



HOLDFAST

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Colonel Doug George to lead our ANZAC Day march



Doug George (far right) at a "Happening" in 2 Troop's Rec Hut, Nui Dat, 1969. Seen with him, (L to R) are Brian "BC" Scott, Mick Van Poeteren and Jim Marett

Leading the march for the Vietnam Tunnel Rats Association on ANZAC Day 2005 in Melbourne, will be Colonel Doug George (AM). Doug was a Troop Officer with both 2 Troop and 3 Troop, 1 Field Squadron in Vietnam, and was wounded in action in a mine incident in Vietnam on 6 November 1969. Doug recovered from his wounds in Vietnam and was given the option to head home to Australia. He chose to stay on, and returned to his Field Troops where he remained until his scheduled return to Australia on 11 June 1970.

In Australia Doug went on to become Commanding Officer of the School of Military Engineering, (SME), where all of us had previously done our Corp training. During this time Doug was honoured by the Australian

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Government with a Member of the Order of Australia in 1984 in recognition of his services to the Australian Army and the Corp of Engineers in particular.

The Vietnam Tunnel Rats Association will form up for the march in Collins Street, between Swanston and Russell Streets. Our numerical order of march is # 319, and we follow directly after the Vietnam Engineers. Look for our distinctive Tunnel Rats banner. March-off is expected to take place around 11:30am, but guys usually start arriving around 9:30am. We'll get the banner up as early as possible so you can locate us easily.

The reunion after the march will take place in the usual venue (along with the Vietnam Engineers group) at the Bedford Hotel (formerly known as the "Turf Club") at 1 Flemington Road, on the corner of Elizabeth Street, right at the top of the city. There will be food, raffles (swindles?), plenty of drinks and lots of comradeship.

All former members of the Field Troops (1, 2 and 3 Troops plus 3 Field Troop are welcome to march with the Tunnel Rats. We look forward to seeing you there and at the reunion afterwards.

Canberra 5RAR Reunion

Full details inside of the fun and comradeship enjoyed



Brigadier Colin Kahn at the Sunday service at the Australian War Memorial

Sapper Snippets

New 'R & C' Centre Opens" in Vung Tau

The Australian Veterans Vietnam Re-Construction Group (AVVRG) has made arrangements with the Australian run "Song Hong Hotel" in Vung Tau to establish a centre that meets the special needs of the increasing number of Vietnam vets making the trip back to Vietnam.

Known as the "Vung Tau R & C Centre", it provides a secure and friendly, base from which vets and their families can explore their old stomping grounds. It offers first class comfortable accommodation and a range of recreational facilities at very reasonable prices.



Through aid projects over 10 years, AVVRG has established good relationships with the authorities and communities. (The Vietnamese Government appointed AVVRG as custodian of the Long Tan memorial). More info on AVVRG is at: www.avvrg.au104.org

Permits for visiting Long Tan, Nui Dat and other areas of interest can be arranged, along with tour advice and assistance. The Centre is managed by Mike McCullum of the Song Hong Hotel. To check the place out, visit its web site at: www.rest-vungtau.com

Gold Coast Reunion

The August 2005 1 Fld Sqn Group reunion in Queensland is fast approaching, so make sure you book now. This is not organised by the Tunnel Rats Association, so you need to contact Terry Ward PO Box 93 South West Rocks NSW 2431. Or Fax Terry on 0265-666-5516 or email him on: terryward@tsn.cc Most of our people are staying in the Twin Towns Resort (Tel: 07-5536 2121) between Coolangatta and Tweed Heads. This place is close to the club where the dinner is being held and they offer free pick-up from the airport. Rooms costs are as follows: Studio \$130 per night, Deluxe Room (2 Dbl Beds) \$150 per night, 2 Bdrm Apt \$200 per night, and 3 Bdrm Apt \$250 per night. These apartments are great for sharing. Book now to ensure you get a room.



BEFORE



AFTER

Tour prize for miracle make-over goes to Ba Ba

It took us a while to figure out who the fit, tanned young man was as he entered the bar where we all met up for the Canberra 5RAR reunion. The last time we'd seen Bill "Ba BA" Lamb he was a "Fatty" heading for the 300 lb mark. Since then Bill has changed his life-style, including his abode which has him now living alternately between Vung Tau and Thailand. Obviously Bill has found the legendary Fountain of Youth in his travels. The photos above show the incredible before and after transformation. Go for it "Ba Ba", you're an inspiration to us all!

Canberra Capers

The reunion in Canberra with 5RAR was a roaring success, with many of the Sappers saying it was the best get-together yet.

A contingent of 30 from the Tunnel Rats Association turned up for the reunion with 5RAR, comprising many of the old faithfuls plus a refreshing number of totally new faces.

Amongst the newcomers we were delighted to see Rod Crane who didn't stop laughing from the moment he got there, Graeme Gartside, our 'Master of the list' who shocked everyone with the story of his final weeks in Vietnam (details in this issue), Rex Rowe (former CO 1 Fld Sqn) who delighted us with his wicked sense of humour (something few of us witnessed from him in Vietnam!), Darryl Lavis and Ted Podlich who regaled us with amazing stories of their time as Sapper-sailors on the armed river craft in the Saigon River Delta, and Noddy Norris who had some superb photos and clear memories that helped fill in a few gaps.

Events kicked off with a few drinks at the Canberra Club on Friday afternoon. It was a great time where through the afternoon, Sappers would drift in as they arrived in town, creating a series of continual welcoming sessions as familiar old faces entered the bar area. A definite highlight was the reuniting of Rod Crane and Chris Koulouris, two great mates who hadn't seen each other since Vietnam. A humorous reuniting took place when Rex Rowe arrived, to be greeted by Mick 'Grumpy' Foster. They hadn't seen each other since Christmas 1969 when a rather well oiled Grumpy leapt onto the CO's lap during the festive lunch. Rex was just weeks from returning to Australia and evidently arrived at



Photos: (Top) Sappers Mick Van Poeteren (left) and Chris Koulouris (right) prepare to present Brigadier Colin Kahn with a replica of the Tunnel Rat's marching banner. (Bottom Photo) After the service at the Australian War Memorial, Sapper Bruce Bofinger (Right) went straight to the top, for a Sunday morning chat with General Peter Cosgrove AC, MC, Chief of the Defence forces (Left)

Sydney airport still limping from the lunch and a little concerned about his 'tackle'. The latter was found to be in perfect order.

At 6:15pm on Friday the bus arrived to take us to the Hellenic Club for the registration process and welcome drinks. (The bus took us to and from each event over the weekend, and the cost of over \$800 was very generously covered by Rex Rowe and John Hopman). It

was at the Hellenic Club that we realised how big this 5RAR thing was. Over 700 people were there, sipping drinks and soaking up the great atmosphere unique to Veteran's gatherings. It was here too that we came across Brigadier Colin Kahn ("Genghis") for the first of several times during the weekend. Brigadier Kahn made a point of seeking us out amongst the huge crowd and spent considerable time walking and talking amongst us, to

the great delight of the Sappers whose admiration and respect for the man hadn't waned a millimetre over the 35 years since they worked with him when he lead 5RAR in Vietnam during 1969/70.

