to cabinet government.’

Moved: Central Highlands Seconded: Noble Park Carried

‘That service and administrative responsibility for mental health and counselling needs of all serving and transitioning ADF personnel be returned to the ADF, with the proviso that serving members eligible for Returned from Active Service badge be entitled to access services from either the ADF or Open Arms at the member’s discretion.’

Moved: Central Highlands Seconded: Noble Park Carried

Veteran Hubs Proposal

Prior to the last Federal election both parties promised that the Government would establish 10 Veteran and Families Welfare Hubs across Australia. It is expected that the Hubs will be in place by October 2024. The question everyone is asking where should the hubs be located?

Traditionally RSLs and Regional Veteran Welfare Centres provided the assistance to veterans in their claims with DVA. While RSLs would continue to provide this service where possible (fewer and fewer RSLs have trained volunteer Advocates), the future model would have Veteran Hubs established to provide a greater breadth of services to veterans eg. DVA claims undertaken by qualified, professional Advocates, Occupational Therapies, Open Arms counselling, Aged Care, Veteran Employment services and other on-site and off-site services.

Consensus appears to be:

- . A location close to a major garrison centre eg. Wodonga with disabled access, public transport, parking
- . Not at a RSL where there are gambling ‘pokies’ machines
- . In a dedicated building or space within a building
- . Staffed by qualified/professional personnel – Trained Advocates and other staff
- . Space for other veteran providers eg. Open Arms, OTs, etc.
- . Capital funding from RSL and Federal Government (DVA)
- . Recurrent funding through the BEST program

Victoria: The Wodonga Hub seems to be the most appropriate template for the development of other Victorian Hubs as it will be up and running soon.

A Business Case for the Hub is being prepared by RSL Vic (Ben Webb) I hope this generates some discussion among 131 Locators Ass. members

Regards,
Rieny.”



131 Locators Association Inc

President's Report for FY 2021 – 2022

I am pleased to be able to present the President's Report for the financial year 2021-2022, a year that has tested all of us. This period represents our eleventh full-year of operation and shows a stable, but positive trend in most aspects of the Association's activities.

The Association remains financial, viable and, sustainable for the foreseeable future as the financial report illustrates. Nevertheless, the seemingly rapid ageing of our members continues to be, without doubt, the major factor for limitations on what the association can achieve. Many of the early Nashos have celebrated their 76th birthdays and others will do so within a year or two. Our former Regular soldiers are of very various ages. Contact with those who served in the Detachment and those who served at Holsworthy remains incomplete, although there has been significant success with new contacts in the past year.

Although not producing any known direct health issues amongst members, in 2021 and 2022 the corona virus changed significantly our established meeting program. We have focussed significantly upon zoom as our means of active communication in the absence of physical contact. We did manage to establish some joint zoom-physical-meeting opportunities in the reporting period.

The Association website, www.131locators.org.au continues to provide both a web presence and a defined identity. During the reporting period, external access to the website has plateaued. However, through establishing a Facebook presence, the size of this group has showed pleasing growth.

Bob Billiards has continued as our Webmaster/Facebook master, providing an essential role in doing so, and has been ably supported by Bert Blink. Thank you, Bob and Bert.

The website statistics and inputs into Facebook demonstrate the ongoing interest in our activities, albeit at a reduced level. As previously mentioned in my 2020-2021 annual report Facebook has directly resulted in some of our unlocated locators being located. Bob, your effort in setting up these ecommunication mechanism is much appreciated.

Eyes and Ears, under the editorial overview of Paul Dickson, appears monthly, and regularly delivers editions of 18-25 pages. I believe that together the size and frequency are major measures of our Association's success. Members' contributions illustrate that we are recording more of relevance from our military past for both history and information. The June 2022 edition was the 167th in the new series, post the 1960s editions.

Only a limited number of activities, meetings, reunions and events were possible in the latter part of the year's program. Highlights for 2021-2022 were:

- . A further twelve editions of Eyes and Ears; extremely well-done Dicko and your enthusiasm is infectious. A sincere thanks to all of our contributors for stories, photos and some history, without which we would have a very thin monthly newsletter, as other associations have demonstrated over time

- . Despite having found several new members, this few unfortunately demonstrates that we are just maintaining membership levels or even have a declining membership base

- . Anzac Day saw the annual march operational, but the march saw only a handful of Sydney members of the Battery attending. This turnout was significantly impacted by the LSTAA Reunion in Brisbane at the same time.

