

JB RICHDALE RNZEME

TALES OF A SOLDIER/TRADESMAN SVN 1969/70

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Change Notes

1. 6 May 2016; Revision 3
 - a. Added 'Stick to your knitting' section, and
 - b. Amended Corp day images person names courtesy Earl Barbarich
2. 7 May 2016; Revision 3C
 - a. Added section titled 'Things that bang in the night.'
 - b. Added paragraph covering the M113 burn down.
3. 13 May 2016, Revision 4;
 - a. Changed the introduction
 - b. Added the New Jersey, Beer and Hospitality sections.
 - c. Added the food section.
 - d. Mines and mowers – added hard standing paragraph.
4. 6 June 2016, Revision 4B;
 - a. Added the Jim Gibb Washing machines paragraph,
 - b. Added 'Might is sometimes not enough ...' paragraph
5. 7 June 2016, Revision 4C. Des Hammond corrections to the RNZEME People section;
 - a. Revised Corp Day venue from LAD to Husky Chuck OR's mess.
 - b. Added paragraph on 'Other EME in theatre'
 - c. Added 'How the Logistics ...' paragraph.
 - d. Added Des Hammond and Ball Bags the monkey to the critters section.
 - e. Reorganises the 'Neighbours' section and added the Mortars paragraph.
 - f. Typo corrections.
6. 22 June 2016, Revision 5. Added Des Hammond images paragraph
 - a. Amended the Introduction
 - b. Edited The Battleship paragraph.
 - c. The newly arrived Case Bull Dozer image, and
 - d. Baria School see saw, plus image of RAEME LAD
 - e. Added 81mm image to 'The Mortars' paragraph.
 - f. Added 'My First Aw Shit Event' paragraph
7. 27 June 2016. Corrected hills names and added new paragraphs;
 - a. Radio and television, and
 - b. Mail, money and Strange Behaviour,
 - c. Oh Dear Missed.
 - d. Added Earle Barbarich alias Clark Kent
8. 15 March 2017- documented the answer to my coming home mystery
9. 12 Oct 2018 – replaced acronyms and abbreviation's with plain text.
10. 11 August 2019:
 - a. Added Earl Barbarich (alias Clark Kent) story.
 - b. Corrected typo's and spelling errors

Introduction

Images and impressions of South Vietnam (SVN) as captured and remembered by Corporal (Cpl) JB Richdale, RNZEME, 161 Battery, RNZA, June 1969 until June 1970. A personal view. Any perceived bias is entirely accidental and is not an attempt to rewrite history. It is just what I remember after all these years. It also worth noting that the information chain at that time (Officers to SNCO's to OR's) was a lot like Chinese whispers. It was only later when The Newman Vietnam Gunners book (and others) were released that I realised that many events had different accounts as to what I thought had actually happened. So, I have written what I remember and much that is described here is not part of the official history¹.

161 Battery Nui Dat

The Connex

161 Battery Main OP (Observation Post) was known as the Connex. This was the main OP station of the Battery position in Nui Dat. Occupied 24/7.

Made from 2 x 10ft containers, ringed with sand bags. These two containers doubled as jail, small arms ammo storage and observation post (OP).

Upstairs, on top of the containers was the OP equipped with, binos, a starlight scope, two M60 machine guns, a 50 Cal machine gun on the roof, a Lmg², a M40 grenade launcher and the claymore mine clackers wired to the mines³ running around the wire perimeter.

For some of that time we also had our own napalm for protection – 44-gallon drums wired to explode and spread burn and hurt in the event – well that I think is what it was for because we never told what the plan was, or the conditions under which they were to be triggered. Later into my tour the 'health and safety' committee (I think) had our napalm generators removed. Unknown but good



¹ . My thanks to the widow of Jim Gibb, Dusty Millar and Des Hammond for provided other images and stories that have been added into this recollection.

² .Lmg – light machine gun that can be seen on the right side of the above picture.

³ . These mines were removed later in my tour for reasons I do not know.

job cause it worried me and others. The same is/was true of the written off 105 howitzer (with splintex rounds) that guarded the gate into the Dat⁴ on the road to the neighbouring hamlet. The problem was that gun was also pointing into our position. Fire that gun and we cop the splintex⁵ as well. Worse was that the Battery did not have any control over that gun! Hummm, not good.



The connex OP was also my stand too position but I was not part of the 50 cal gun crew. That was manned by the dirty 13 trucking company pers⁶. As we found out this arrangement looks more dangerous than it is. It just did not have the stability required so it was best used a hosing machine, lots of noise and look out any one in front, friend or foe. Bloody good fun and absolutely deadly to banana trees.

Things that go bang in the night

A watch shift in the connex lasted 2 hours. At night that could be a most entertaining spectacle:

1. A B52 strike (generally to the north east around the Long Hai's). The first indication would be a moving orange/yellow series of flashing lights moving either across the clouds or along the black horizon. Sometime soon after that was followed by a low frequency heavy rumble of bombs detonated in line. Sometimes that would be followed by the ground shaking briefly. The nearest experience I had of that before or since is listening to an earth quake coming down the Hutt valley. That low frequency rumble is almost identical to a B52 strike.
2. 'Puff the magic dragon'⁷ would signal its arrival over the target by a parachute flare followed by another marking up a race track. Sometimes you could hear the distinctive rumble of a DC3 other times you couldn't. Anyway, with the flares in place Puff would circle the race track and hose down the area underneath, a bright endless stream of tracer followed by the ripping sound of a multibarrel mini guns. Bad news for anyone underneath. We were never



⁴ . Dat – short for the Nui Dat Australian led task force position situated west of Vung tau.

⁵ . A 105 splintex round will strip the rust of a wire fence such is the density of shot. Mean, mean and not something you want to be in front of!

⁶ . The dirty 13 trucking company was the Battery transport section made up men with many different skills, some were on their 2nd or 3rd tour and vastly experienced in areas outside of driving. That included how to get the best out of the weaponry we had. I suspect that it was those skills got us the spread of arms inside the connex.

⁷ . Puff was also known as Snoopy.

told what the results were. What we did know was the owner of the land got it ploughed for free whether he needed it or not.

Oh Dear, Missed!

Every evening at 6pm a star shell would light up in the sky. That marked the end of the working day and the beginning of look out! Anyone caught moving in the surrounding free fire zone between the hours of 6 in the evening and 6 in the morning risked being fired upon without warning or a never you mind.



This particular night, when I was doing my shift in the connex and a light came up on the Wolverton's. Ah haa, bad people moving around our free fire zone. Call in the duty officer who

called in a fire mission with the grid reference of where we thought the light was – on the face of the Wolverton's immediately above the small hut in the centre of the top picture as I recall. Husky Chuck got the mission. Cherrrr, six 155mm SP howitzers. Serious stuff. 'Shot out over', we wait and then the profile of the Wolverton's is back lit by orange, red and yellow flashers. Oh dear, all six shot has gone clear over the mountain and beyond, like missed the hill altogether and gone



on several km's beyond the intended target! Ohhhhh, not good. The duty officer has a private conversation with someone on the end of the phone and the decision is made to 'cancel the fire mission', leave well enough alone and give the Charlie's and his navigation light a miss. To this day I have no idea how that shot fell where it did, where it actually landed or whether it served the interests of peace or not. What I do know is somewhere on the eastern side of the Wolverton's are six big holes, that were not there before. Oh, dear or should it be shit happens?

The Battleship New Jersey

One of our FO's got to play with the battleship USS New Jersey. It was parked off the coast and a helo was sent to our Nui Dat position to collect the FO. The target area was in around the Long Hai's to the north of Vung Tau which was rumoured to be the base and hidey hole for one of the NVA Regts⁸ in the province. The FO was rumoured (Cpl's don't get told much remember) to have directed the fall of shot from the helo but felt a more personal approach was required and landed somewhere



near to the target. Apparently, he misunderstood the reach of the 16-inch shells blast wave, shock, other hurting stuff and subsequently decided that directing shot from the helo was close enough. He may be the only NZ soldier to have every controlled the fall of shot from a battle ship.

⁸ . Talking of rumours. One constant rumour was that Charlie and us had agreed to have Vung Tau as our common in country R&C centre. It is said that both parties agreed to leave the other alone as a soldiers R&C needs to be respected. Hummm, interesting eh? Really good story if nothing else.

The Lines, The Bogs & The Dreaded Lurgy

This first image is of the Battery lines in the dry.

1. On the left are the newly minted barracks for the OR's that opened the month that I arrived.
2. Far right is a discreetly designed communal bog hole⁹ shared by everyone in need.
3. Behind that is the Jim Gibb golf driving range to keep the body and mind together.
4. Behind the golf range is the picture theatre screen powered by a 16mm special that became my responsibility to maintain and run. Very popular as long as there was not breakdowns then look out.
5. The officers and SNCO's lived in digs on the right of the top picture.



The 2nd image is the same place taken from the other

end in the wet. These beautiful rain storms would unleash two or more per day and the joy of it all was

the temperature dropped and you could shower and wash in the rain without fear of the dreaded lurgy – Yuk. An enduring memory, I suspect, for every SVN vet is the runs, the dreaded lurgy, involuntary bowel movement, the shits and generally the unfairness of it all. Positioning bog holes became a subject of much debate. The pro's and cons were mutually exclusive and formidable challenges to the powers to be – too close and the smell was offensive but too far away and you filled your pants! Then there was the undesirable complication of Husky Chuck next door! More about that later. There is a limit to how much night soil you can talk about in one go.

On the western perimeter was the basketball hoop. Popular and a good way to keep in shape enjoyed by all. The sand bag container on the left is an OP and defensive position similar to but not quite to the same standard as the connex.



Bdr's and OR's Mess Nui Dat

Inside 161 Battery OR's mess during 'opening' hours. The two people on the extreme left are EME; Neil Ward, and Earle Barabarich¹⁰, both visiting from the Aussie LAD across the road.



Soon after I arrived the powers decided that Cpl Richdale should be the Bdr's mess president. That was a first and very interesting period that lasted most of my tour. Notable Incidents and events included:

1. A Bdr barman suffered terribly from prickly heat (best you read about it) and could not sleep unless he drank the bars profits every day. That was around 48 or more cans of beer a day!
2. A smash and grab raid during the wet when a 20-cubic foot old chest freezer loaded with cold beer disappeared one night. A search of the Battery position the next day discovered the said freezer (empty) hidden in the long crass that only the wet season can produce. Sneaky applause and admiration by the said Bdr mess president for the raiders' organisation to spirit away a tonne or more of cold beer. No convictions, only suspicions and that was as far as the powers wanted to take the matter. Somebody knows who but that remained a well-kept secret even to this day.

Beer and other Libation

One matter that seems to have been overlooked by all the commentators of that time is the fact that beer was is rather important to the functioning and well-being of all units. The importance of the palliative effects and the ability of a cold beer to soothe the soul has been over looked, some would say neglected even. 161 Battery was no different.

Within the Battery considerable energies and creativity had been put in place to ensure that supply of beer and other libation was available on demand – yes, under controlled circumstances, that goes without saying of course! One particularly clever arrangement negotiated by an enterprising soldier (a RNZA BQMS is my guess) was that it got written in stone the Kiwis could and would be supplied from both the American and the Australian libation systems. That meant 161 Battery was the only unit at the Dat that had beer from both continents.