Shortly after this, Brigadier Kahn took to the stage for a short welcome speech during which he made special mention of the Tunnel Rats and the unique place we had in the hearts of the Infanteers. It was a very proud moment for the Sappers to hear those words from someone they admire so much.

The end of the evening fell into a bit of heap. The bus was late, Marty McGrath fell over outside the club, grazing his elbow and injuring his pride, then Frank Denley was run over by a car, fracturing several toes and slowing him down somewhat for the weekend. To cap things off, several of the lads keen on a nightcap were refused entry into the pub below our apartments, generating considerable anger. Fortunately wisdom prevailed and the rejected Sappers opted to retire to bed rather than confront the bouncers. The age of wisdom at last!

A Saturday Lunch was organised where we presented John Hopman (former Troop Officer, 2 Troop) and Rex Rowe (former Co 1 Fld Sqn) each with replicas of our Marching Banner. The banners were inscribed with words thanking them for their leadership. John and Rex were clearly moved by the gesture from the Sappers and responded with kind words in return about the achievements of the Field Troops Sappers in Vietnam and the unique tasks they carried out.

Saturday night was the big dinner at the National Convention Centre where over 850 attended. With a mass of beautifully laid out tables, formal service and everyone wearing their medals it was a sight



Photos: (Top) 2 Troop legend, Grumpy Foster (far right) explains to General Peter Cosgrove AC, MC, Chief of the Defence forces, how the Army is actually run by Sappers. Looking on in amazement are (L to R) Bill Lamb, Graeme Gartside and Chris Koulouris. (Middle photo) The big 5RAR Dinner at the National Convention Centre (Bottom Photo) At the Saturday presentation lunch (L to R) Harold Bromley, Rod Crane, Greg Gough and Peter Brunton



Brigadier Colin Kahn has words of praise for the Sappers during his speech at the official dinner in Canberra

to behold. The Sappers were treated royally, with our three tables in a prime position, right up front near the stage. Our Marching Banner was erected nearby, our table was decorated in the red and blue of 1 Fld Sqn, and signs in the centre of each table proudly read “2 Troop 1 Field Squadron” (who supported 5RAR on both their tours of Vietnam).

In his speech, Brigadier Kahn again made special mention of the 2 Troop Tunnel rats and the role they played with 5RAR in Vietnam.

Jim Marett gave a speech on behalf of the Sappers, in which he thanked 5RAR for giving us the unique experience of combat operations, something few people ever experience, and something which bonds men together forever. The Sappers presented Brigadier Kahn with a replica of our Marching Banner, inscribed with thanks for his leadership in Vietnam.

After the formal part of the evening, Brigadier Kahn again made the

effort to join the Sappers, posing with us in front of our banner, and chatting with us about old times.

On Sunday morning a service was conducted at the Australian War Memorial, dedicating a plaque for 5RAR.

There were some serious soldiers at the service, including General Peter Cosgrove AC, MC, Chief of the Defence Forces, and Lt-Gen Peter Leahy, CA, Chief of the Army. The speeches, given by these two men and by Brigadier Kahn were moving and enlightening.

After the formalities the crowd was able to mingle with the dignitaries. The Sappers naturally went to the top and ambushed General Cosgrove, who declared to us that

He “Wouldn't have gone down those tunnels for quids”.

After the service, the Sappers enjoyed a casual lunch at the Canberra Club, with the afternoon drifting nicely into hours of reminiscing and swapping stories, photos and legends.

The day ended with a Chinese dinner nearby for about 20 of us, where Graeme Gartside very generously picked up the tab. Thanks Graeme.

Next morning we all headed home, having enjoyed three days of great fun and comradeship and having reunited with not only some of our fellow Sappers, but also with one of the Battalions we served so closely with in Vietnam.



The quality of these pics is appalling (Frank Denley's camera was switched to "Disco Lights" mode), however, they are so historic we had to include them. (Top): Four of our leaders in front of our banner: (L to R) Bevan Percival (2 Troop Sergeant), John Hopman (2 Troop Officer), Brigadier Colin Kahn (CO 5RAR), and Rex Rowe (CO 1 Fld Sqn). (Bottom): The 2 Troop lads with Brigadier Kahn in front of our banner.

Nostalgia Corner

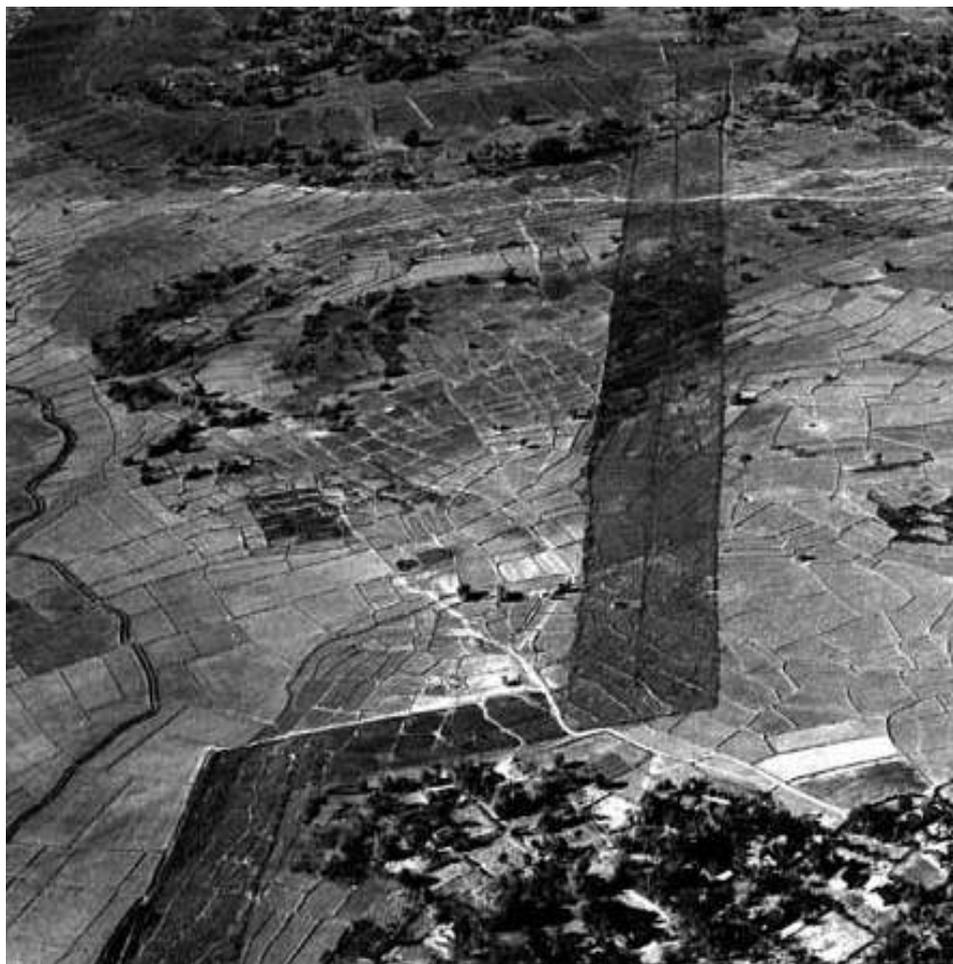


Pages of great pics from the past to amaze and amuse. Contributions welcome. Send your favourite Vietnam photographs by mail to:
 Jim Marett 43 Heyington Place
 Toorak Vic 3142
 Or by email to:
tunnelrat@optusnet.com.au



Twiggy's moustache

Many from the 1969 to early 1970 period will remember Richard 'Twiggy' Branch's moustache. It was a masterpiece, bushy and droopy, but curving back up at just the right point to make it still legal in Army dress terms (according to Twiggy). Seen here near Dat Do, Twiggy is searching the C Ration packs for Pound Cake, his favourite item.



