

'FOLLOW THE SAPPER'

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December 2017 Edition 29



Greetings fellow Sappers and Friends.

As we rapidly approach the 'festive' season, some will hear the much spoken words, 'Peace on Earth and Good Will to All'. The images I have included strike me as a contradiction; a bizarre juxtaposition today, given that the majority of Vietnam's population is Buddhist. There are many Christians, most being Roman Catholic, but they are in the minority. Any festivity will bring a smile on little faces. I didn't know Santa carried a flag. Who can know for sure?

Most of us probably spent a Christmas in what was then South Vietnam. We will remember senior NCO's and Officers serving up the Christmas fare and perhaps a tot or two of rum. Maybe some of us visited the orphanage in Baria and gave the kids a treat. We will remember missing our loved ones back in Australia.

I was in Vietnam in 2009 for Christmas. It is truly an amazing time when everyone comes out onto the streets to celebrate, despite the Regime of Vietnam. The picture of Santa is a good friend and Australian doctor, Philip. He is giving some Christmas spirit to children at a leprosarium in Kon Tum, Central Highlands of Vietnam. Very few people visit this place for fear of contracting the disease. I have been there a number of times and am still in one piece.

I suppose the point I am trying to make is that we must continue to share that Christmas spirit, despite who we are, what our colour is, our religious beliefs or ethnicity. We seem to be bombarded with gloom and doom via our media. The politics of our Nation seem to thrive on conflict, sometimes of the most trivial kind when most of us want to see our country governed well. We see dreadful images of starving children in Yemen, the Sudan and other African regions. We see refugees struggling to survive on Manus Island. We see nation leaders carrying on like children – tit for tat. The worry is they can wreak havoc on the globe. We see major world leaders and subordinates accused of sexual harassment or of domestic violence. How is it we find ourselves in this situation? If we of 1st Field Squadron Group could endure the Vietnam War and still find time to share just a bit of Christmas spirit whilst being so far from our homes and loved ones, is it such a big ask for those who have it within their power, to do the same.

At this 2017 Christmas season, and well beyond, let us all hope, and pray if we do that, for a healthy serving of '*Peace on Earth and Good Will to All.*'

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LEST WE FORGET.
Editor: Derek Smith



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This piece honouring Corporal Robert Bowtell, was submitted by John Pritchard. Well done John.

BOWTELL AWARD

The Plate will be known as
**“The Junior NCO Award of Excellence in 1 CER
in memory of Corporal Robert Bowtell”**

In 2015 during the visit by our Association to 1 CER, Darwin, I broached to subject of an award to perpetuate the name of Corporal Robert Bowtell, KIA 11 Jan 1966, with the then OC 3 Fd Tp, Lt Adam Mowat. This in turn was supported by the OC 1 Fd Sqn, Major Sam Padman.

However the proposal stalled during 2015/16 as the unit was heavily involved in preparations for their tour of IRAQ as well as the tedium of the posting cycles.

In July 2017 I had lunch with the OC and SSM, 1 Fd Sqn as well as being invited to address, 1 Fd Sqn. Both the OC and SSM supported the proposal and briefed to CO and RSM.

In early August I addressed 1 Fd Sqn and over lunch discussed to award with the CO and RSM. The RSM to his great credit, resurrected the proposal and in November this year the first award will be made. The recipient, yet to be named, will also receive a signed copy of Col Sandy Macgregor’s book, “No Need For Heroes”.

I am hopeful that a family member can be sponsored by the unit to make the presentation but as usual ADF funds shall determine this course of action. These being critically tight in respect to travel.

These are photos of the plate. The plate will be on a stand with the recipient’s name plates appended.



Vale - 1 FD SQN GP RAE members:

WO2 Ron Janvrin 1 FD SQN GP 1969/70
COL Rainer Frisch, MBE 1 FD SQN GP 1969/70
SPR David Martin 1 FD SQN GP 1966/67
LCPL Les Caruthers 1 FD SQN GP 1967/68
SPR Norman Hedge 1 FD SQN GP 1967/68
SPR Andrew Wine 1 FD SQN GP 1966/67
WO2 Ken Wheatley 1 FD SQN GP 1968/69

Passed away 11 June 2017
Passed away 29 July 2017
Passed away 4 August 2017
Passed away 16 August 2017
Passed away 17 August 2017
Passed away 17 August 2017
Passed away 24 September 2017



LEST WE FORGET

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The Dat Do Shire Council by Corporal M. Folster



I was given this wonderful piece of our history at our reunion. It does reflect my editorial in so much as it involves giving and receiving. Well done Dat Do Shire Council crew. Enjoy.

Half way across the world from here is a divided war torn country, Vietnam. Once it was defended by about half the forces of the free world. This story concerns one small part of that war ravaged country and of its people. As a member of the free world forces, my job brought me into close contact with the people of the villages who had been living under the shelter of the Australian Task Force.

In true Aussie fashion and know-how a pair of pliers was produced from the tool box and the old man was stood with his back against the dozer and a heavy Australian hand against his chest to steady him. The pliers were applied to the offending tooth and the struggle began. The crunch of the splintering tooth could be clearly heard by all who had gathered to witness the extraction.