Some of that beer was 'shit' (even that is a too polite description of some the stuff that was foisted on us) that I suspect was dumped on the poor unsuspecting soldiery solely for profit. Some of it was lovely and much sought after and those brands were always hard to get – Hamms and Budweiser were two brands much in demand. The Australian brands mostly did not reach the same level of popularity because most just did not seem to 'travel well' - or they were 'shit' to start with

¹⁰ . Earle, probably the only person that I know that actually went running for fitness in SVN. As I learnt much later he went running with the SAS on the hill and was known by them as Clark Kent of superman fame.

and dumped on the soldiery for ...? Yeah, that debate was ongoing and never resolved as I recall. Be that as it may one side effect of this clever arrangement was that the Battery mess's had a lot of visitors – Aussies keen to sample Yankee beers and Yanks looking to sample the Australian brews. Made for some really interesting impromptu parties. Two that spring to mind are:

1. The Yanks from Husky Chuck that came over to the OR's mess to celebrate their purple hearts. It seems they were riding on the top¹¹ of an APC that got hit by something nasty. The consequences were shrapnel in the bum and a purple heart for each and every one that got it 'up the arse'. Notes on how you explain that to your kids were not included?
2. A Yank visiting from the same neighbours that was shot through both cheeks of his bum by a SLR 7.62 round. Part of a debate on whether their M16 was superior or not to our SLR. A gunner was paraded to explain what was deemed 'an accidental discharge (AD)'. And as an aside that started another debate as to whether the shot yank should receive a purple heart. That debate lasted for some time and was the reason for several more impromptu gatherings. I digress, that shot person reappeared in the OR's mess after an absence of 3 weeks (I think after recuperation in a Vung Tau hospital) singing 161 Battery praises 'as great little place ...' He was most welcome as I recall.



Figure 1 – Dirty 13 Small Arms Inventory, most not on the equipment table.

The organisation to maintain this important libation service was second to none – the key players in my time were Bdr Billy Douglas in concert with the Dirty 13 Trucking Company:

1. Billy Douglas (on his 2nd tour) ran the PX and was responsible to procure and maintain adequate stocks of the beer and other libation – goffers¹², hard liquor¹³, liqueurs radios and cameras plus other goodies – at all times. That meant trips to Vung Tau, sometimes by himself, driving a big truck armed with a colt 45. On one such trip his fully loaded truck returning from Vung Tau, rolled off the road into the Mekong delta. The beer and other goodies were spilt into the mud as the tide was out. Before too long the locals appeared to claim salvage rights. That led to a Mexican stand off – Billy Douglas, standing up to his knees in the mud, between the beer and the locals, waving the colt which looked rather bigger than it was given he was only 5ft2 tall. That worked for a bit but then the locals got bolder and



¹¹ . Nobody rode inside the APC's as the armour could not stop a lot of the angry stuff, particularly the RPG's. Your injuries were likely to be less if you were riding on top when something like that came along.

¹² . Goffers, no idea where the name came from but is the label given to soft drinks; Coke, Pepsi, lemonade, orange and the like.

¹³ . As a member of the Battery you entitled to buy two 40oz bottles of hard liquor or liqueurs per month. These we sent home carefully packaged in a 105 shell tube. Really meant for the job. When I got home my parents had drunk the lot except for ½ a bottle of Baileys Irish cream. That took some effort I can tell you.

advanced on Billy. He fired a shot and the recoil had him somersault backwards. Apparently, the locals were caught by surprise and stopped advancing. It was at that point that help arrived. So, the scene was secured and the spoils collected back up and ferried back to the Dat. The truck? – Nobody remembers what happened to that.

2. The dirty 13 trucking company bought in considerable quantities of ice every day to keep the beer cool. More when the Battery was back at the Dat. Generally, the Battery deployment was 6 weeks out on operations followed by 2 weeks back at the Dat to refit and rest, repeating. Without ice to keep the beer cool risked trouble in the camp. Warm beer appeals to no one then any more than it does today.

Hospitality

A sub unit of the Big Red One division came visiting arriving when the Battery out. Those that stayed with us were the APC's and crew alone, no infantry. About 12 APC's and 30 soldiers. The APC's were in sorry state – you could see through from one side to the other. They had been in some bad places but what I could not understand at the time was why all the APC's were in a similar state of disrepair. Later I found out that unit was going home and we were a stopover on the way to embarkation out of country. I suspect that equipment had changed hands – the good stuff stayed in country, the damaged left with the Big Red One. Sensible thing to do wouldn't you say? Yesss, but not everything I saw that year was sensible. Oh no!



So, the Battery had only the stay behinds in the lines. Not many but no problems as we made them welcome. That produced mixed results. Some of the guests were friendly and convivial while others were racist and angry. Three Red One OR's, all black, bailed me up and were looking to give 'the whitey' a hiding when other members of the Battery happened by and rescued me. That, and other instances, did darken their visit. To be blunt I (and others) were pleased to see them go. I often wondered what would have happened if these angry visitors had tried it on when the rest of Battery was home?

Food and Fusion Cooking

When I left to return home I swore I would never eat chicken (or its relations) ever again. Today, many years later and that oath is still largely true. Although these days I do sometimes eat chicken but only under sufferance or to be polite. It is not that the Battery cooks did a bad job, no, it is simply that all of us had eaten a life time's quota over that year in Vietnam.

What I remember about food is,

1. The cooks (3 or 4 borrowed from RNZASC) had probably the toughest job in the Battery. That they performed so well required considerable grit and determination given that they had to repeat the work day



Figure 2- Battery kitchen and Mess fatigue in action.

after day, after day with limited resources – remorseless work that would test anyone, and

2. Chicken dominated. Mutton? Non-existent. Beef? Sometimes and generally it was a disappointment altho a welcome relief from chicken. Pork? Non-existent.
3. Food powder! I did not know that food came in powder form – milk, yes but eggs and potatoes and other veg as well, now that was new to me. Later, when visiting the USA, I learnt much of their food was reconstituted powder or puréed just like the Battery food back in 1969. It was as if there is a need to protect the clientele from seeing what food actually looked like. Hell of a way to eat!
4. The local food – tasty but highly suspect and generally too spicy for our pedestrian tastes. One favourite was pickled pork cube neatly wrapped up in a banana leaf. The locals thought of it as a sweet, we regarded as a savoury. But look out as it could turn on a savage case of the runs!
5. R&R was generally looked forward to so that you could get eat some 'real' food. I went to Bangkok and got nowhere close. The so-called western meals were almost inedible and very disappointing. The Thai food on the other hand was attractive to look at, full of RED MEAT, full of greens (altho of an unknown type) and smelt good too!! Following the example of the locals all you had to do was stir in the dainty little side plates of sorta clear liquid with specks floating in it and wolf it down accompanied by beer. That's what we did. The mild but not unwelcome surprise was that it took three bottles of beer (big bottles of Singha) to finish the meal and quench the heat. But overall it was the first real red meat meal for long time. The next morning broke with an unusual urgency to pass No:2's. Oh dear, I thought I had broken something and was going to die such was the heat and burning sensation around my ring gear. Them (as it turned out) floating seeds got me both ways. Never mind, I/we learnt how to manage the hot and finally did get in some real (well nearly real) food before it was time to go back to the Battery,
6. C rations. Now that is a subject in its own right – see below.
7. Beer. When the Battery was out then they were on the dry unless it was Xmas in which case each member got 2 cans of warm beer on Xmas day as I recall. Possibly one of the few times when warm beer was welcome.
8. Hot boxes were sent infrequently from our Dat kitchen if the Battery was reachable by road. Now we are back to those clever cooks posted to the Battery because making up hot boxes was quite a challenge but one they were up to. That included ice cold goffers as well. Bliss on wheels.
9. Venison! One evening, much to everyone's surprise, a small fallow type deer somehow ended up inside the Aussie neighbour's wire. That occurred around the evening stand to when everyone (armed and dangerous) was at their stand to posts. The deer, realising its mistake, made a dash for the wire going right thru the now alert neighbour's like a bat out of hell. The neighbours opened up with pretty much everything they had. We watched this happening because we were at stand to as well. One small problem tho, some of the shot was going through our place! Ugly, but it was all over in a matter of seconds after the deer disappeared over the wire and into the long grass untouched from as near as we could tell. No casualties on our side but we never heard how the



Figure 3- from Wikipedia

neighbours got on. There was not a soul amongst us that was not drooling at the mouth over the thought of roast venison.

10. The BBQ's. When the Battery was in back at the Dat there would sometimes be a BBQ.

Gunners, being enterprising individuals, would disappear to the four corners to find 'real' food. The dirty 13 trucking company would bring in tonnes of ice so that the beer and goffers could be chilled down to taste (½ tonne trailers are ideal) 44-gallon drums would be filled with water and loaded with shell fish, crabs and then left to drop their load of sand before being steamed. Big and tasty. Then there was the fish¹⁴. To this day I still don't know where the gunners got the food from (or how) but I do know that those BBQ's were second to none. Fairs fair tho, the cooks always went the extra yard and were generally able to contribute a most welcome tit bit or two.



Figure 4- local fish was most edible and welcome.

The Battery worked mostly on a repeating cycle of 6 weeks out eating 'C' rations followed by 2 weeks back at the Dat on 'fresh' rations. C rations; a very interesting combination of stuff passed off as food. I suspect it only qualifies as food because someone (a Yank most likely) said it was, not for any other reason. Because by most standards (mine included) it was not food altho it would keep you alive. No one ever died from eating C rations is my understanding. Be that as it may that fact does not make C rations food!

I learnt later that there were 12 different C ration recipes. That was news to me and I am sure news to others as well because what I experienced was chicken, chicken, repeating with something passing as a red meat stew thrown in from time to time. Oh yes and then there was the large tin of apple sauce. It had a place but I never found out where it fitted into the scheme of things. Well not quite as any one (like me) visiting the Battery in the field was always made welcome and encouraged to stay with one gun or another. Secretly the hope of the hosting gun crew was that the visitor would be able to whip a meal from the combined C rations packs that somehow tasted different from everyone else's attempts. Thus, was born what I refer to today as Fusion Cooking. Those in the know will realise that this is shorthand for Confusion Cooking, something I still practise most weeks these days.



Figure 5- from Wikipedia

¹⁴ . I do not remember any red meat (or pork) at these BBQ's. I suspect the wise heads knew both would be best left alone.

Things an EME Person on Secondment Needs to Know

Prickly Heat

Eight to a hut. This is the hut that I shared with members of the dirty 13 trucking company and the field engineer (Jim Hendricks RNZE). Note the air-conditioning is state of the art.

This image shows how to avoid the dreaded prickly heat, wash and shower regularly followed by liberal covering of talcum powder¹⁵, wear loose fitting clothes and most of all never break into a sweat!



Dhobi Rash

But then there was the dhobi rash. Nothing trivial about that and I suspect there are others like me who get repeats of these bloody rashes and itches to this day. Yeah to be fair, they have tapered off in recent years. About bloody time too!

I digress. For a very small cost we could get our washing done by the locals. I quickly found out that was a bad move as although the clothes looked clean, they were often invested with 'lurgy' leading to dhobi rash and other forms of itching or even infestation of lice!!! Ughhhh, ugly. Once I learnt that lesson, I did my own washing. I also stopped wearing underwear or socks because, in the heat, any clothing in close contact would bring on a dhobi rash attack. This is me and my sockless boots.