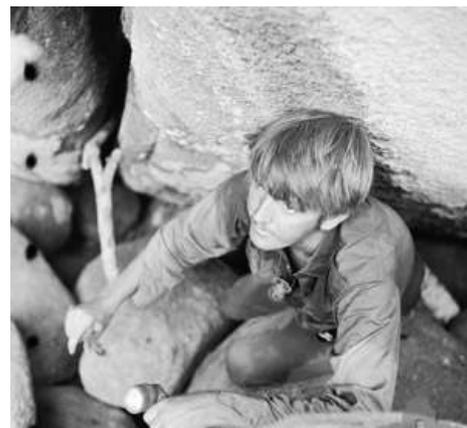
The Barrier Below

Here's an unusual view from above, of the Dat Do minefield. Taken from a Chopper, it shows the contrast in vegetation within the barrier, and though we are only seeing a small sector, it gives an indication of the massive size of the minefield and how obvious it was that it could never have been properly guarded.



Walking the Walk

Sapper Eric Thompson moves through the jungle south-east of Nui Dat during Operation Atherton in September 1967. The operation was aimed at clearing a Viet Cong controlled area and Sapper Thompson was one of several engineers attached to 2RAR /NZ (ANZAC), the ANZAC Battalion



And caves too!

Flashlight in hand, Sapper Trevor Hughes emerges from the gloom of a cave in the Long Hai mountains on 18 February 1970 during Operation Hammersley. The cave held a cache of rocket propelled grenades and an assortment of other weapons.



Digging in for the night
Sapper Bill Coolburra carves a fighting pit from the earth at a jungle camp during Operation Roundhouse, a search-and-destroy mission against the Viet Cong during February 1966. Spr Coolburra was serving with 3 Field Troop, Royal Australian Engineers, based at Bien Hoa.



An SSM's nightmare

For some reason, when back in the base camp we were called to parade each morning. Those not totally hung over would attend. As you can see, it wasn't a pretty sight. The bunch of very slack Sappers would be given duties for the day, which would be avoided if at all possible. Weapons inspections were even introduced at one stage, but were stopped instantly when one Sapper mishandled his rifle and nearly blew the head off the inspecting Officer. Recognisable in the photo (from l to r) are Frank Denley, Peter 'Roo Dog' Scott, Bruce Bofinger, Brian 'BC' Scott, Marty McGrath, Gerry Wallbridge, Jack Power and Jim Marett.



"You steer, I'll shoot"

In serious war-mode, and wishing they'd paid more attention to the boating section of their training at SME, Sappers Darryl Lavis (left) and Ted Podlich (right), both of 2 Troop sit at the tiller of an Assault Craft while operating with the D & E Platoon patrolling the waterways and mangroves of the Saigon River Delta. While initially excited about the unusual adventure, both Sappers were glad to be back on dry land, even if it did mean stomping around the Long Greens with 5RAR again! Ted and Darryl met up again at the 5RAR reunion for the first time since Vietnam.



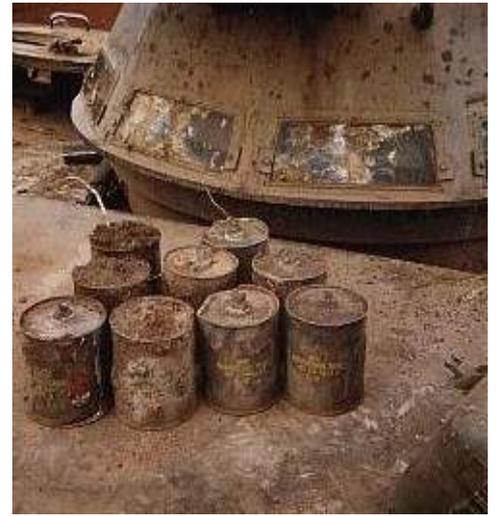
That's progress

Remember the Back Beach at Vung Tau, the one right in front of the Peter Badcoe Club? Pristine sand. Hardly a soul in the water or on the beach. Paradise for a Digger on two days leave and recovering from a monster hangover. Well things have changed (see above), it's now more crowded than Bondi at the height of summer.

Nostalgia Corner



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A Day's work at the Ngai Giao minefield

The Ngai Giao minefield north of Nui Dat had to be cleared to avoid further injuries to locals and further lifting of the mines by the VC to use against Australian Forces. Sappers from the Field Troops were given the clearing task. Left photo: Sapper Rodney O'Regan starts the day by defusing a mine on his way back from morning ablutions. Note the combat-ready bare feet! Right photo: Mines lifted from the minefield ready for demolition. Note the shrapnel marks on the turret of the APC.



Lest We Forget

Dave Cook who was with 3 troop 1 Field Squadron paid a visit to the grave of Bob Bowtell at Terendak, Malaysia. Corporal Bob Bowtell, a member of 3 Field Troop RAE was KIA while exploring a Viet Cong tunnel system at Ben Cat, Bin Duong Province on 11 January 1966. The following quote from the book "No Need For Heroes" by Sandy MacGregor gives an idea of the drama: "Day 4, saw us find several trapdoors and tunnels and once again we could hear Vietnamese voices down there. It was on this day that Bob Bowtell died."



That thousand-yard stare

It has obviously been a long hard day for Sapper Barry Hartford, as he relaxes against a tree after an arduous tunnel search during Operation Enoggera when 6RAR occupied a Viet Cong village on 25th June 1966.



The Tunnel Rat Quartet

Left: Four lads who worked together in the same section of 2 Troop during 68/69 pose for the camera while back in Nui Dat after being out on operations with 5RAR. Left to right: Ted Podlich, Terry O'Donnell, Tim Ryan and Basil Dutko. Basil was an exceptional Section Commander and a highly skilled Sapper who gained the respect of everyone who worked with him. He was tragically killed in a car accident not long after returning home to Australia. His funeral was well attended by 2 Troop members.

Roadside discovery

Sapper Steve Armbrust (left), prods with his bayonet while his No. 1 Sapper Daryl Binns looks on. They were working with the armoured personnel carriers (APCs) on Route 2 in the north of Phuoc Tuy Province in June 1971. Sapper Binns, using the mine detector, had located a suspicious object buried near the road. The APC's were eventually able to move forward to their destination.



"I think we hit something"

With an added mine-roller device, this US M48 tank on loan to Australian forces was used to clear minefields. On 11 April 1971, while being driven along Route 328 by Sappers Baker, Haig and McCole of 1Flid Sqn it hit a massive 80lb command detonated Chicom mine and burst into flames. The Sappers put out the fire, alighted the vehicle rather rapidly and weren't surprised to find their hearing impaired for a few days!