A special mention for those Committee members who made things happen for the Association. Bert Blink continued in the role of Vice-President and is generous of his time and digital skills. Bert has subsequently been a regular attendee at the new format meetings

Grahame Dignam, Treasurer/Secretary remains the strong adhesive for the Association's financial arrangements, records and operation of the membership database.

The Public Officer responsibilities by Gordon Malcolm saw our regulatory responsibilities effected.

Ernie Newbold, Nick Proskurin, Ian Amos, Merv Nairn and Ged Carroll are all acknowledged for their ongoing involvement and support.

Our regional representatives provided local overview and contributed to our planning program. I thank Bert Blink (ACT and doubling up as Vice-President), Al Adams (Vic), Geoff Blackwell (SA), Barry Guzder (WA), Stuart Sporn (NT), Terry Erbs (QLD) and forward scouts in rural Victoria, Ron Mason and Rieny Nieuwenhof, for their collective contribution. A note of appreciation to our Honorary Auditor, Jim Fitzgerald, for again keeping us on the financial straight and narrow.

Sadly, the names of more of our number have now been etched onto the Association Honour Roll. Lest we forget them.

Allen Morley

October 2022



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/131divlocbtyraa>

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the 131 Locators Association Inc.
Held on Tuesday 8 th November 2022 commencing at 11.00 AM at
Canley Heights RSL & Sporting Club, NSW.
26 Humphries Rd Wakeley NSW 2176

Personal attendees were: Allen Morley, Grahame Dignam, Ged Carroll, Ernest Newbold, Bob Billiards, Merv Nairn, Nick Proskurin, Gordon Malcolm and Ian Amos

Zoomed members were: Ron Mason, Bert Blink, Rieny Nieuwenhof.

Apologies were received from: Paul Dickson, **Terry Erbs, Barry Guzder, Warwick Brooker, Steve Watt, George Lane, other State Reps and Jim Fitzgerald.**

The Election of office-bearers for the 2021-22 year.

Allen Morley declared all positions vacant, and election proceeded.

The Chair was handed to Gordon Malcolm Public Officer during this portion of the meeting.

Nominations for the positions of President (Allen Morley), Vice President (Bert Blink), Public Officer Gordon Malcolm and Secretary/Treasurer (G Dignam) were received and as all were prepared to stand again and were unopposed were duly elected for the new term.

The committee namely George Lane, Ged Carroll, Ian Amos, Bob Billiards, Merv Nairn, Ern Newbold and Nick Proskurin also elected to stand again as a group.

As no new nominations were received and the group being unopposed were duly elected for the new term.

The chair of the meeting was passed back to the new President- elect Allen Morley for the balance of the meeting.

The regional Representatives who were appointed and are not elected and so continue in their roles.

President-elect Allen Morley expressed his appreciation to Paul Dickson especially, for his continued efforts in publishing the *Eyes & Ears* regularly. Mr. Morley also expressed his appreciation to Bert Blink and Bob Billiards for their commitment as Vice President and Website administrator and for all the committee who actively assisted during the busy year.

Appointment of Auditor.

Jim Fitzgerald has indicated that he would be available to act as Auditor for the Association for the 2021/22 financial year.

Meeting closed at 11.20AM AEST

.....

Minutes for the General Meeting of the 131 Locators Association Inc.

Held at Canley Heights and Sporting Club Humphreys Rd, Wakeley NSW

And via Zoom internet

Following the AGM: Date: Tuesday, 8th April, 2022 at 1120hrs...

. Pertinent Points – extracted from the 131 Locators Association Committee meeting...

Attendees were: Allen Morley, Grahame Dignam, Nick Proskurin, Ged Carroll, Ernest Newbold, Bob Billiards, Merv Nairn, Gordon Malcolm and Ian Amos

Zoomed members were: Ron Mason, Bert Blink and Rieny Nieuwenhof

Apologies: Paul Dickson, Warwick Brooker, Barry Guzder, Terry Erbs, Steve Watt, George Lane, other State Reps and Jim Fitzgerald

Financial Membership is currently ... **126**, plus Associates **2**, plus Affiliates **16** Total **144**

Plus Lapsed as at 1/11/2022 **36** members

Presidents report.

See above.

Allen also commented on

- . The advice of 2 members having passed in the past Month
- . He advised that he had received a reply from the Minister regarding the Vietnam Medal issue advising essentially that no action would be forthcoming before the report into the issue was tabled. To be continued.