Lice!

A bit of important hand me down knowledge still relevant as I suspect medical science is no further advanced today than it was then. I digress, every now and again there would be an outbreak of lice. The accepted cure, administered by the medic¹⁶, was to be shaved all over and burn destroy all clothes. Uhhmm, everyone knew when someone had a lice problem. No brownie points in the offering. But there was an easy solution that had none of that social stigma. Burn all your



Figure 6-My bed space at the Dat

¹⁵ . Bad cases of Prickly Heat were treated with Gensen's Violet or 'something' red coloured. Nothing discreet!

¹⁶ . The Battery medic for much of my tour was Cpl Phil Freeman, ex NZSAS and vastly experienced. Good guy to have on your side.

clothes, yes and then give those hairy and often sensitive areas of your anatomy a liberal going over with fly spray. Works a treat. You can sit back and watch the lousy critters dying and dropping away. The euphoria lasts about 5 minutes before the pain sets in because that fly spray is mostly made up of a kerosene that stings like hell¹⁷. That is when you bolt for the shower or any running water (temperature irrelevant) and attempt to wash the fly spray off. It takes a few minutes but the relief does come as long as you are under the water! But you can't stay under the water all day! So, there is point when you must get out and try to behave like a normal person. Not easy and you are uncomfortable for a few days but it is worth it to keep your hair and dignity.

Camping Lessons

On one deployment by road we had to camp out overnight and continue the next day. An open sandy patch with little cover other than stands of big bamboo was chosen. The new EME Cpl and one other newbie chose a stand of Bamboo and built our hooch into that cover. Yes, it was the cover we were looking for. A place to get out of the heat. Afterwards I realised that we were the only ones to do so. Everyone else built in the open? Our hooch, like everyone else's, was the half round corrugated iron affair with the ends covered off using mosquito nets. Comfy. Yes, that was until the strange noises started. Noises that sounded like sand paper on wood, sorta like scratching sounds. A quick flash of the torch revealed scorpions¹⁸ climbing up the mosquito netting! Not much sleep that night. Worse was to follow because one of the old heads (I think he took pity on us but I may be wrong) told us that bamboo thicket looks inviting but are full of spiders (nasty ones) and skinny poisonous snakes. Leave them alone and you won't be bothered otherwise ... yeah, and we were lucky cause all we lost was the sleep.



Stick to your knitting

EME Cpl's should stick to their knitting and resist commenting on things outside their area of expertise. This fetching image is of an exotic orchid growing at the Dat. Several carefully framed images of this flowering wonder were captured by Cpl Richdale and images sent back to NZ to spread the word of the blooming wonders of SVN. The response was 'well boy that is a common weed round here in NZ! Nothing exotic about that my boy, nothing at all'. Oh dear, not a good look. A little bit later I found out that a previous gunner on his second tour bought these blooms (cannon lilies as it turns out) to brighten up the DAT gun position. Charlie gun I think. The same gun that suspicion has made off with a tonne of cold beer from the BDR's mess. I have often



¹⁷ . Fly spray, I have a sneaky suspicion that fly spray is the genesis of the police pepper spray in common use today?

¹⁸ . It was rumoured that the Sgts mess had a 'big scorpion' kept in a jar on the bar. Members were encouraged to find worthy combatants (millipedes for example) then, at a suitable time, the pair would be let at it. Results were never published so what actually happened is unknown to the author.

wondered how the Vietnam 'Bio Security' regard these lilies today because it looked to me that liked the environment!

Might is sometimes not always enough

For reasons that I have forgotten, me and three others from the Battery were travelling in a Landover kitted out much the same as this image, in the wet, along a muddy single lane track when we came round the corner to be confronted by a single lane bridge (no sides and barely one vehicle wide) and a bloody big water buffalo standing on the other side. A really big, humungous water buffalo with a spread of horns nearly as wide and the bridge.

We were armed – SLR's, M16's, a GPMG, a Grenade Launcher, pistols and knives – but not one of us thought that would be nearly enough to deal with this beast. We could not back up and were too close to call for a fire mission – yeah we could have done that altho the consequences would have been interesting – 'you called a fire mission because of a buffalo?'¹⁹



I digress. The silence at the bridge was deafening as we both looked over the other. The beast was bigger than the Land Rover so trying to push it away just might trigger a response not to our liking. Just as the tension was becoming unbearable this brown berry of an urchin appeared from under the bridge, wringing wet, clad only in a pair of shorts. What's more he only came up to the shoulder of the beast. He never said a word, just took in the scene, walked round the back of the beast and twisted the big black ball sack. We watched astonished as the beast backed up and another twist of his balls sent it off the road and into the stream under the bridge. The urchin followed with a look on his face of pure scorn and utter contempt. We, truly humbled, went quietly on our way realising the might is not always enough. Sometime you need friends (or at least someone that does not mean you harm) even if they think you are a bunch of dick head(s).

¹⁹ . The buffalo is and would not have been the problem. Oh no. The problem would have been that Cpl's do not call up fire missions. Dear me no, 'Not done don't you know?' Cpls (well all OR's really) should be seen but not heard.

My First Aw Shit Event

Soldier tradesmen are supposed to come equipped with soldierly skills? Yes, I hear you say! Well no, not in my case and the same was true of others the Gunners borrowed from other corps – cooks, drivers, field engineers and I suspect even those variants from the teeth arms as well.

I remember when our rotation landed in Vung Tau just after a rain storm had been through seeing, on the tarmac, this large mob of blokes, dressed in a variety of clothes (one even had a skull around his neck), none of which approximated a uniform, all ringing wet and obviously very happy. They turned out to be a Kiwi company about to go home back to Singapore in the same bird that delivered us. We were issued their weapons. In my case that was an M16, a very rusty M16!



The only thing that moved on was the magazine – that, I only found out later. But what really shocked me was how any kiwi soldier could let a weapon deteriorate to such a state²⁰?

I digress. The road trip back to Nui Dat on the back of an open truck was nervous time for me. Here I was surrounded by soldiers I did not know, had never trained with, in a completely foreign environment, with an obviously sick weapon. What would/could I do if something happened? How many others were in the same position? I have only been in country 5 minutes and been issued with a weapon to be used to further the cause of peace that is clearly in poor condition and worse I had only a vague idea on how to use it!!!! My first 'Aw Shit' situation and what was worse is that the situation was generated by my own side! The goodies for crying out loud!

In my case I was able to exchange the rusty M16 for the more familiar SLR immediately after arriving at the Battery. But not everyone got that lucky. One attached other corps that came in on the next rotation was also issued an M16. Like me he had never seen one before that date and when he sat



on the bed next to mine trying to figure out how it worked it went off. Not good and luckily only one bang because that round hit the floor under my reclining bum, blew a hole in the floor, scattered concrete and other hurty stuff out through the wall. Oh shit, big surprise by all concerned but have no fear the system knew just what to do. The offender was paraded and brought to account under a charge of 'accidental discharge' (AD, nearly as bad as 'asleep on guard in a theatre of war') and duly punished. That cost that soldier any prospect of receiving his long service and good conduct medal in what turned out to be an otherwise exemplary career that saw him rise to the top of his profession, WO1.

The question that came to my mind years later was why did the head shed send a volunteer young soldier, just coming into his prime, into a situation without even the basic skills needed? Why? Was

²⁰ . It was not until much later that I realised that these rotations in to and out of country are an ideal situation to 'disappear' weapons unwanted by the departing unit²⁰. As it turned out this was my first experience with how the logistics tail actually works in a theatre of war.

it because they were careless or was it, they just did not care? The latter is my guess because he was not alone. It happened to me and others I know as well²¹.

²¹ . The Battery management had no option but to bring charges. They were victims as well with no wriggle room. The fault and guilty party was the head shed back in NZ for the allowing the situation to develop in the first place, a situation that could have been avoided with just a little effort on their part.

RNZEME the Magicians

Jim Gibb at work at the 161 Battery Lad. He was the unit vehicle and general magician²² called upon to make miracles normal. This images that follow are just one example of his creativity. Under construction is the wet session lawn mower made from the mangled parts of a land rover that tangled with a mine.



My roll was no different. I often felt that I was a magician expected to keep anything and everything 'electric' working. That ranged from fridges and freezers, house wiring, phones, audio and tape recorders, lighting and projectors, televisions and radios of all types, generators and any other electric devices. At least I did not have to keep the Lister generator going as was the case of my predecessors. No literature, no training and no experience on any of this 'electric' stuff. What we had going for us were our wits and a resourceful BQMS who could find the 'things' we needed in the absence of all but non-existent logistic tail? However, over all, that year and its challenges taught me more professionally than I ever thought possible. Lessons I carried with me the rest of my life.



Jim (with his head cut off) on the 1st trial run of the tow behind lawn mower. Doors quickly went back on to stop the snakes from trying to bite the driver. They got quite angry for some reason!

In the dry this was a dust bowl. Nothing grew. The dust (a reddish-brown power) could be inches thick and got into everything, staining clothes brown or changing the pages of a book to the same reddish-brown colour.

In the wet the grass could grow inches in a day (several centimetres to the metric amongst you). This amazing growth brought in the critters – snakes, mice and other vermin, creepy crawlies big and small and butterflies of the most spectacular variety.



²² . Magician? Every EME and Sigs tradesman posted to the Battery probably feels the same way. None, before or after, had it easy. All of them had find their own way as none were trained or prepared for what they were expected to do that I know of. Hell of a way to run a war!

What was that mower made of? Part of the chassis from blown up land rover, wheels from a written off ½ tonne trailers, the trailer toeing eye and the diff from another blown up land rover. The engine from a busted something that connected through the diff fitted with a custom designed 2 blade rotary cutter. Worked a treat.



Figure 7 - Ross Cocker (RNZASC) looking as Jim Gibb tests the mower.

Jim Gibb also designed and built our state of art hot and cold running water showers. There was no one in the Battery that did not bless Jim for that bit of creativity. It was the job of the mess fatigues to light the Jim Gibb designed hot water chooffers²³ so that the water was good and hot at the opening of play every day and at the close of play as well.



Figure 9- Before Jim Gibb worked his Magic

The washing machine, another Jim Gibb creation. Such was its importance that the use was restricted to the SNCO's and officers. Also, quite handy when a concrete path or pad was needed.

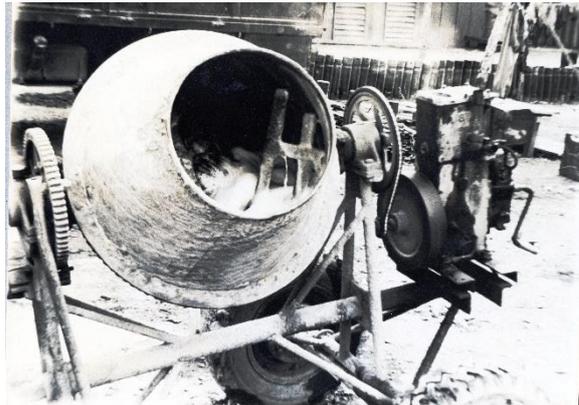


Figure 8- Jim Gibb created washing machine

²³ . Hot water chooffers were made from 44 gallon drum with a diesel drip (borrowed from somewhere ...) that heated coils of cold water powered by an overhead water tank that the Aussie's topped up every day.