Now this is luxury

One of the great pleasures of coming back to base camp after operations out bush was the sheer pleasure of a real toilet. Well sort of real. It was a pit with six dunny seats, magazines to read, plenty of paper and plenty of company. Seen here enjoying the facilities (from back to front) are Sappers Mick Van Poeteren, Marty McGrath and Bob Ottery. On the side wall behind them is the infamous "Drip Board" which listed the men who had contracted VD in Vung Tau or on R&R. Unfortunately the names are not legible in this photo. If anyone has a clear photo of the board, let us know as we are pretty confident we can make a fortune blackmailing the lads on the list.

Going bush with the Grunts



Last issue we looked at the chain of events leading up to a Tunnel Rat going out on operations. This issue we look at what it was like being attached to Infantry and being out on operation with them for periods of four to six weeks at a time.

Two Sappers, known as a Splinter Team, would be attached to a Company or Platoon of Infantry for the duration of an operation. The two-man team would consist of a Number One, the more experienced Sapper and a Number Two, who had usually been in country less than six months.

Our role was to carry out our specialist tasks of demolitions, mine and booby trap clearing and tunnel and bunker searching. On top of this we essentially became additional Infantrymen. We patrolled with

them, we ambushed with them, we harboured up at night with them and we fought beside them.

The operation would usually begin with a helicopter airlift into the area of operations (AO), an event guaranteed to get the adrenaline going and the hairs sticking up on the back of your neck. A mass helicopter airlift of 12 or so choppers filled with fully armed fighting men is a sight to behold, especially when viewed from mid-air, and when you are a part of it. The swoop into the landing zone (LZ) would climax the thrill and signal the beginning of the operation as you took your first steps of it, fanning out to secure the LZ.

Then began six weeks of patrolling the jungle in the unique and time-proven Australian way - absolutely minimal noise, and leaving as little

Photo: The boxes of C4 explosives have been dropped in by chopper, and now the Sappers take time out to plan the demolition of the bunker system.

trace of your presence as possible. Communication within the patrol was by an array of elaborate hand signals and an occasional whisper. Except for in the depths of a firefight, you never spoke above a whisper for the entire operation.

In simple terms, what the Infantry were doing when patrolling was looking for signs of the enemy, following those signs to hunt the enemy down, and then engaging the enemy when found. The firefights were often in or around the enemy's bunker systems or a result of the

ambushes we would set each night.

The Infantry were incredibly well trained in the process of reacting to the initiation of a firefight. This training was called 'Contact Drills' and the purpose of the training was to gain the initiative in the first crucial seconds of contact with the enemy. In these few seconds, one side or the other reached a point where it had the edge in the battle.

For the Australians this process involved reacting without question and doing something totally opposite to what your mind and body would normally demand. You turned to face the enemy fire and moved aggressively towards it, firing as you went, and then quickly dropping to the ground to take cover. At the same time the patrol's machine gunners would head for the high ground to gain maximum effect from the weapon and give maximum cover to the patrol.

Unfortunately the Sappers weren't anywhere near as well trained in these Infantry tactics. As a result, every Tunnel Rat has a story or two to tell about the first few enemy contacts they had while out with the Infantry. Invariably the Sappers found themselves to be the only man standing (instead of having taken cover), and usually isolated a good ten or fifteen yards behind the rest of the patrol.

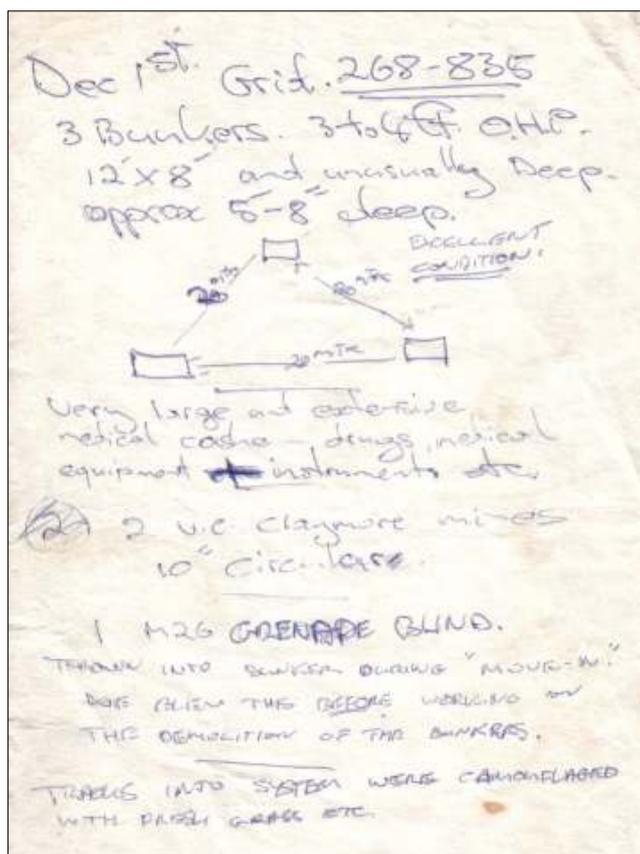
Typically, this would be laughed about later, but it did expose a major flaw in the process of having us integrated so closely with the Infantry. A few days training in Infantry tactics would have solved the problem quickly and not left so many Sappers standing out like a shag on a rock in their first contacts.

The daily routine varied little. After a day of patrolling a suitable site would be picked to harbour up for the night. The men would spread out to form a circle around the harbour position, with the machine guns located at the four 'corners' of the site. The HQ group would set up home in the middle of the circle.

The site would be chosen for a combination of its attributes as a potential ambush site, and its ability to provide reasonable sleeping positions for the men. You slept on the ground, with a groundsheet beneath you, but usually no 'Hootchie' tent above you as they made noise in the rain and shone in the moonlight. You cleared your personal sleeping area of scrub, hoping you didn't disturb an ant's nest or other bugs. Depending on the security situation, you sometimes dug a 'shell scrape' to sleep in. This was disturbingly shaped like a grave, but only about 12 inches deep. It protected you from shrapnel, but not from a direct hit.

If it rained, you simply got wet. Most men quickly discovered that by protecting your face from direct raindrops you could sleep through the rain.

The evening meal was taken and then the patrol 'Stood To'



Photos (Top): Keeping an eye out for the enemy while with the Infantry on Operation Silver City in March 1966 is Sapper Stewart Law of 3 Field Troop. (Bottom Photo): A Sapper's SITREP report, written for radio transmission on 1st December 1969 while on Operation Kings Cross with 5RAR.



Photos (Top): Sapper Peter Scott emerges after searching a small tunnel connecting two bunkers. (Middle Photo): Bounty from the bunkers, including RPG rounds, Chicom grenades, mortar rounds, M16 mines and a claymore mine. (Bottom Photo): One of the C4 charges, made up and ready to be dug into one of the internal walls of the bunker.

before last light. 'Stand To' was a process of silently listening and looking out from the perimeter during the time the patrol was traditionally most vulnerable to attack. After 'Stand To' everyone hit the sack except for those first rostered to man the machine guns. In groups of two, everyone had a shift on the machine gun during the night, usually for two hours.

Before first light the group 'Stood To' again, then shaved, squatted over a scrape-hole for toilet activities, ate breakfast and cleaned our teeth before moving off on patrol. You didn't have a decent wash, and certainly no shower, for the six-week duration of the operation. No deodorant was used, you didn't wash your hair and nobody wore underwear because the chaffing they caused would cripple you in a couple of days. Your body took on a unique mushroom-like smell after a few weeks an aroma much like the moist earth around us. Often you didn't take your boots off for days, and when you eventually took them off you were amazed at how your feet were in such good nick considering the pounding they'd taken and the fact that they'd been wet and dry several times a day.