Public Officer Report.

All pre-AGM documents were done on time and the Yearly Fair-Trading report will be dealt with ASAP.

Webmaster Update:

- . Bob advised the number of face book members was now 324.
- . Indications are that Face book members are using that link to access the Newsletter, but the number has fallen on the latest figures. The website could now be classed as a historical document as most interactions are on the Facebook platform.

Health Report:

As we age, we all have minor niggles and some of us have more pressing problems.

- . **Steve Wynn** advised he was still alive having found a doctor who he doesn't mind seeing. While still battling cancer in various forms "he is in good spirits when he is not sick.". We wish him well.

General Business and around the grounds:

Discussions ensued on the following:

- . Remembrance Day activities were arranged for the Sydney CBD where bookings were required with many suburban RSL having local services.

If you've got more photos that you want added, just send them to: - Paul Dickson – web Photos

131eyesandears@gmail.com– BUT DON'T FORGET TO ADD TITLES/NAMES ETC.

. Upcoming Events Calendar –

131 Locators Association Committee Meeting

Date: Tuesday, 13th December, 2022 at 1100hrs

Venue: to be advised

Also, available via Zoom link to be advised



. Birthdays in the Battery...December –

DATE	NAME	REGT NO	SVN IN	SVN OUT	COMMENTS
1	DAVID DOUGHERTY	2786594	17 01 1968	04 02 1969	
1	KEVEN BUSH	3792069	18 02 1968	21 02 1969	
1	NEVILLE SMITH	1734352	01 07 1969	25 03 1970	
3	RAYMOND MINNS	4410744	20 05 1966	28 02 1967	† 24.05.1997
3	CLIVE DREIS	2785766	05 02 1968	03 12 1968	
6	ALAN ROBB	5715343	29 01 1968	21 01 1969	
7	ANTHONY O'MARA	38334	15 03 1968	18 03 1969	RAEME † 01.01.1985
7	TERRY WESTERWAY	215818	04 05 1966	07 05 1967	
8	ROBERT WHITE	311537	22 04 1966	16 05 1967	† 1992
9	ANDREW OPIE 2Lt.	43611	04 05 1966	06 01 1967	† 14.07.2022
10	HANS WEBER	3789591	04 05 1967	02 04 1968	† 12.07.2016
12	MICHAEL DAVIS	4720736	20 01 1970	30 01 1971	
12	CHRISTOPHER BRAZIER	2792185	24 02 1970	25 02 1971	
13	JOHN STANFORD	217765	29 01 1969	21 01 1970	
13	LAURENCE D'ARCY	215649	04 03 1968	04 02 1969	12 Fd Regt.
13	" "	215649	20 05 1971	05 08 1971	131
14	PETER FLETCHER	2783429	04 05 1967	12 12 1967	
14	CHRISTOPHER SELF	66981	1969	1970	† UNKNOWN
14	THOMAS KING	1411018	12 12 1966	12 12 1967	† 25.04.2011

15	GEOFFREY PRICE	5715931	08 05 1969	25 02 1970	
16	PHILLIP PERRIN Capt.	53105	29 01 1968	21 01 1969	
17	TONY GOLDSMITH	1732029	04 05 1967	12 12 1967	
18	JIM HOGNO	2783680	03 01 1967	27 09 1967	
18	TOM CHECKLEY	311534	22 04 1966	05 08 1966	† 05.08.66 KBA
19	GEOFF BLACKWELL	4718307	20 06 1967	21 05 1968	
19	PETER GAULT	2783644	04 05 1967	27 09 1967	† 24.05.14
19	ALLAN BENSLEY	243104	04.06.68	18.06.1969	† 20.12.11
	" "		20.01.70	30.01.71	
19	RODNEY BEASLEY	3797746	04 03 1971	05 08 1971	
19	MICHAEL FERRIS	1733794	23 12 1968	28 03 1969	1st Armoured Regt.
	" "		30 03 1969	03 12 1969	131-RAEME
21	ROBERT RETROT	1731922	05 05 1967	30 01 1968	
21	MICHAEL BOYLE Lt.	217004	17 02 1970	11 02 1971	
21	BLAIR SHEPPARD	1735563	01 04 1970	04 03 1971	
22	JOHN McGREGOR	3787376	20 05 1966	30 04 1967	
22	MICHAEL BURGESS Capt.	242895	24 03 1968	26 03 1969	RAEME
22	PETER MEANEY	4719804	03 06 1969	25 03 1970	
22	RONALD RYAN	2793176	20 08 1970	09 06 1971	
24	RON EVANS	3789614	04 05 1967	20 02 1968	
25	STEWART McALPINE	2787471	08 07 1968	04 06 1969	
25	ROBERT HOLDSWORTH	3793058	04 01 1969	03 12 1969	AACC
25	PETER BREMNER	1734544	16 04 1969	16 04 1970	
26	CHRIS BOULLY	4717884	17 04 1967	12 12 1967	
26	DAVID BILLINGS	2793071	19 08 1970	05 05 1971	4 Fd Regt.
28	GEOF. MACAULAY WO2	35753	27 11 1969	05 11 1970	† 27.04.13
28	LIONEL OUTEN	1732195	05 05 1967	30 01 1968	
28	JOHN MARTIN Lt.	43613	25 02 1968	21 02 1969	
29	BRIAN HAWKEY	1200572	20 05 1966	29 04 1967	AACC
29	FRED LENNON Sgt.	29712	20 05 1966	11 12 1966	† 25.07.13