Jim Gibb enjoying the Nui Dat swimming pool and coooolllll shower.

In the back ground is Sgt Ross Cocker who ran the Battery transport section known as the Dirty 13 Trucking Coy.



Still at the swimming pools. Very popular over the hot months. From Left to right; Jim Gibb, Barrie Richdale and Ross Cocker RNZASC.

Nui Dat was built inside an established French rubber plantation. The trees in the background are the rubber trees. Good shade but look out above! Rubber trees hold their dead wood and will dump the lot on the unsuspecting without warning.



Jim Gibb on the left and Ross Cocker RNZASC on the right developing their golf swing. Jim Gibb came to be a very good golfer and one of the driving forces behind the development of the Waiouru Pearce Golf Club²⁴ post SVN.



²⁴ . While Jim Gibb was one of the founding fathers of Pearce Park a fallow RNZEME type (Roger Munro) was one of the founding members of the bowling club situated in the same park.

Tels Section

Image of the available test equipment issued to the unsuspecting tels tech (Sigs or EME).

Golf clubs for PT, useless bit of test gear that was only good to look at, 9mm paper weight – vital if there was to be a breeze thru the shed in the hot and lastly a crash course in semiconductors courtesy of the US Army magazine benevolent society that came in monthly. Nat Geo very popular for those wanting to press butterflies. The range of books, magazines and manuals was astonishing and most welcome.



RNZEME People

Going home; John Collins (on the left) and Joe Grey. No more sleeps, just a bag drag.



Cpl Joe Grey
Armourer in repose



Barrie Richdale

Barrie Richdale in his office before the sweat broke out for the day experimenting with his new camera and what became known as selfies.



Jim Gibb and Goldie Goldfinch
Going home 1970



Des Hammond
in a moment of reflection; where is that bugger with my beer?



Barrie Richdale Again

After returning from a long day on shot gun duties while the Battery deployed by road. That flak jacket, once lined with sweat, was a nearly perfect insulator against the heat. Well nearly. Yes, he is totally knackered.



Corp Day 1969.

This was a gathering hosted at Husky Bravo OR's mess, neighbours to both 161 Battery and the RAEME LAD²⁵. From left to right.

Barrie Richdale, Earl Barabarich, Goldie Goldring (with inf coy), Ron Dawson kneeling, Keith McDougal, Neil Ward, Sammy Seal, Roger Waite (with inf coy, I think), Gary Mitten, Pip Ferron, Des Hammond and Jim Gibb.



²⁵. Thanks to Des Hammond for the info about the venue. He remembers that neither RAEME nor 161 Battery managers would allow the EME Corp Day celebration or gathering of clan members on their respective sites. But it was ok to celebrate that momentous day over with the Yanks altho it in not clear what they thought of the matter.

Earl Barbariich

The guy in the middle wearing the bush hat. He was always a fitness fanatic. He and I used to run around Waiouru in the early 60's. He was never built for running – nearly 6ft tall, around 15 stone, barrel chest – he ran like a bull dozer, three strides in and he started puffing but never stopped. Bloody difficult to run with as his strides were short accompanied by heavy breathing. But he never stopped, just one foot after the other until I gave up. Later he would be posted to SVN and join the Aussie LAD. And yes, kept his fitness up by running. No one else did so. To find running company he would run up to SAS hill and tease some unsuspecting super grunt to run with him. They called him 'Clark Kent'²⁶, a very appropriate nick name that describes someone with huge endurance and determination.



Missing from our Corp day celebrations was Cpl Francis Davidson (holding the M16), ex REME and now RNZEME gun tiffy out with the Battery as he was most times. Did not say much but did a grand job. That included building and zeroing an M16 fitted out with a Star Light night vision telescope. Not a natural arrangement. Francis designed and made the connecting bits. Clever work – now the piquet's can shoot in the dark.



It was used in anger once that I know of.

The Battery deployed north east down by the Long Hai's. Soon after arriving Charlie started mortaring the position. Like, every night, whether the Battery needed it or not. Enter the watch tower. Flown in by Chinook, erected by RAEME wrecker. Manned by the Battery armed with the starlight M16 and the 'not on the equipment table' 50 cal.



Yes, Charlie came visiting that night, Gunner Dusty Millar²⁷, using the M16 Starlight, spotted Charlie setting up the mortar and identified the target using M16 tracer rounds that was followed up by Bdr Nig Botica hosing the target down with the 50 cal. Peace and tranquillity restored²⁸. It remained that way for the rest of that deployment when the tower was dismantled and taken away the same way it came in.



²⁶ . Clark Kent was the name the SAS called Ear Barbariich as told to me by Bruce Mazengard, president of the ex SAS association in 2019.

²⁷ . Gunner Millar was ex infantry whilst Bdr Botica was on his 3rd tour. Besides both belonging to the Battery transport section, both were widely experienced soldiers that added depth and skills that you would not normally expect at that level. The Battery was full of people like these two. Capable and enterprising soldiers with experience and abilities beyond their rank.

²⁸ . A clearing patrol the next day found blood trails indicating the shot was on target.

Other RNZEME Activities

Peter Stitt was the EME magician at Bon Son supporting the medical team that worked in that location. Other kiwis from the RAME LAD visited from time to time to provide backup otherwise it was left to Stitt (and those before and after) posted in support of the medical team to make miracles a common place occurrence.

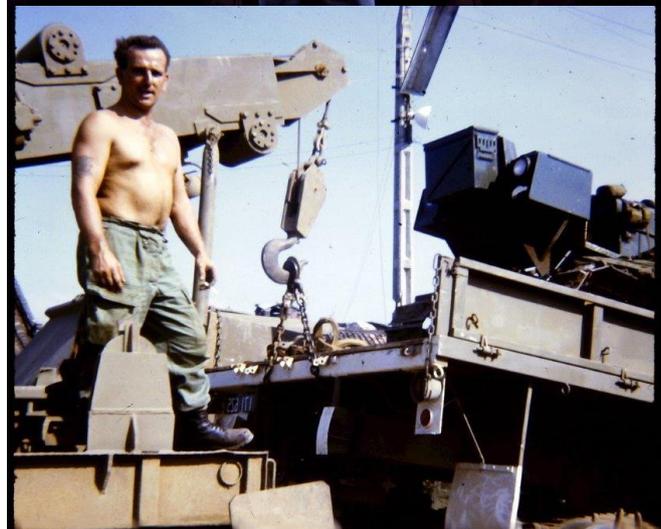
Pat Horgan led the EME contingent (including Dave Ruha) in support of a road building project somewhere in the north end of Thailand. Again, the SVN RAME LAD kiwis visited for a variety of reasons. Des Hammond and others will know more.

Des Hammond Images

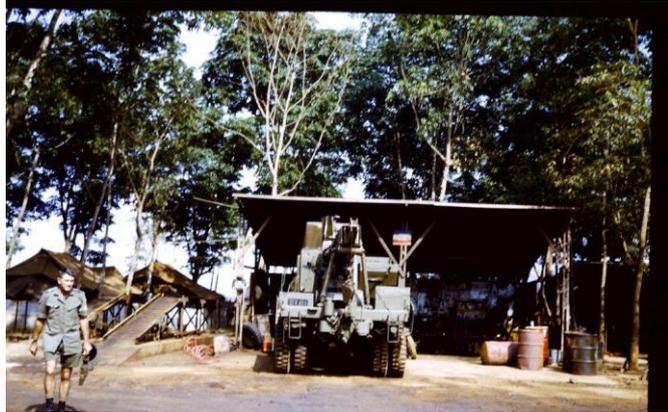
The Battery Case bully arriving in country. Des Hammond was tasked to paint it olive drab.



The Case bully with its new paint job on a broken-down truck about to be recovered by the RAEME wrecker (and Des Hammond). Jim Hendricks (the field engineer type attached to the Battery) in attendance.



The RAEME Lad that Des Hammond, Earl Barbarich, John Collins, Joe Grey and other RNZEME types operated from. The centre piece is the covered hard standing pad with OR tents on the left. Not shown is the ERV that the telly goons operated from that looked just like the image that follows.



Most of the Dat units got involved with civil aide projects at one time or another. The Battery assigned gunners to build a school were as the RAEME Lad (Des Hammond and others) built this swing to complement the little the local kids had to play on. The bare-chested figures are the round eyes (otherwise known as the Tantalans²⁹ in Vietnamese) that built and installed this see saw.



²⁹ . Kiwis were Tantalans's, Austalians were Hook-da-loi's. Yanks unknown or forgotten. All were generally referred to by us as round eye's. The locals were commonly referred to as gooks or slope heads. The term Didi-mau was the universally accepted term for F__ off, be gone!

Living with a Field Engineer

Jim Hendricks, RNZA (on the far right in this image was the Battery attached field engineer. Jim and this little Case bully³⁰ built the bunds that was and is today a gun batteries principle protection. Building the bunds was joint affair and important cause gunners are immensely modest and do not like their legs exposed.

When the bunds were done Jim and the Case would then build social amenities like long drops, paths, underground command posts and more. The task varied depending on the season – the wet or the dry. This an image of a partially completed gun position sleeping hooch. The design is half round corrugated hoop iron standing on 3ft high sand filled ammo boxes with mosquito nets covering both ends. Later Jim will come along and surround the entire gun with bunds that provide the modesty and security gunner's grave for. Everything will be lined or covered by tastefully arranged sand bags so that the entire structure stays put and presents a tidy picture. Another thing gunners are particular about.

Working in close proximity with field engineers does introduce us EME types to situations outside our normal experiences. Back at the Dat I was allocated the bed space vacated by the last field engineer. He thoughtfully left a clean bed space and two bars of sunlight soap tucked under the bed. I was most impressed at his thoughtfulness but found the soap did not really lather up as expected. When I commented about the lather issues to a fellow roommate³¹ he looked at me strangely and said 'that ain't soap; that is PE (plastic explosives)! Oh, that would explain it!



³⁰ . Des Hammond remember that the CASE arrived finished in Caterpillar yellow. He painted it drab green and learnt the art of spray painting, a skill he did not have before. Never let it be said that RNZEME types are not flexible.

³¹ . Our hut at the Dat was made up of the dirty 13 trucking company people, me and the field engineer who turned out to be Jim Hendricks.

Never travel Alone ...

One deployment the Battery did bought home the message that a field engineer (actually anyone) should never travel alone. On this occasion the Battery moved by road whilst Jim Hendricks RNZE travelled by Chinook – the Case slung underneath, him and his kit inside. The plan was the Chinook would deliver both just after the Battery arrived. Great plan but that is not what happened. Something held up the road move (I was riding shot gun) and the chinook was early. They dropped the Case in the designated clearing and pushed Jim out the back. He mounted his bully as every field engineer does and surveyed the scene. Uhhh, a large flat clearing full of high elephant grass surrounded by bush and jungle. No one else here by me and the Case. ‘Ohhh, what are those black clad figures emerging and disappearing into the tree lines? Ohhh, black clad figures, not good, that is what they wear isn’t it!’ Aw shit, what to do next when you’re all alone with only a small bully for company? Uhhh, only he knows the answer to that and the answer was nothing like this posed image. I digress, hours later the Battery turned up and found a very relieved and very pale field engineer sitting in his Case with eyes as big as saucers. It later turned out that the black clad figures were the SAS from the DAT doing the clearing patrol. Nobody thought to tell Jim Hendricks of that minor detail earlier. That is just one example of why you should never travel alone. Always go with the herd.