Helicopters resupplied us with food every three to five days. They also brought in water if we couldn't find drinkable water in the streams. And sometimes, depending on the season and our activities, our clothes would be so ripped or rotten they'd have to be replaced with fresh ones flown in from Nui Dat. It may seem a small pleasure now, but the feeling of putting on those fresh greens was pure heaven.

Weapons were meant to be cleaned and lightly oiled every day. The Tunnel Rats carried two weapons, a 9mm pistol used in searching tunnels and bunkers, plus either an SLR semi automatic rifle or an Armalite fully automatic rifle. Most Tunnel Rats were a bit slack about cleaning their weapons, at least until they had a weapon fail in contact, which tended to focus them again on the importance of regular maintenance!

The Tunnel rats really moved into overdrive whenever bunker or tunnel systems were found. Bunkers were found on a very regular basis. It was not uncommon for a team of two Sappers to search and then blow up over 100 enemy bunkers in a single operation.

The bunkers were always found in groups, from as little as three bunkers up to 20 or 30 in a system, often interconnected with trenches or small tunnels.

Sometimes the bunkers had just been vacated by the enemy and it was common to come across meals still cooking on stoves and other evidence of a hasty retreat.

If the enemy had defended the bunker system, the Infantry and the Sappers would sometimes sweep through the system dropping grenades into each bunker. This was great for the Tunnel Rats as it lessened the chances of coming across



The choppers drop in and the operation begins as the Infantry and the Sappers supporting them fan out from the LZ.

someone alive in the bunker, and it blew the spiders and bats to bits as well. After searching the bunkers for documents, medical supplies and weapons, the Tunnel Rats would then set them up for demolition. The Tunnel Rats carried explosives, but not enough for a system of over three bunkers. Choppers would fly in the extra explosives, sometimes dropping them rather than landing a process that often had the Infantry running for cover despite our insistence on the safety of the process.

Eight slabs of C4 plastic explosive was used per bunker, with some dug into the walls and some placed on opposing positions at each end of the main supporting timber, to 'spin' it and cause maximum damage. All the bunkers in the system would be connected together on the one charge, and once it was all set up, the Infantry would leave. The Sappers would then light the fuse and walk away to catch up with the Infantry, all the time waiting for the big bang. No matter how many times you did it, it was always an anxious and exciting moment waiting for the whole system to blow up behind you. Very satisfying.

Each evening the Number One of the Splitter Team would radio a Situation Report (SITREP) back to Troop HQ in Nui Dat. This report would detail any mines, booby traps, caches, tunnels and bunkers found that day.

The Tunnel Rats also swung into action whenever a mine incident occurred within the patrol. This was without doubt the most harrowing aspect of our job. The enemy would often plant more than one mine, hoping to also catch the men they knew would rush to the aid of those wounded by the first mine.

The Tunnel Rats had to clear safe paths to the killed and wounded so they could be cared for or evacuated.

So in an atmosphere of wounded comrades in pain, a balance had to be found between rushing the process and ensuring the enemy mines were found. With the Infantry understandably desperate to help their mates, it was a situation charged with seemingly conflicting emotions, but all in fact aimed at the same goal. Incidents such as these were sadly too common, and helped cement the incredible bond between the Infantry and the Sappers. It's a bond that's equally as strong today and a bond that quickly brings emotions to the surface at reunions. Our role in such incidents is something we are extremely proud of and rightly so.

The operation would continue, with a routine of patrolling, ambushing, following signs of the enemy and destroying his bases whenever we found them. Success was usually measured in the numbers of enemy killed, captured or wounded and in the number of enemy bunkers destroyed.

Eventually the operation would come to a close and it was time to head back to paradise the Nui Dat base camp. Choppers usually took us back, and what a glorious ride it was, knowing you were safe (at least until the next operation) and knowing that a shower, fresh greens and cold beers were mere minutes away.

Sappers in the slammer



The story of two Tunnel Rats who pushed the envelope just a bit too far and ended up in Australia's military prison, at Vung Tau.

The Tunnel Rats were a bold and boisterous lot when they came back to the Nui Dat base camp after operations. Beer was consumed in unimaginable quantities, and the boys would let off steam in the most imaginative ways. The Troop dunny was blown up on a regular basis. Tents were booby-trapped with blast caps or smoke grenades. If enough guys were in camp after a major operation, the Troop staff would organise a Barbeque, where the behaviour was both peculiar and predictable. Once the booze had taken hold, the food fight would begin, with crabs and prawns flying in all directions, taking no regard of rank. Then the shirt ripping would commence. We all boasted new shirts, our old ones having rotted on our bodies during the operation we'd just completed. The barbeque shirt-ripping ritual would be kicked off when a sleeve or pocket was

Ripped off someone's new shirt, triggering a mass reaction of ripping and tearing until most of us were left with little more than a collar or a cuff. Today psychiatrists might analyse this in-depth and come to all sorts of conclusions, but the reality was, the boys were letting off steam.

Asking the Tunnel Rats to show a bit of self control and common sense when safe and sound in base after six weeks of carrying out their unique tasks on operations was a bit optimistic. To borrow a line from the movie "Apocalypse Now", it was a bit like "handing out speeding tickets at the Indy 500". Add into this mix the fact that the Tunnel Rats were facing 30% casualty rates, and it's surprising there weren't more incidents where Sappers ended up behind the barbed wire of the military prison at Vung Tau.

The Military prison at Vung Tau was known as the 2MCE (2nd Military Corrective Establishment). Soldiers who committed offences against Australian Military Law in Vietnam

Photo: At the left side of this Provost Corp HQ building is the Vung Tau military prison where Sappers Denley and Gartside did their time.

were sentenced to a period of "detention" at 2MCE which was staffed by members of the Provosts Corps as well as selected Corporals from Arms Corps such as Infantry, Engineers, Artillery and Armour to assist with running the facility.

Frank Denley blows up the CO's dunny

The three Field Troops (1,2 & 3 Troop) which comprised the Tunnel Rats, were a part of 1 Field Squadron, led in mid-1970 by Major Johnston. Earlier in the year, the Squadron had hosted a visit by a group of Australian entertainers. This group included women, a species so rare at Nui Dat that women's toilets simply didn't exist. Major Johnston decided that a new toilet should be constructed for our



Sapper Frank Denley in Vietnam, prior to the demolition of the Co's private dunny.

female guests. Rather than waste the effort on a single visit, the toilet was constructed adjoining the Major's sleeping quarters, and it became his personal thunder box. For the Tunnel Rats who went out bush on operations and were used to squatting over a freshly dug "scrape" on a daily basis, this was a luxury of dream-like proportions. However, nobody felt it was an injustice, after all, he was "The Man", the CO of the squadron.

When Frank Denley decided to blow up the CO's dunny, this logic was lost in a fog of alcohol. "Basically, I was pissed, and common sense took a back seat," said Frank. "I had nothing against the CO, it wasn't a grudge thing, or an anger thing. It was just another prank in the chain of lunacy emanating from the Sappers in the Field Troops."