*Above colour background coding explanation – Red – financial Locator, Yellow – located Locator, Black – passed Locator, Blue – honorary Member, White – NOT Located Locator.

Ed – 8 blokes not highlighted is the same number of NOT LOCATEDS as reported in November's Eyes and Ears last year. It looks, maybe, we are looking for some sort of miracle! It's a real shame, but I can only hope that these members are still with us somewhere.

. Locator Profiles – we've received 175 and we've sent out 175. Ed – Maybe we need to draw in a deep one so as to hold our breaths for a while longer.

. Located...

Have a look at the Association's web site - <http://www.131locators.org.au> – you might find some lost mates or get in touch with us and see if we can for you.

Vale



Name: Baker, Leigh, Kingsley
Nickname: 'Mouse'
Service No: 3789657 Rank: Lance Bombardier
SVN In: 10 06 1967 SVN Out: 23 04 68
DoB: 12 02 1945 DoD: 26 05 2022

Lest We Forget



Ed - I was notified by **Scotty McNicol**, yesterday, via the following email -

"Hi Paul. I have just received the latest edition of 'Chin Up', the Victorian TPI newsletter.

2nd on the list of deceased Victorian members is Leigh Baker of 131 Div. Loc. Bty. I remember the name, but can't put a face to him. I'm not sure if you are aware of his death. If you are, you can ignore this email.

Regards.....Scotty McNicol."

Consequently, I did research and found out, via the Melbourne Sun Herald, that Leigh passed on 26.05.22 and his funeral was on 2.06.22. and afterwards he was cremated.

Some Service details: Leigh was a National Serviceman, who served in Listening Posts (31 Delta), initially as a Gunner and was promoted to Lance Bombardier.

Bob Billiards has some classic photos from 31D SVN back in 1967-68 -These are from one operation with 2 locations. It ran for 6 weeks up near Xa Tua Tik and it started as Op Santa Fe.



Barry Nugent in foreground and Leigh behind

Barry Guzder and Leigh – 'Baring it ALL'



US 'Tankie', Leigh and Vic?

US 'Tankie', Leigh and Barry Guzder





L-R – John Blake, Barry Guzder and Leigh

Barry Guzder – this photo was extracted from Barry's Locator Profile...

Somewhere on ops: Mouse Baker, Geoff Blackwell, Bert Blink, Blackie, Bluey and Alan Robb



Bert Blink - this photo was extracted from Bert's Locator Profile...

Arriving Vietnam June 1967 with Bob (taking photo), Barry, Mouse, Ric and Robert Bruce.

Charles Brewer – “Morning Paul....Charles here ex 133 Div Loc.
Thank you for your sensitive email re Leigh - there is bound to be blokes who will appreciate this.
Appreciate what you do - our Secretary of 7 Fd Regt Assoc, John Balfour, does likewise.
So yes; RIP Leigh Baker - & Ubique Paul. Blessings...Charles.”

Peter Dealy – “Hello Paul
Leigh was at LP 31A on SAS Hill when I was there. Will go thru my photos to see if I have one of him.
Cheers, Peter Dealy.”

Ernie Newbold – Here's a classic extracted from **Ed's** archives of Ernie Newbold archived photos.