The drama that day did not finish with poor Jim, oh no. The Battery escort included Aussie M113's as well as air cover. When the Battery got to the clearing and started to set up the M113's pulled over and got a well-deserved brew going. Whoops, one got careless and set fire to their APC! It burnt very well, the crew and everyone close by moved out and watched as the M113 burnt down. The disconcerting bit started when the ammo cooked off. Not good when that happens, tends to put you off your stride until it is over.

Living with the Neighbours

The Americans

Husky Chuck³² were our neighbours back at the Dat. A mix of 155mm SP supplemented with 175 guns and 8" howitzers. When they went off the concussion could empty the long drops. You quickly learnt to pinch your ring gear when they opened up. The sensation of fly's and other dark things bouncing of your rear end as you squatted over the long drop is something words cannot describe!

One good point was that when Husky Chuck were on a fire mission they made it a point of pride to all fire at the same instant of time. That shock wave and concussion was tremendous but at least they all went off at the same time. As a consequence, we quickly learnt to:

1. Avoid the long drops unless Well I leave it to your imagination,
2. If you could not avoid the bogs then you had to endure the 1st shot, then start counting and empty out as much as you could before reaching the magic number then you jumped off, pinch shut your rear end and slam the bog lid closed. Get it right and you avoided the nasty effects of the concussion wave and would be back on the bog before your ring gear gave out. Get it wrong and you would have to endure the horrible smell wave and dark things bouncing off your bum!
3. Go through all the buildings and reattach all the bits that had been shaken free.
4. Replace the fragile things that got broken.



The Mortars

There is always completion between gunners and the infantry mortar platoon – who could react the fastest and who could get rounds on target first. Yes, it is mostly good-natured rivalry but living with the mortar platoon is a quite another matter. Ask any gunner and they will tell you they would rather the mortars were anywhere else but not next door. Why? Because the first thing that happens when a mortar is launched is the safety pin (made from solid steel) is ejected that invariable rains down



³² . When I arrived Husky Bravo was coming to the end of their time and was replaced by Husky Chuck. They provided the brigade's medium (The 155 SP's) and heavy artillery (175mm field guns and 8" howitzers) support.

on the neighbours. Having to wear you steel helmet all day, in the tropics, as protection against the bloody mortar safety pins is no fun what so ever.

The Next Door Mine Field

This top image is of a light mine clearing extra armoured APC that was used around the Dat to clear and empty old mine fields next to the Battery position. This is what it looked like before it triggered a big something in that mine field! That row of tires on the right was shredded and the boom folded up like a banana. The driver needed a change of pants and several days' rest before resuming.



The mine clearance support team that did the clean up after the armoured special APC had been through. They may have claimed to have cleared the area but we did not test the quality of their work. All clearing patrols avoided the area.



Deployment

The Battery deploying by air sometimes. One Chinook, one gun, the crew and camping gear, two pallets of ammo. But the Chinooks were tired and could struggle in the heat. What you see here is the test to see if it could fly. If not then it shed the pallet and so on until they found a weight they could lift.



What happens when the load is too heavy for the helicopter? One bent Onan generator³³. That was part of the load belong to the CP section cut away from many feet up when the pilot realised, he was too heavy. Everything else on that load was munted as well. However, it did make available spare parts we did not have before. Ah the many wonders of how a logistic tail can work. That reminds me of the visits to Ben Hoa, Long Bien and Special Forces camps around Saigon to secure other hard to get parts. All possible because and enterprising BQMS. Today I think we would call him and entrepinner. (sic)



³³ . Part of a new equipment sent to the Battery from NZ. Completely useless as it turned out because these Onan could not run on leaded petrol that standard issue in SVN. Is it any wonder that soldiers become cynical when the head shed does not know the front from the back?

Sometimes the Battery deploying by road. I recall once we were on the move when someone called a fire mission. The Battery deployed the guns on the side of the road. Only took minutes for 'battery ready' to ring out. Most impressive given the speed that they were able to respond. I am not sure if the surveyors knew where they were. Did not matter as the Battery could shoot on demand. That is all that mattered. The FO's would sort out the fall of shot. After all that is what they are paid to do.

When the Battery moved by road each gun crew had a truck to travel on. The others, surveyors and watch keepers etal, travelled like this I tell you there is not a lot of room; space was always at a premium inside and outside.

The wet and a road move. In the dry the dust would be inches thick and the just a bit of scruffy grass otherwise barren. Not so in the wet were the grass would grow inches per day and over 2 metres high.



Road Move Protection

Cobra gunships often covered us when the Battery deployed by road. The cobra worked in pairs with the Loach (also known as 'Flying Sperm' to be seen on the left of this image) flying low as a teaser inviting anyone to take a shot. That bought the Cobra into the game with 'aw shit' results!



On the ground the Aussie Centurion tanks would be parked at points along the way. They could shoot a rod antipersonnel shot that just cut everything off at the knees. But beware the bamboo thickets One 50ton Centurion tried to crash through and was lifted clean of the ground leaving the tracks spinning in free air. Most unbecoming for such a macho machine.



Sometimes we would have the use of two or more 'Dusters'³⁴ (a self-propelled twin 40mm cannon that in the real world were used as low level anti-aircraft guns) but in SVN they were used for conveyor escorts or as a means to block off an escape route. That involved parking at the exit from a valley and hosing up the valley on auto. Nothing much moved after that. Threat contained.



³⁴ . The Dusters belonged to Husky Chuck. Nobody interfered with them when they moved!

RNZEME Embassy Guard

NZ Embassy Saigon, July 1969. One Cpl Richdale, RNZEME, Gunner Millar and another were assigned as embassy guard. We slept on the third floor and were expected to make ourselves scarce throughout the daylight hours. At night we took turns to 'guard' the embassy. Nobody other than us stayed overnight because the VC had gone through the street like a dose of salts during the Tet 68 offensive in an attempt to get at the US ambassador who lived on the same street. Humm, our SLR and 1st line ammo was no going to cut it should they try again. However, the real problem was the boredom and the bloody Aussie MP's that snuck in and out of the street trying to catch us asleep on duty. There were times when I thanked the frogs for the noise they made.

One story I heard was about the Mk3 Zephyr bought over from NZ to carry the ambassador around. The only one in the country and nobody knew how to look after it. One set of gunner embassy guards gave the Zephyr a birthday and got it running again – new plugs, clean and set the points and tappets and an oil change plus tune up. Bloody good work not that anyone said as much.

NZ powers should have gotten a car like this one that took the US Ambassador to work every day, escort included. Plenty of these models around and no shortage parts or people fix them. Somehow NZ powers never really understood the importance of an effective logistic tail unlike some of our allies.



Adventures of Tradesman

The Snake

Image of 161 Battery position, Nui Dat. The building on the left is the command post (CP) manned 24/7 when the Battery was in. Beneath this structure was the underground command post that was used when things got rough.

The newly arrived Cpl Richdale was summoned to the CP where the watch commander instructed Richdale to fix the broken phone down in the underground CP. Roger that. Armed with my trusty tool kit and AVO meter I descended into the dark of the underground CP. Bit odd, no lights and cob webs unlike anything I had ever seen before. No prob's cause I had a torch in the tool kit. Cheerrrr. The watch commander was right the phone (actually all the phones) did not work along with all the lights. Soon had them all going again (including) all the lights and was somewhat puzzled by it all including the gaggle of heads gathered at the top of the stairs watching a tradesman at work. The watch that was not watching what they were posed to be watching!

Job done I left that hallowed sanctuary where entry was strictly by invitation only. Later a friend told that I had been set up by those sneaky CP staff. It seems that sometime in the past (no one left that remembered when) a snake³⁵ had emptied the CP watch and then retreated into the underground chamber. Nobody would go down there after that. But, the Dat had been rocketed just after I arrived and management decided that they better get the underground CP open for business again. Yeah, the rockets had missed us but they did fly over the Battery on the way through so we were on the line of flight. Where would the next one's land? Anyway, a dilemma because none of the CP watch staff were expendable – everyone knew it that - and legend said it was a big mean snake! Furthermore, just about everyone knew about the snake in the underground CP. Wait, that new EME



Figure 10- CP East Side. EME Lad in the foreground



³⁵ . A snake emptying the CP happened in my time. This time a macho gunner loped the tail off a snake as it disappeared into the sand bags that ring the CP. He took the foot or more of tail to show off to the rest of the CP watch. Bad move as it turned out because a noise at the door into the CP revealed the rest of the snake had followed the gunner and was in a very angry mood. The watch bolted out the window and would not go back until that macho gunner dealt with the angry snake. Battery off line. Sooner or later someone notices. Not good.

guy that just arrived probably does not know and he is expendable. Amen. And so, it came to pass the newly arrived, untanned, EME Cpl restored the fighting capacity of 161 Battery. No thanks, no nothing but I learnt something that day – gunners are sneaky bastards, not to be trusted.

Fireballs, Thunder and Lightning

In the wet the thunder storms were really awesome, crashing thunder, fork lightning, fire balls and torrential rain. The battery had deployed up west in clearing in a rubber plantation when one of these wet session thunder storms struck. As the thunder crashed and the rain poured down a fire ball appeared and started to bounce off the trees. Every time it hit a tree it accelerated and eventually it hit the Battery comms wiring. A gunner on the end of the wiring was dropped³⁶ and later we found out that the fire ball had shorted through him and literally dehydrated him, desiccated him³⁷! A dust off (an ambulance Huey chopper) was called in and in spite of the terrible conditions got in and took the downed gunner to Saigon. He spent two weeks there where the cure was to replace his lost fluids. When he came back to the Battery, he looked quite normal except for the worst blood shot eyes you have ever seen. And, he became quite agitated when thunder and lightning started up.

All this was the lead up to a hairy ride in a Huey for yours truly. That fire ball and storm did more than dry out a gunner. It also got in to the Battery communications and wiring. Several watch keepers at the other end of these wires were thrown around by the fire ball. The tannoy³⁸ systems stopped working. I was back and the Dat and was put on the resupply chopper the next day to sort out the problems. That chopper was designated to resupply the grunts with clean kit and new food. To that end a sand bag with nothing but the essentials was prepared for each grunt in the company. About 60 or so sand bags casually stacked on the floor behind the Huey pilots. The only room for me was to sit on the sand



Figure 11- the Huey Gunners View



³⁶. For a more complete version of what happened that day see Vietnam Gunners written by Lt. Newman

³⁷. Others of the Battery were thrown around by that fire ball. None injured to the same extent – see Vietnam Gunners..

³⁸. From the outside the tannoy elements looked brand new (which they were) but now they rattled when shaken. When I opened them up I found nothing but black soot and carbon beads. Only the steel/Alloy was left. Nothing else. Truly munted.

bags and hang on because every time the Huey turned a corner the mass of sand bags moved and a few leaked out the side! Yes, that's right, leaked out the side! That was one flight I was pleased to leave but I always wondered about the grunts that missed out. I wonder if they ever realised that the missing bags had been donated to the locals and it was not the rear party that screwed up?