"In fact my plan wasn't to blow up the dunny, but to create an unholy mess by dropping a small charge into the pit of the toilet," said Frank.

"I figured that a small well-placed charge would decorate the internal walls with a shower of officer poo."

Things went wrong from the very start.

Frank began the deed by emptying the contents of his demolitions bag onto a sandbag in front of his tent so he could select the required items to make up the charge. Unfortunately after making up the charge he left everything where it was on the sandbag, to become prime evidence in his later conviction.

"To be honest, I can't remember how big the charge was," recalls Frank. "I would have needed less than a quarter of a slab of C4 for what I wanted to do, but under the influence of a few too many cans of VB I could well have used half a slab or more."

"I snuck over to the HQ area and after waiting a while to ensure Major Johnston wasn't on the throne. I then tried to enter the

hallowed halls of the CO's private dunny, only to find it was locked. However, there was a gap at the bottom of the side wall large enough to get my hand in, and exposing an opening into the pit beneath the toilet seat.

"Wanting to minimise the chance of anyone wandering into the dunny while the fuse burnt, I had attached a fuse that would burn for only 60 seconds before the charge went off. Unfortunately this factor made it impossible for me to take alternative action when things started to go wrong.

"I lit the fuse, slid the charge under the wall and pushed it into the pit, but I could hear that it only dropped a few inches instead of into the depths of the pit. It must have come to rest on a ledge or timber support. Time was ticking by fast and I made

one attempt to push it in further before I had to get a safe distance away from the impending explosion.”

Frank's memory of events gets a little hazy from this point onwards, but the explosion virtually obliterated the CO's dunny and an immediate and urgent search for the perpetrator was set in motion.

“Sergeant Bevan Percival was obviously looking for the culprit when he walked past my tent and saw the contents of my demolitions bag on the ground. Despite my denials, I was number one suspect from that point on.

“Predictably the army brought out it's biggest weapon. The next day on parade we were told that nobody would go on R&R or home to Australia until the culprit owned up. I couldn't let my mates down, and the Army knew it, so I owned up.

“I spent 21 days in the Australian military prison at Vung Tau and instead of being returned to my beloved Field Troop, I was shuffled between 17 Construction and 21 Construction Squadrons. Not going back to my Troop was worse punishment than the time I spent in the slammer.

“I went AWOL and disappeared into the dives of Vung Tau, coming back to base only to raid the Sergeant's Mess for food. It was a road to nowhere and eventually the Army in their wisdom decided the best thing they could do with me was send me home on psychological grounds.

“I went home to Australia six weeks earlier than my one year posting and without the chance to see my Troop mates back at Nui Dat. Over the years after Vietnam we gradually found each other again, and now we get together regularly. The comradeship so evident at those reunions is something I value dearly.”

Graeme Gartside packs an AK 47

At a point several months before your posting in Vietnam ended, you packed the belongings you didn't need into a large metal trunk which was shipped home by the navy. The trunk usually contained gifts, souvenirs, uniforms and (illegally) the occasional bottle or two of spirits purchased at US\$1.40 per 2 litre bottle and cigarettes at US\$1.20 per carton. The trunk arrived in Australia some weeks after you did, and it was obvious that in most cases the trunks hadn't even been opened by customs. We may have been completely wrong, but we felt that the blind eye attitude of customs was a nice little perk for the diggers returning home.

Obviously, for the bold and the brave, this situation presented an opportunity to send home more than duty-free booze and cigarettes.

In searching Viet Cong tunnels, Caves, bunkers and caches, the Sappers of the Field Troops came

across many enemy weapons, all of which, in theory, had to be handed in to the Intelligence officer. In fact, the tents and the recreation huts of the Field Troops were an armoury of Russian, Czechoslovakian and Chinese-made AK47 assault rifles.

Graeme Gartside was the proud owner of one of these, a glistening example in pristine condition, complete with banana-shaped magazine, a few hundred rounds of ammunition and a set of ammunition pouches. Priceless.

Graeme is a few months from going home, is packing his sea-trunk and comes to the point where he realises he has to make a decision on his AK47.

“I could sell it, give it to a mate, donate it to the recreation hut or pack it into my trunk and have the ultimate souvenir of my tour.”

Graeme Gartside on Ops with the APC's near Long Phouc Hai, before the AK 47 incident.



recalls Graeme, who still has a soft spot for the AK 47 that could have graced his walls.

“Plenty of stories had come back from guys who'd returned to find their trunks had obviously never been opened since they were sealed with wire straps in front of the owners in Nui Dat.

“I took the punt and decided to pack the AK. I first took the trunk without the rifle to the office for inspection. It was cleared for shipping so I then took it to the Squadron HQ area for sealing and shipping. However, on the way I detoured to my tent and put the AK47, the ammunition and pouches into the trunk, about midway down the pile of shirts, trousers and more innocent souvenirs.”

The trunk was sealed in front of Graeme and sent off on its journey to his home address. However fate intervened in the form of a very poorly timed strike by the wharf labourers in Australia. The strike threatened to have the trunks sitting on the wharfs for months. To ensure the diggers got their sea-trunks, the Army took alternative action and started temporarily sending the trunks by air via the Air Force. This meant that the “blind eye” of customs was replaced by a completely different set of people tasked with inspecting the trunks.

“I'd just come back to Nui Dat from a short operation with 7RAR when I got the call,” says Graeme. “The Military Police wanted to see me. I knew straight away that it would be about the AK47. They interviewed me and I denied everything until it reached the point where they said they'd let me think about it for a while. I thought about it and realised they would find my fingerprints on the rifle if it came to that point. I owned up and was charged with the offence.

“Before facing the charge in front of



If the wharfies hadn't gone on strike, Graeme would have been the proud owner of an AK 47 just like this one!

Major Johnston, the Squadron CO, I was led to believe that at worst I'd be fined and maybe have to do be 'Duty Blowfly' for a while in base camp.”

Being 'Duty Blowfly' meant you had to clean the grease traps around the mess hall, clean the rubbish bins and perform other degrading and smelly tasks.

“At one point in the proceedings,” recalls Graeme, “the Major asked if I had anything to say for myself. I didn't really so I remained silent. I don't know if this angered him or not, but his punishment totally stunned me.

“I was sent to the slammer for 21



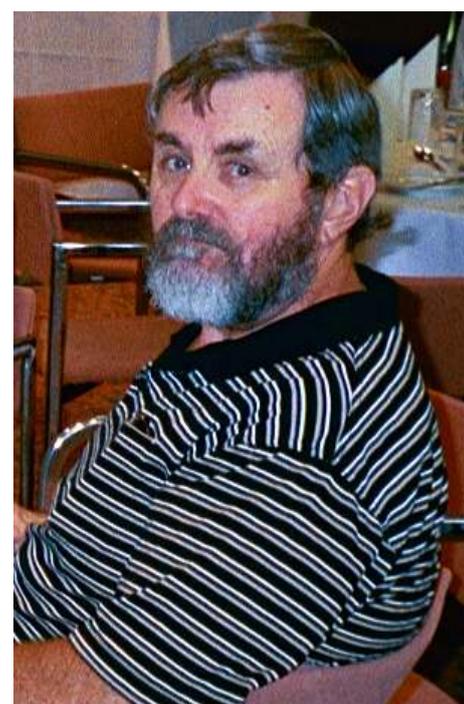
days! This seemed a bit steep for souvenir collecting, but I guess it was also about the false declaration I made to the officer who inspected my trunk prior to it being sealed.