A = Stan Briggs ?
 B=Max Troynar
 C=Bob Retrot
 D=Leigh Baker
 E=unknown (Bdr)
 F=Allen Morley
 G=Ernest Newbold
 H=unknown
 I=Geoff Blackwell
 J=Nick Proskurin
 K=unknown
 L=unknown
 M=Fire alarm



Holsworthy with the blokes "doing" PT?

A late correction – "A" at in the photo is Laurie Gallop not Stan Briggs.

Bob King – "Paul,
 Sorry to hear about Lee (Mouse)..
 Pics attached,
 Bob."

Bob's pics –

Ric Marques, Max Troynar, Nick Proskurin, Bert Blink, Bob King and Leigh (at front)



Bert Blink, Barry Guzder, ?, Bob King, Leigh and Bob Bruce



Barry Guzder, Bob Bruce, Bert Blink, Leigh, ? and Nick Proskurin



Max Troynar and Leigh, with Grahame Dignam in the rear.

Mike Butler – “Hi Paul

I met Leigh a few years back when he came to Box Hill RSL at one of our VVAA Black Tie dinners. He wasn't well then and very quietly spoken. I believe he was a member of Upwey RSL and looked after their memorabilia. I wasn't aware that he had passed. May he rest in peace.
Regards, Mike Butler.”

Ed – after reading Mike Butler’s email I found the following with reference to Leigh - see below photos and story extracted from the Upwey Belgrave website



RSL
Australia
Upwey Belgrave

Museum Curator

Leigh Baker



The weapons that are to be mounted at the RSL include a :303 rifle, the navy ceremonial officer's sword of Allan John Rankin Watkins, a Russian 7.62mm RPK machine gun and a Japanese officer's sword

Leigh Baker, Collection Manager – Running Rabbits Military Museum, Upwey Belgrave RSL

Front: Phil Garland and **Leigh Baker**, behind from left, Jason Wood,

Brian Neal and David Eaton holding mounted weapons which are to be put on display with the money they received.



Leigh (above) – far right and (right) centre



Max Troynar – sent this photo of ‘Mouse’.



A great memory of
Leigh



May He Rest in Peace and Never Forgotten.



131 Locators Association is always on the lookout for new financial members. With the establishment of the web site we continue to be burdened with the ongoing cost of maintenance etc and we need to be able to support this effort equally.

So, if you're a non-financial Associate receiving emails and the *Eyes & Ears* regularly you could bite the bullet and email Grahame Dignam:sectreas131locators@gmail.com and he could forward you the relevant forms to join - Memberships are available for 1 year or longer deposit a DONATION direct (add your name) to the associations account at "A/c Name: 131 Locators Association Inc. Bank: Westpac, Kingsgrove NSW BSB No: 032 166 A/c No: 264133"

Hope we hear from you?

Website: <http://www.131locators.org.au>

. Other related sites...

. Locating, Surveillance & Target Acquisition Association...



LOCATING, SURVEILLANCE & TARGET ACQUISITION ASSOCIATION

The Eyes and Ears of The Battlefield



Australian Artillery Association – www.australianartilleryassociation.com



ROYAL AUSTRALIAN ARTILLERY HISTORICAL COMPANY

www.artilleryhistory.org



Website link - <http://www.vvaa.org.au/>

Website link - <http://www.dva.gov.au/Pages/home.aspx>

. VETERAN'S AFFAIRS WEBSITE

The Dept of Veteran's Affairs has launched a new mental health initiative to assist veteran's experiencing the affects of mental illness and their families. Providing information and fact sheets about understanding mental illness, links and contact information for accessing support, and online resources for health professionals, this website focuses on helping veterans identify early warning signs of mental illness to effectively manage their mental illness and seek treatment. For more info or to access, please visit www.at-ease.dva.gov.au

. 1st Battalion 83rd Artillery...



Dedicated to the men of the 1st Battalion 83rd Artillery who served in Vietnam from 1966-1971. We left Fort Sill in October 1966 for Vietnam. We originally were at Bear Cat, Nui Dat and Xuan Loc. We later were in many other locations in Vietnam. We also welcome our Australian and New Zealand Allies to whom we owe so much.

It is also dedicated to those members of the 1/83rd who did not return. We will never forget their sacrifice. Website: <http://www.1stbn83rdartyvietnam.com>



The Royal New Zealand Artillery Association

<http://www.rnzaa.org.nz/>

Editor contact email: 131eyesandears@gmail.com Ed – Paul 'Dicko' Dickson

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