Fatalism part 2

Many were afflicted by a fatalistic attitude. Ultimately it affected everybody to one degree or another. The helo ride described above is one example and this image is the background to another. These are US Navy divers tasked to inspect all the ships coming or leaving the Mekong delta. I and a couple of other kiwi's, ran into them in Vung Tau while on R&C during a night on the town. About 1am we ended up at their base, in their bar, well inebriated and enjoying the cool of the night when a couple of the yanks said that they had to go on duty. What! Yes, there are new ships in the anchorage that need their hulls checked. 'We will be back in an hour so.' It was two hours before they came back and very sober. It turns out that they used short period breathing apparatus that only has minutes of supply. They put on a fully charged air supply, went down on side of the ship and checked the hull for mines and resurfaced up on the other side where his second would be waiting. But it went wrong this time. The ship looked normal from the entry side but on the exit side was moored a big flat bottom barge. Our diver on ascent and getting short of air, bumped into the flat bottom of the barge, got disorientated (remember it is the middle of the night) and was lucky find the edge before he drowned. A very sobering experience even for us bystanders. Why they went on such duty pissed is something I do not understand. I still do not understand to this day why systems, and good intentioned people, can be so corrupted by insidious attacks of fatalism. And there was more to follow.

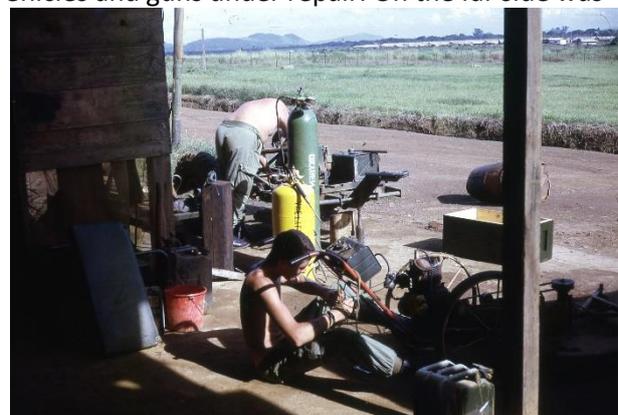


Hard Standing

The building opposite the CP is the Battery LAD – the EME house. The hills in behind are we knew as the Wolverton Mountains that dominated our landscape to the east.

The end wall under the twin phone line pole is the wall marking the electronics section, my work place. In the middle was hard standing for vehicles and guns under repair. On the far side was the transport section office,

Here in this image is Jim Gibb (bending over) fabricating the soon to be commissioned tow behind lawn mower on what is the only bit of hard standing on the Dat position. Very important piece of real estate that meant guns and vehicles could be repaired/serviced all year round. So, for you EME guys out there here is an example of the minimum hard standing that you can get by with.



Mines were a problem. Not that common but a threat never the less³⁹ as the Dat bone yard showed. I recall going out to visit the Battery in the field one bright early morning. As our land rover approached the gun position safely hidden behind Jim Hendricks bunds we could see all these heads standing on the parapet watching us drive up. When we arrived inside the position, they all stated clapping and cheering. Weird! But not when we found out that they were clapping and cheering because the mine clearing team had not yet cleared the road yet!⁴⁰ That was one of the 'Aw Shit' occasions.



Australian House Wiring

This what the Dat lines looked like in the wet. On the left were the new and improved lines that replaced the tents that was used by everyone up until these were built. When I arrived the new OR lines had just been completed and that included mains power for lighting. Much of it just did not work and it was my job to get the lines electrics going. Now I knew very little about mains power and house wiring then but I soon learnt and became very cautious and suspicious of the work of Australian electricians. What they left behind was plain dangerous. The blessing was that no one got hurt.



Figure 12- New Lines but old bogs!

American House Wiring

I was sometimes called upon to be a driver/operator for a Battery officer travelling over to touch base with other units or work parties building schools and the like. One such visit was to a US Army ARVN training camp around Baria. We were to stay overnight and I was assigned a bed in a lovely wooden hut that slept 16 yanks and included an en-suite with hot and cold running water! Luxury in capitals.

³⁹ . Two gunners were killed by a road mine in 1968 – see Newman's 'Vietnam Gunners' for details.

⁴⁰ . Fatalism crept in as time went by. Almost everyone, to one degree or other, was affected. On that road trip we had a radio and was on the Battery net yet the sport of watching whether we would make it or not was more important than raising a warning? Of my batch I suspect only a handful left the way they came in. Everyone else had a touch of fatalism to one degree or other.

When I arrived all the other occupants were still out at work so I grabbed shower and luxuriated in the available hot water. Wonderful, well yes it was until I tried to turn the water off and get out of the steel shower cubical. I got a shock every time I touched a tap and another when I tried to step of the cubical. Bad karma. I solved the problem by jumping out of the cubical and left the water running. Even worse bad karma to follow because when the rest of the hut came home the water was stone cold!!!! Not impressed by this stupid colonial. 'What the matter with him, everyone knew you turned off the electric hot water before you took your shower!' Common sense really? Bloody dangerous but then the situation back in the states is not much better because the yanks never adopted our MEN (Mains, earth, neutral) system designed to protect against such dangers arising unless of course you were an Australian electrician.

Them New Fangled Semiconductors

The CP had several 'acquired' radios that gave them range and convenience that they would not have had otherwise, mostly of the RT524 variety. These came with loud speakers which made monitoring and watch keeping a lot easier. But there were times when they needed to monitor more nets that there were 524's to go around. So that meant a PRC 25 (or later PRC 77) had to be brought in. No loud speaker, someone had to sit with their ear on the phone all the time. Irksome. So, I designed and build several loud speakers plug on monitors out of busted transistor radios. That made monitoring the extra nets hands free. Watch keeper bliss. This image tells the story:



1. My test and repair bench at 161 Battery LAD, and
2. The Philips Handbook⁴¹ or Noddy's guide to semiconductor technology where I learnt about how the new-fangled semiconductor and transistor technology worked,
3. A salvaged and scavenged transistor radio that were the parts of the PRC 25/77 watch keeper loud speakers plug on local monitors.

New Gear, No Parts

At some point the head shed back in NZ started issuing us with new gear! Amazing, new long wheel base Land Rovers (regrettably different from the Aussie variety), new Onan generators (regrettably unable to run on leaded petrol) and new radio equipment, the PRC 77 and GRC 160 variants of which no one in SVN other some special forces were using as it turned out. In all cases no parts or technical manuals or test equipment came to keep them running! Oh dear, what were they thinking back in the head shed?



The Land Rovers needed the radios fitted that could be easily removed as and when required. We had a free hand and this what we came up with. Worked well. People in the front had access, others in the back had access and the full deck of the land rover was still available, no loss of space. And yeah, we mounted the whip antenna on the back so it could not be wiped off in a close encounter. So pleased were we of what we achieved we sent copious pictures and notes back to NZ. They just ignored us and adopted a set up that broke all the rules that we, at



⁴¹ . An American benevolent society sent out monthly a variety of books and magazines to every unit in Vietnam. National Geographic, Readers Digest, Philips Hand book, Radio Hams Handbook (vital support manual), dictionary's How to books, fiction, fact, instruction, think of it and would appear in one or more monthly shipments. These books taught me about semiconductors and other things that my training and experience to date had not covered. Knowledge I needed to keep the Battery electrics and electronics going.

war, said were important. And worse we still did not have any spares parts, test gear or tech literature to help us maintain and fix this new stuff!!

How the Logistics Tail Really Worked

Des Barkle RNZA and US Army guest. Location was probably the Battery Sgts mess, Xmas or it could have been the US Thanksgiving Day.

Des Barkle was the Battery BQMS and a man of considerable importance given it frequently fell to him to solve the insolvable – eg find parts and materials that the logistics system could or would not provide. Being good neighbours helped a lot. The quid pro quo was that he would arrange to conceal equipment from the prying eyes of the US Army unit auditors that would appear at regular intervals to ensure every US of A unit had only their entitlement and no more. When the audit was on 161 Battery would be transformed into a storage depot for all kinds' vehicles, weapons and every other kind of unimaginable equipment that fell outside the rules for any number of reasons best not gone into as the statute of limitations may not yet have run out.



A Place to Gather

Another view of the LAD vehicle/gun bay this time populated by the members of the Battery transport section otherwise known as the 'Dirty 13 Trucking Company'. Many were on their second or third tour. Some were ex grunts and knew a lot about guns of all kinds and other stuff. Comforting really because my weapon skills were limited to the SLR. Their hidden skills were always a surprise and a comfort as there was not much they could not do. Clever, enterprising soldiers and fun to be around.



Leading the Clearing Patrol

When the Battery was out anyone left behind had to mount a daily clearing patrol to check our perimeter. These patrols were more common in the wet where the grass and could hide a tank. Cpl's qualify as patrol leaders! Well don't they? Ah not in my case and certainly not when I first arrived. I knew how to spell the word but nothing beyond that but was never the less expected to lead that patrol when my turn came around. The first time was truly unnerving until I realised that my patrol members were vastly more experienced than I was⁴². The patrol would assemble at the gate, I would consult with the others and in the beginning admit my ignorance. A gunner would invariably step forward and in no time he (and the others) had the patrol organised, two out front me and the radio operator in the middle and two in the trail. I learnt that including everyone at the

⁴². The Battery never changed over as a unit. Instead packets of up to 20 or so would be exchanged. That way the Battery was never without experienced soldiers to call on. This is case in point but there are many other examples. A very good system. As I later learnt new units quite often struggled and were at their most vulnerable when they first arrived lacking these wise, if cynical, heads.

beginning made for an effective patrol, one that everyone recognised was more likely to work where everyone knew their job and the limitations of the others. Most importantly everyone was in their comfort zone and comfortable with those around them.

Agent Orange

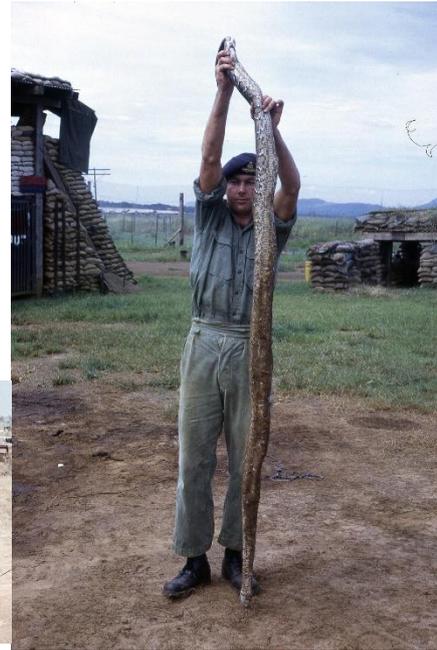
These baby Hercs delivered Agent Orange every three months or so. A small overhead fixed wing plane would appear first and circle the drop area with a blaring loud speaker shouting 'Ouhm bow bow, number one'! Over and over again. Basically 'don't shoot this is good for you'.

Soon after these baby Herc's appeared spraying the area. Everything died soon after. That meant the Nat Geographic magazines were freed up from butterfly pressing duty until the butterflies reappeared sometime later. Pity that the later health issues suffered by many SVN vets due to Agent Orange were not so easily fixed or even attended to!