“The military prison at Vung Tau was surreal and totally degrading. I'd be ordered to fill sandbags all morning, then to move the sandbags from one side of the yard to the other side. Then I'd be ordered to empty the sand from the sand bags and fill them again. Insane.

“The sentence took place in September 1970 and I was returned to 2 Troop when I completed the 21 days. The boys immediately dubbed me the “AK Kid” when I got back, and this nickname stuck till I went home as scheduled in November.

“My trunk was waiting for me minus the AK47 of course.

“I was never one for reunions and so on, but lately I've renewed contact with lots of the guys, and met up with about 25 of them at a reunion in Canberra. I'm amazed at how close the comradeship is and how quickly it embraces you. There are no irrelevant questions asked and there's nothing to prove. It's great.”



The “Bad Boys” as they are today: Frank Denley on the left, and Graeme Gartside on the right

OUR BADGES

As you might expect, there is a rich history behind the badges proudly borne by members of our Corp, the Royal Australian Engineers.

"Facimus Et Frangimus" is the Corps motto and it means "We make and We Break", indicating the main tasks of the Engineers to build things and to blows things up. The motto is shown on the Corp's Cypher which is used on official letterheads, certificates or formal proclamations. At one stage it was also shown on our hat badge.

The Corp has also been granted another motto "Ubique" (pronounced you bee quay) which means "Everywhere". This motto was originally accorded to the Royal Engineers by the King in 1842 after the gallant actions of Sappers in Crimea, and has been inherited by the Royal Australian Engineers.

The Royal Australian Engineers hat badge currently has E11R in the centre showing the Queen heads our Corp. The badge also carries the garter/cypher of the highest order of chivalry, the Order of the Garter. The Order of the Garter is Her Majesty's personal order with a very small membership. The Queen alone decides who will be admitted to the order. It includes herself and the Prince of Wales and 24 Knights Companion. The Queen has granted us the use of the following motto on our hat badge to signify she is our Colonel in Chief: "Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense" which mean "evil be to him who evil thinks".

We are also eligible to use the Queen's motto "Quo Fas et Gloria Ducunt", meaning "where right and glory leads" which is on her coat of arms and is shown on the Royal Engineer's cipher. It's rarely used as we're happy with "Facimus et Frangimus".



We wear a bursting grenade on our service dress collar and mess dress uniforms to signify our Corp and past gallantry.

Artillery have also been granted the grenade. The RAE grenade has nine flames and the RAA grenade has seven flames. The grenade is referred to in both the Royal Engineers (of the UK) and the Royal Australian Engineers as our "collar dogs".



The Cypher



The RAE hat badge



The badge in detail

We've turned up a few Tunnel Rats

Graeme Gartside's never-ending search has so far turned up a good number of former members of the Engineer Field Troops in Vietnam. To help you contact your mates, here's a list of those we have phone numbers for. We also list some names where so far we've been unable to get phone numbers. If you can help with those numbers, please contact Graeme Gartside on 08-8725 2845.

3 Field Troop

Alan Tugwell 08 8552 5229

OC's 1 Field Squadron

John Kemp 02 6288 3428
Rex Rowe 02 4861 6324

1 Troop

Alan Rantall 03 9434 2031
Clive Pearsall 03 9459 4470
Bob Coleman 03 5342 0941
Peter Sheehan 03 9390 2834
Kevin Smith 03 9787 1506
Bret Nolan 03 5278 9969
Peter Koch 04 3822 3100
Phil (Jonah) Jones 07 3390 1130
Ray Kenny 07 3881 3648
David Wright 03 9435 4131
Colin Spies 07 4743 4676
Garry Von Stanke 08 8725 5648
George Hulse 07 3399 7659
Barry Meldrum 03 5427 1162
Garry Degering 03 9763 0510
Terry Gleeson 03 5623 2886



2 Troop (1966 1967)

Richard Beck 07 3208 5808
David Buring 02 6254 6689
Ron Cain 02 6586 1412
Graeme Carey 02 6056 0997

2 Troop (1967 1968)

Eric McKerrow (Silent number)
Peter Bennett 08 9385 5499
Brian Sheehan 03 9336 3137
Robert Knowles 08 9535 6416
Bernard Ladyman 08 9795 7900
Lew Jordan 03 6397 3261
Dennis Burge 08 8281 2270
Murdock Ballantyne 08 8298 2515
Ray Johnston 07 3351 1609
Ray Kenny 07 3881 3648
Stan Shepherd 07 5523 2157
Andrew Rogers 08 8087 5671
Stephen McHenry 08 9344 6939
Warren Burnie 02 6687 7030
David Kitley 02 4735 4991
John Kiley 02 4228 4068
John Beningfield 07 4778 4473
Hans Rehorn 03 5623 5572
Geoff Russell 02 6342 1292
Brian Rankin 07 4775 5095
John Goldfinch 02 6674 0855

Roland Gloss 02 6367 5324
James Smith 0413 669 087
Garry Cosgrove 02 4845 5153
Mick Rowbotham 03 9439 7566



2 Troop (1968 1969)

Don Nicholls 02 9579 4126
Peter Laws 02 4942 8131
Rick Martin 02 6928 4253
Colin Norris 02 4627 1180
Ray Vanderhelden 02 4776 1373
Paul Grills 07 4162 5235
John Douglas 08 8376 3788
Mick Weston 07 5444 3307
Phil Lamb 08 8564 2001
Rod Crane 08 9530 3083
Daryl Porteous 07 4973 7663
Geoff Handley 03 5593 1791
Ray Jurkiewicz 07 3886 9054
Ross Bachmann 07 5495 1443
Ted Podlich 07 3862 9002
Jim Castles 02 9639 2941
John Gilmore 08 9795 6847
Richard Branch 07 4947 1044
Don Beale 02 6236 8267
Ross Hansen 07 3202 7540
Bob Austin 02 6644 9237
Harry Classen 07 3273 6701
Bud Lewis 07 3881 1230
arryl Lavis 08 8263 9548
Wayne Lambley 07 3851 1837
Peter Brunton 03 5156 5531
Terry O'Donnell 03 5334 3443
Harold Bromley 03 9726 8625

2 Troop (1969 1970)

Dennis Wilson 08 8892 2671
David Brook 03 9546 2868
Colin Reddacliff (Silent number)
Peter Scott (219) 02 4341 3782
Les Shelley 07 3264 4041
Ian Pitt 03 5349 2018
Ron Coman 07 3355 7279
John Hopman 02 9398 5258
Jim Burrough 03 9885 8285
Stephen Wilson 07 5538 2179
Mick Van Poeteren 03 9435 0383
Brad Hannaford 08 8389 2217
Jim Marett 03 9826 3908
Frank Brady 02 6555 5200
Graeme Gartside 08 8725 2845
Bob Ottery 03 5199 2516
Kevin Connor 07 4032 2208
Marty McGrath 02 6059 1204
Greg Gough 0417 911 173
Jimmy Shugg 08 9776 1471
Janis Atrens 02 6292 3071