Critters and Animals

This boa constrictor was one of two (as it turned out) resident in the Battery gun position. This one lived inside some 6" diameter water pipe that lay next to the perimeter wire. The BSM (John Bellamy) tasked the dirty 13 trucking company to 'remove the pipe and other rubbish'. They used our invisible 'Donna Duce' truck to carry the pipe and rubbish away. Part way down the DAT main thoroughfare riders on the back witnessed the emergence of this boa from out of one of the big pipes. Ohhhhh, big problem, wild snake loose on the back of the Duce surrounded by anxious gunners! Quick thinking required. Stop, slam into reverse and empty the rubbish and snake onto the road. Then run over the boa with all hands delivering death



blows with the rakes and brooms from the safety of the Duce. Worked a treat but for the small minor problem, the Dat main thoroughfare was now blocked by rubbish, a dead snake and demented kiwi's on a mystery truck! Australian management, who had a war to fight, were not impressed. Just quietly we did not care.

Image of Echo gun pit under the command of Sgt Joe Hakaria. That is where the second boa lived, inside the roof lining between the iron and the sandbags. A mutually agreeable arrangement as I recall. Those in that gun pit knew of the boa but no else did until the dry came around when we could see the boa's wriggle tracks in the dust. Yes, he/she was as big as the one pictured.



Apples the dog appeared soon after I arrived and was the pet of the Dirty 13 Trucking Coy. Handsome dude ain't he. Two gunners (rumoured to be Dusty Millar and Noel Hickey) bought Apples from nearby Baria for a bag of apples hence the name. He lasted nearly a year before the powers decided he had to go for reasons that none of us understood. Sadly missed unlike the ants that plagued us in the dry. When they really made a pest of themselves, we would take a claymore mine⁴³ fuse and feed it down the ant nest entrance. A squeeze on the clacker and the peace was restored for a while.



⁴³ . Claymore mines were part of our perimeter defence. My job was to ensure the detonator clackers worked without losing appendages in the process. Ant nest destruction was very good and reliable test procedure. Proof by demonstration will beat fluffy words every time. Gunners like that.

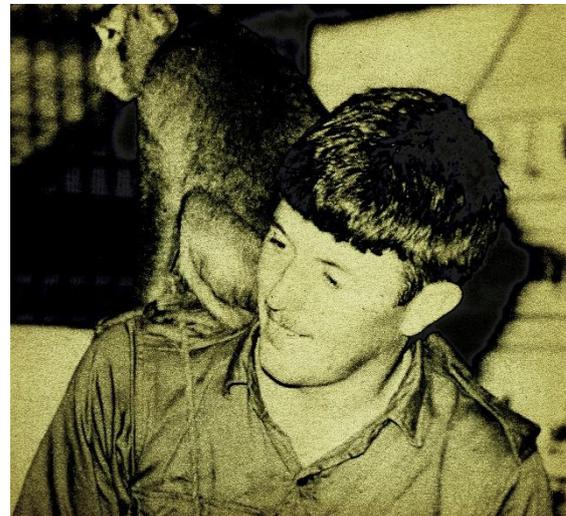
Hornets were another matter. They were big, very big. The good thing was they did not seem to build nests like bees and wasps (not in short supply either). A pair of hornets would mate up and build a single unit nest in a sheltered spot, like inside anywhere and then defend the space with vigour. Fly bombs just made them angry or angrier than before. Squash treatment did work but you needed help to get both at once otherwise you were in trouble. Bees and wasps' stings are pussy cats compared to the sting of those bloody hornets.



No higher resolution available

Des Hammond and friend that went under the moniker of Ball Bags.

There were not many monkeys in the Dat but they were around.



Entertainment; Detention, R&C and R&R

A gunner prisoner in custody pending delivery to the Detention Centre down in Vung Tau.

One of my 'EME' duties was to deliver prisoners to that detention centre. It did not have a good reputation and

neither did the Aussie MP's who were generally disliked by all. So, to the ease the pain delivery included a trip to a quiet bar until the prisoner was well and truly inebriated before delivery. One told me he had no recollection of the first day. Mission achieved.



When the prisoners time was up we would collect him and swing by the Peter Badcoe club for refreshments. This was the R&C centre where you could swim and relax.

For the recently released a visit to the club was a gentle introduction back into society. This time we bought him home sober (well only slightly inebriated but no more than the rest of us).



R&R was 7 days and we could elect to go to Asia, (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaya area, Thailand), Australia (not NZ), Japan or Hawaii. Most chose short travel trips so they could get the maximum free time. Jim Gibb choose Hong Kong and bought some really smart photographic equipment to complement the professional set up he already had. This image; Barrie Richdale and Radar Radavonich (RNZA) pool side Bangkok.



Nui Dat had an entertainment bowl that visiting guest and entertainers regularly performed at. Bands were the most common and came from mostly kiwi land, Australia or the USA. Never disappointed and a great way to experience a change of what otherwise could be hot and boring. Yes, boredom was the worst of it particular over the last 5 months (Feb on 1970) when Charlie went to ground and would not come out and play.



Hands Up ...

Hands up who wants soup? That question landed a humble gunner in the connex jail where he spent a very uncomfortable night because the ants that lived there resented his presence and ..., use your imagination and you won't be far wrong.

Mess fatigues were the most detested yet vital duty a gunner could be called upon to perform. The duty started before the sun rose and did not finish until the all the dishes were done generally after sunset. More over these fatigues were also doubled as the offices mess waiters. That made it really hard because they had to clean up and change into a clean set of greens so they would be presentable when waiting on the officers. That done they then had to go back to walloping the dishes, pots and pans in the stifling heat and humidity. Bugger! Anyway, that was the way it was. One day the officers sprung a surprise formal dinner on the cooks and mess fatigues.



Figure 13- The Kitchen and fatigue in action

Nobody happy because there was no warning or time to prepare and it meant double time for everyone in the kitchen particularly the mess fatigues. Suck it up I hear someone say! Well they did and indeed the kitchen got a formal dinner ready over coming all of the challengers. The guests arrived – the high society of the Dat, colonels and up - drinks and nibbles were served and then dinner was announced. Everyone was seated awaiting the mess stewards when this apparition appeared at the door dressed in gum boots, dirty shorts (nothing else), covered in sweat and grime. He paused at the door and waited until he had everyone's attention and then said in a loud clear voice 'hands up who wants soup?'

Oh dear, big problem. I am uncertain as to what exactly what happened next other than:

1. A SNCO was ordered to lock the offending mess fatigue up. That involved a hurriedly assembled a (giggling) escort of gunners that marched the offender to the connex jail (entry to the right of the stairs) where he had to first unload the ammunition before he could be locked up for the night,
2. The dinner did continue but nobody remembers anything beyond that,
3. The offender was charged and bought before the BC. The punishment did not involve detention (that meant I did not have to take him to the Vung Tau lock up).
4. A new detention pit was constructed, this image of prisoner and escort. Neither of whom were involved in the 'hands up ...' affair. Having to expose the ammo so a prisoner could be locked up was not good form so this was built on the Battery position. It consisted of a sand bagged hole surrounded by wire. Problem solved, prisoner secured, ammo secured and security of both assured.



Radio and Television

All the messes made quite a lot of money. Not surprising given that there were no overheads and they all had a captive clientele in that nobody could leave the Battery position without permission. Well nearly true but the less said about that the better. The amassed mess funds bought all sorts of magic entertainment gear. Purchases that were impossible back home in NZ or simply beyond reach. Each mess made their own arrangements but what tended to happen was a trip would be organised to a USA PX somewhere (Vung Tau or the Saigon area) with a bucket of mess bar profits money in exchange for TV's, reel to reel tape decks (including music tapes of the day, ohh yeah) and a humongous stereo audio system capable of rivalling Husky Chuck for shock and awe when wound up to full noise. That same money was also used to buy board games and a ping pong table on one occasion. Anything that could provide entertainment and amusement for those off duty.

When the stereo was off, we could tune into AFVN, the only English-speaking radio station in country and very popular never the less. If you saw that Robin Williams film 'Good Morning Vietnam' then you have a pretty good idea what sounded like⁴⁴.

Radio AFVN played mostly popular music much of it unlike anything else I had ever heard before – soul is a case in point. Most of us had a transistor radio (they were dirt cheap) and could listen when there was nothing else to do. I was radio/music agnostic until that tour when my latent music appreciation was woken and has stayed with me ever since – who can forget Credence Clearwater Revival! Oh, there are so many more but to name them would be to slight the ones I don't name. Can't have that.

AFVN also supplied 7-day television that was pure US of A. Sport coverage was big. Basket Ball and Grid Iron dominated. Many, me included, needed the help of the old hands to come to terms with Gridiron (in particular) altho the American basketball game was on a different planet to the one I was familiar with. Yet it was not long before most of us had our favourite teams and the debates as to the virtues of one team or player were as long and convoluted as could be heard anywhere.



Mail

The mail worked pretty well although it could be quite slow. But only a few wrote letters. Most, me included, made tapes and sent them back and forward. The first shipment included a dirt-cheap cassette player along with the letter tape. That was all that was needed and worked well. It was magic to hear the voices of my near and dear, really magic. I have still got my original radio cassette transistor radio altho it is not called on much these days.



Parcels took longer to get delivered. A friend in NZ sent myself and another a Christmas cake. It took three months to reach us. We opened it to reveal a green solid fungus block of what was once a rich heavy fruit cake as only that dear lady could make (Mrs Dawn Metcalf, wife of John Metcalf RNZEME). Sad, but that cake still smelt good tho.

⁴⁴ . U tube have a good, accurate and entertaining description of AFVN.

Strange Money

I was surprised to find out about MPC, the play money operating inside the SVN economy. It looked like this and as I recall it worked something like as follows;



1. We were paid in MPC once a fortnight on the same cycle as back home. Individuals drew only as much as they needed, allocated a portion to their wife's or others and left the rest in the 'bank'. Not an interest-bearing account bank tho. Years later I wondered why not. I suspect it was because nobody thought about it. Opening a Post Office Saving account, as was common practise in NZ, was not going to work in Vung Tau. I suspect not a lot of people knew that then or now!
2. Trading inside any unit was done with MPC. A beer was 10 or 15 cents a can and goffers were 10 cents if I remember correctly,
3. Trading between units was done using MPC. That how we got our mess's restocked and the unit PX filled with all sorts of goodies.
4. Green backs (or any other foreign currency) was not to be used in country. That, and any other currency, was to be controlled and locked away by the pay clerk. When it was time to leave the country, you turned in your MPC and got the equivalent in real money in return.

All transactions with the locals should have been done using the local currency (Piastres). You go to your pay clerk and swap the required amount of MPC for Piastres and then make your purchase. But nobody much liked the local currency including the locals. You got a much better deal with green backs or MPC. Green backs were hard to get (well for most of us Kiwi's anyway) whereas there was a price to pay in trading in MPC as it could go out of date and become worthless overnight without any warning⁴⁵. That happened late 1969. If you could not explain why you had X of the old MPC then you could not exchange it for the new MPC⁴⁶ and the locals were banned out right, period. The 1969 MPC swap over process and after effects is described beautifully in Wikipedia. Immediately following there were all sorts of stories going around of locals and servicemen behaving badly having become paupers overnight.