Doug George 03 9889 2116
Mick Lee 07 3808 4823
Phil "Jonah" Jones 07 3390 1130
Bevan Percival 07 5537 1577
"Roo Dog" Scott 07 5576 0232
Bill Lamb 0418 424 208
Gerry Wallbridge 03 9803 4223
Bruce Bofinger 02 4861 5715
Chris Koulouris 02 4952 6341
Arthur Davies 07 3408 1556
Brian Scott 07 3204 5691
Roy Elbourne 02 4868 1493
Grumpy Foster 07 4041 2321
Jack Power 07 4955 3761
Frank Denley 02 6571 2056
"Arab" Avotins 07 4129 8012

2 Troop (1970 1971)

Butch Marsden 08 9921 6183
Graham Besford 03 9439 2661
Des Evans 07 5486 3886
Jock Coutts 08 9279 1946
Keith Burley 07 5543 0990
Bob Hamlyn 08 8672 3172
Brian Christian 07 4778 6602
Keith Ramsay 02 6585 6503
John Brady 02 6888 1192
Kevin Lappin 07 3273 8614
Peter McCole 03 5155 9368
Gary Sangster 0409 522 099
Bob McGlenn 07 5426 1597
Paddy Healy 02 4930 7541
John Smith 07 4788 0123
Leon Madeley 07 5497 1038
Steve Walton 07 3269 3192
Terry Wake 07 4786 2625
David Gammie 02 4365 2696
Mick Rasmussen Silent number
Bill Marshall 07 5545 0389
Ziggy Gniot 0418 885 830
John Crocker 07 3206 7995
John Cross 02 4757 2273
John Tick 04 3898 7262
Chris Koolen 03 5237 7368
Jeff Maddock 03 5442 2875
Rod O'Regan 02 6550 6068
Gary McClintock 07 4788 0123
Des Polden 03 6223 3830
Roy Sojan 08 9926 1235
Kevin Hodge 08 8347 7060
Ray Fulton 03 6288 1176
Graeme Pengelly 03 5345 2397
Bruce Arrow 02 6288 3872
Mal Botfield 02 9872 2594
Peter Cairns 03 6267 4646
Ron Cook 03 8787 7377
Cec Harris 02 6629 3373
Dave Young 02 4283 3439
Robin Date 03 9783 3202
Bill Craig 08 9530 1008
Mick Bergin 03 5974 2175

3 Troop

Bob Coleman 03 5342 0941
Phil McCann 03 5442 3459
Mick Coleman 03 5799 2432
John Beningfield 07 4778 4473

The following are former members of Field Troops whose phone numbers we are looking for. If you can help with information, please contact Graeme Gartside by phone on 08 8725 2845, or by

mail to Graem Gartside, 9 Park Street Mt Gambier SA 5290 or by email to: hawthorn@ansoninc.com.au

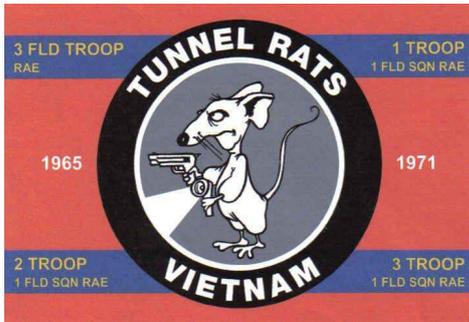
One Troop: T J Drummond, M Staggard, Captain Usbeck, Michael Bruggeman, Captain Rainer Frisch, Doug Myers, John Pritchard, Neil Innes, S. Sgt G. Biddlecombe, Captain Adrian Black, Bruce Oakman, Sgt Robert Tilley, Ivis Rostoks, Terry Sutcliffe, Ray Carroll.



Two Troop: Peter Williams, Bob Morris, John Wilson, Harold Bell, John Collier, Peter Gammon, Ralph Hill, Kevin Moon, Bob Hower, Rodney Palmer, Ken Butler, John Coe, Ray Ryan, Peter Clayton, John Ash, Peter Piromanski, Ralph Scafer, Alan Taylor, Paul Bradshaw, Bruce Ramsay, Peter Wood, David Pannach, Carlton Smith, Ron Richards, Dennis Clarke, Edward Clarke, Peter Cosh, Anthony Green, David Matulick, Alan Packer, Jock Peattie, Greg Roberts, Mick Lundy, Stan McNamara, Wal Warby, Greg Barnsley, Mick Byrne, John Ronaldson, Bob Smith, Graeme Clarke, Dennis Crawford, Ray Williams, S. Sgt. Startories, Ross Throbon, Brian Knowles, David Briggs, John Scanlon, Sgt. Jeffries, Bill Matherson, Gary Shoemark, Les Verco, Ray Hogg, Harry Cooling, Brian Noel.

Three Troop: Tony Bower-Myles, Norm Martin, Brenton Smith, Peter Vandenberg, Ray McCarthy, Martin Frank.

Troop unknown: Barry Harlford, Ray Jacques, Kent Luttrell, Kelly Warne, Ashley Ryan, Phillip Baxter, Stephen Theodore, Edward Budd, Trevor Kelly, Gary Miller, John Miller, Terrence Binney, Edward Baker, Ian Woods, Bruce Crawford, Patrick Quinn, Garry Jesser, Leo Power, Robert Earl, John Fleming, Edward Kearney, William Miskin, Christopher Brooks, Malcolm Nevins, Keith Milne, Mihael Moon, Douglas Brock, Robert McLeay, David Sturmer, William Willcox, Geoffrey Box, Peter Phillips, John Paul Ryan, John Harrison.



Thanks again to those who forked out the \$38 to support the newsletter. A superb personalised membership card is issued to all those who join. Your membership is valid for all of 2005, and we'll hit you again late this year for another year's membership.

You can still join

If you haven't joined and you'd like to, simply fill in the form below and post it with your cheque. But don't worry, even if you don't join, we'll continue to send the newsletter - we realise some are not interested in joining anything, and some may not be able to afford it right now.

Free stickers this issue

Everyone is rapt in our Tunnel Rat logo and several people

have asked for stickers featuring The Rat.

We have designed and produced several stickers, suitable for your car, your bar or whatever. They look stunning, and best of all, they're free with this issue.

A reminder again, on why we formed the Tunnel Rats Association

Our status seemed to be getting a bit blurred. It had reached the point where any Engineer who served in Vietnam was calling himself a Tunnel Rat.

The members of the Field Troops listed on the banner above are the only Engineers who went out on four and six week-long operations with the Infantry and Armoured units. They fought alongside the Infantry plus they performed their additional tasks of mine and booby trap detection and clearing, plus bunker and tunnel searching and demolition.

It is these men of the Field Troops who represent over 95% of the casualty list of the 1 Field

Squadron Group.

We are extremely proud of what we did, in particular of how we worked so closely with the Infantry and Armoured units. By wrongly claiming Tunnel Rat status, some men from non-field Troops have begun to blur the line defining the unique role of the Tunnel Rats.

If it became generally accepted that all Engineer units in Vietnam were Tunnel Rats, then our status would be reduced. Nobody has a right to do that. We should not allow anybody to diminish something we are so proud of.

The forming of the Association is not an elitist thing, and it is not an anti "Pogo" thing. It is simply intense pride in what we did and a move to protect our status.

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43 Heyington Place Toorak
Victoria 3142
Telephone 0403041962
tunnelrat@optusnet.com.au

If you want to help fund the newsletter, here's the Form

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