Strange Behaviour

As I found out people could and would do strange things for no obvious reason. Somewhere in this monologue I mentioning that only a few that I knew that came out of SVN the same as they went in. Some became increasingly cynical and/or more and more fatalistic as time in country passed. Others went troppo - a term out of WW2 I think. Acting strangely or going troppo was not always dramatic or highly visible. It can be silent and just erupt when you least expect it. Instances I remember:

1. There was a gunner that had a problem but unknown to anyone other than those in his gun crew. They were a great family and looked after each other, one for all, all for one. That, I suspect, is probably the secret of every good gun crew – works best when it is a family. But

⁴⁵ . That was the theory but I am not sure that in reality was strictly true. The stories about the black market and profiteering were endless.

⁴⁶ . It also meant a please explain was required that would lead to big trouble. It was rumoured that many just set fire to their ill-gotten gains and started over again.

then things came unstuck when that individual was the 'stay behind' on a particular deployment. With no family around him he went off the rails and took to anyone who would stand still long enough to be, well, dealt to. That included me until rescued. After that he disappeared and I do not know what happened to him.

2. Another that decided that he had had enough of the war and moved out down the road to the next-door local settlement. The BSM talked him into returning. Not an easy job with the entire battery looking on.
3. A third delighted in bombing a local grass cutting contractor⁴⁷ from the upper story of a hotel when the Battery went to Vung Tau for R&C. That was remarkable for two reasons – 1) that the bomber thought he could and so collected up all the empty bottles (there were many) as he could find and 2) that the local was completely unfazed. He just watched and side stepped every missile until the bottles ran out. The ground was soft so the bottles mostly plugged.
4. Booze could produce strange behaviour. There was a gunner that downed a bottle of hard liquor in one gulp, paused, his skin rippled a variety of colours before he passed out. His companions (who goaded him to accept the challenge) carried him back to his digs and laid him on his bed. Job done. No, not really. About ½ an hour latter someone appeared summoning me to the BDRs mess where a fracas was in full swing. There was to be found the aforementioned gunner with a stool in each hand clearing out the bar. Riding on his back was a small Bdr with one arm around his neck and the other ineffectually pounding into the ear of the interloper. Before much more could be done that gunner passed out again and was dumped back on his bed with less ceremony than before.

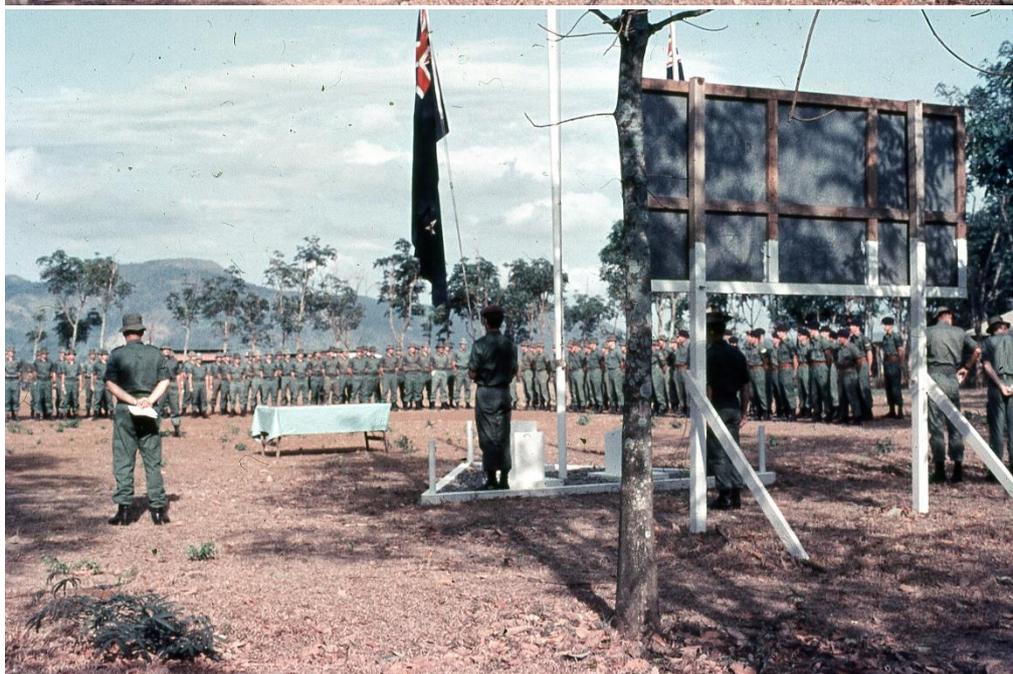
⁴⁷ . He was cutting the grass with a large pair of scissors. Remarkable, and did a good job as well.

Parades and Ceremony

Anzac Day 1970.

A very solemn and moving experience made doubly so because the memories of those Vietnam casualties were fresh in everyone's mind. Every unit in the DAT participated. In this image the flag on the right is our NZ flag attended by a gunner with the rifle and grunt on at the flag pole. The Australian used a similar set up. Their flag can be seen on the left of this image.

The image below is of the same event showing the battery on parade just prior to the start of the ceremony



Welcoming a new Battalion and Consumer Protection

Every battalion had a 105-battery assigned to be the primary support. The battery BC and his FO parties spent more time with the battalion than they did with the battery. The only time the Battery all came together was between missions when battery returned to the DAT for rest and refit. And, bonding with the infantry was important. The way 161 battery did it was to put on a formal Maori welcome followed by socialising largely limited to the SNCO's and Officers messes. This image is of the Battery lined up behind the challenge. Accepting the challenge is the new Battalion commander escorted by the Battery commander.



Figure 14- Mew BN Welcome

In this next image you can see the challenge. Crouching is the new battalion commander and to his right is the battery commander (BC, Major Andrews). This welcome took place at the Battery Dat position looking out over our eastern boundary with the Wolverton's in the background. The US Army Husky Chuck position is off to the right of this image.



The candy striped pegs in this image are part of the guns survey arrangement. A mystery to most people other than gunners. Apparently, each peg allows a gun to 'fix on' something. Recalibration shoots (the next picture) are also important to check and see that the rounds fell where they thought they should. Can be embarrassing when that does not happen. Uhhmm, I can remember a couple of such events that qualify as one of those 'Aw shit' occasions.



For the curious amongst you the barrel thing between the guns is actually a radar set to designed measure the angle and velocity of rounds as they departed into the heavens. Velocity is symptomatic of barrel wear and an important factor as to where the shell actually lands. Velocity measurements and gun calibration is what we would call these days, consumer protection. Imagine, gunners were there before the great unwashed had even heard of the concept. No laws or political guidance required either. But that has all changed regrettably. It is not that the concept is wrong, no, it is the political element that is wrong. Just imagine what would happen if guns were calibrated subject to political whim? Uhhmmmm!

Going Home and Howard Morrison

I came to the Battery as one of 9 that flew out of Whenuapai on a RNZAF C130 via Canberra, Alice Springs (overnight), Singapore (stopover for 3 days), Saigon (Ton Son Nuit) and finally landing in Vung Tau. When the back ramp opened there, standing in the rain was a 100 or so beaming grunts – the going home lot. Dressed in all sorts of clothes (one even had a skull around his neck) completely oblivious to the rain! I remember thinking ‘what have I got myself into?’



Twelve months later I left for home with the same 9 gunners – this image - starting our journey from the Dat in an RNZAF Bristol Freighter (BF). Now the BF is a gentle lady, slow to move, slow to climb and limited to 10,000 ft cause there is no pressurisation. I have heard it referred to as ‘rivets in formation’ and it is almost impossible to talk over the noise. We/me did not care. We were going home. The fact that it would have to fly low over Charlie whilst it clawed for altitude did not bother us at all. In fact that leg from the Dat to Singapore was one of the better flights (civil or military) that I have ever had.



It is not obvious from this picture but those big swing doors have windows. Once in flight the Load master spread out a mattress so that we could stretch out and watch south east asia go by. Couple that with the fact that the BF flew low and slow meant we had a wonderful view of south east Asia as it rolled by in beautifully cool conditions.



We stopped over in Singapore for several days before joining a RNZAF C130 loaded with others and gunners from a later batch also going home. That flight took us to Melbourne (a now closed RAAF Base on the western highway) before jumping the ditch landing back at Whenuapai around dusk. To my surprise and delight my mothers brother (Uncle Ron Peckham, ex WW2 bomber command that cost him a leg) was one of a few there to meet us. How he found out when we were arriving I do not know to this day because we were not told when we were going to arrive. My uncle said nothing but slipped me \$20.00 and disappeared into the night. I was gob smacked as it was so unexpected.

The plan was to take us to Papakura over night. The next day we would disperse on leave. The wise amongst us who were on their 2nd or 3rd tours said ‘no way, there will be nothing to eat and the bar will be closed. We are going to town. Come with us.’ So that is how me and three others ended up

at the Station Hotel opposite the Auckland rail way station, just in time to book in and order a meal before the kitchen closed.

The dining room also had a stage and a floor show. Quite radical for 1970! As we approached we could hear the hum of conversation. Sounded good but the moment we entered, still in our uniforms, the conversation stopped stone cold dead. It was clear we were not welcome. Bugger them, nothing was going to upset our joy of being home, not even the snooty of Auckland. We settled at a table, ordered a meal, got in the drinks and proceeded to enjoy in spite of the rest. Cherrr!

Some time later the entertainment came out – Howard Morrison and quartet. Before he even hit the stage he made a big fuss of us and our presence there that night. We were surprised and humbled. Howard gave the rest of the audience a ‘talking to’ strong on the need to respect returning servicemen. Soon the place was buzzing like it was before we came in. Magic night. Thank you Howard Morrison. We will never forget you and your quartet's deeds that night.

Next day was a domestic flight to Wanganui where my folks, my sister, my wife and young daughter were waiting. That picture of that gathering outside the terminal as I got off the plane is burned in my mind.



JB Richdale
7 June 2016

Mystery Resolved.

How did my Uncle Ron find out where and when I would return back to New Zealand? This question has long bothered me and was unresolved until January 2016. If you recall when we landed back home at Whenuapei where, to my surprise and delight, was my Uncle Ron waiting as we cleared immigration. He shook my hand, slipped me \$20.00, then disappeared into the dark. He never said a word. And neither did I. Frankly I was too surprised as he was the only person there to meet anyone. The only person and one more than we expected because we were not told when or where we would arrive. That was a secret. The 'where' is probably a bit ridiculous but the 'when' was a real and genuine question. The only time we found out with any certainty was when we got on the Herc in Melbourne earlier that day. To the best of my knowledge no was told or could find out when our bird and its cargo was going to arrive. That was the way it was meant to be.

Later I asked my mother and wife about what they knew. My mother told me the Army would not tell her (or my wife) anything other than it would be in the month of June. Nothing besides that. She told me that was when she got on the phone and found out. I did not press her and never found out what 'got on the phone meant'. My wife never asked either so was unable to help.

In late 2016 I applied for the Defence files of my relations that fought in WW1 and 2. When they arrived I discovered that my Uncle Ron - who served in WW2 Bomber command that ultimately cost him a leg - had reenlisted in the RNZAF as an ATC officer! Ahh revelation! now I know what mum meant when she said she got on the phone – she rang her brother, a commissioned officer in the RNZAF living in Auckland who socialising



in the Officers mess's at Whenuapei then the home of the C130 Hercules transport squadron. He, without abusing his connections, was able to learn that most secret of secrets - our Herc's flight plan - and meet me as we disembarked.

Thank you, my Uncle Ron, for making the effort. I said nothing at the time but that event meant a lot to me then and still to this day.

JB Richdale

December 2017