About five miles down the road from the one time Task Force area lay the village of Dat Do. The village once prospered as a source of supplies for members of the Task Force; services such as ice, dry cleaning and native gifts were principle items. Even now some of the latter adorn lounge rooms around Australia. Dat Do is a thickly populated village and as part of the Civil Aid and Pacification Program members of the Task Force carried out many jobs there. I wish to tell of the tasks that were carried out, the helping hand that was extended to this village and of two men whose job brought them into close contact with its people.



At this stage, with the patient barely conscious and the dentist also a bit pale and shaken, the tooth finally came free amid cheers from the crowd and was passed around for inspection. The old man, apparently in a state of shock, was unable to stand unaided so two young Viets came forward from the group to assist him to his home.

The "Dat Do Shire Council" came into existence in the early part of 1970 and consisted of a two-man crew with a light bulldozer and a Ferguson tractor fitted with a radio and pulling a half ton trailer, with tool box. Their task was to repair and widen the existing roads within the village.

The first obstacle however was the language barrier and in the early stages the crew's sparse knowledge of this caused some very embarrassing misunderstandings. The first of these was when a very old man who could barely walk shuffled up to the "Shire Council" and, using signs, indicated that he was suffering from toothache and was in pain.

Later the same day an English speaking member of the community approached the Council crew and explained that although the old man was very grateful for the extraction of the offending tooth, he had not been seeking the Council's assistance in removing it but had been seeking information on the correct channel by which he could obtain treatment by the Aust Dental Corps. From that day on the old patient was never sighted by the Council crew again.

The back blocks of Dat Do being mostly jungle country with clearings for houses and numerous narrow tracks, there was always the possibility of an accidental meeting with the enemy. On one occasion the members of the Council, with time to spare, decided to inspect one of the tracks that they planned to improve in the near future. Whilst moving down the track the crew observed small VC flags made of crepe paper and stuck to trees at close intervals along the track.

Cartoons by Lindsey Dean

... Continued on the next page .

Continued from page 3.

A couple of these flags were pocketed as souvenirs and the crew carried on down the track, around a bend and came to the first house where there appeared to be a party in full swing.

With thoughts of the possibility of being invited for a couple of drinks foremost in their minds, it was some time before one of the crew spotted a large VC flag flying from the top of the tree under which they were standing. The message was very swiftly passed on to his mate and at this moment the crew were spotted by the members of the party. The party must have just been finishing because as the Council crew started to leave (speed being the key word), so the guests began leaving the party...also at high speed but in the opposite direction. Once clear of the area a hasty message was flashed over the radio and the National Police arrived and searched the house. However all the guests had left and the Police later informed the Council crew that the VC had been celebrating their success of the previous night when they demolished several culverts on Route 44. Parties were off the social agenda for the little crew of party poopers for some time in that particular area.

On another occasion the Council crew, on noticing a house being decorated, obviously for some kind of celebration, questioned the people as to the occasion and were informed that preparations were being made for a funeral. On asking the identity of the deceased, he was pointed out – on a bed on the verandah of the house, alike and watching as his family and friends prepared for the big event. His passing on two days later was the signal for the beginning of festivities which lasted for three days. The 'Shire Council' honoured an invitation and drank a few beers to the deceased's health, although it seemed rather pointless at that stage.

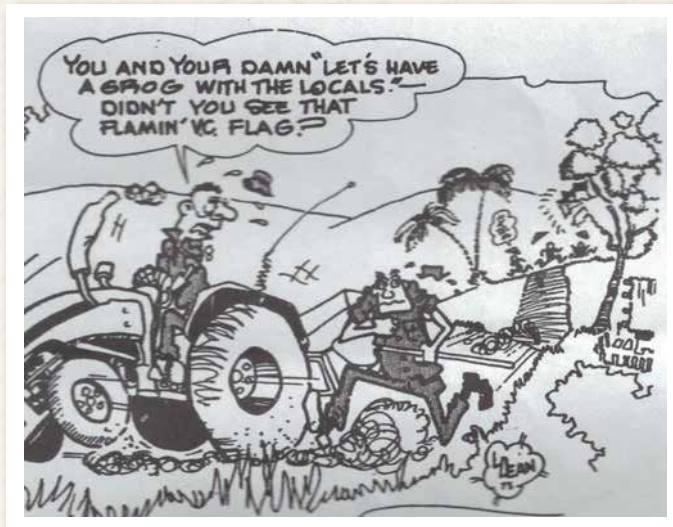
Adapting to the various meals was a problem to the 'Shire Council' crew when they first started operations in Dat Do and found themselves eating frog, fish sauce and other varieties of Vietnamese food.



Invitations to meals were extended daily by the villagers and as refusal would offend, the crew were obliged to accept, eat the meal regardless of its composition then praise the cooking being careful not to praise too loud or long for fear of being rewarded with back-ups.

Perseverance had its reward and the crew gradually adapted to the

meals and could eat a frog with the best of them and became partial to dried squid, which was popular as a light snack whilst drinking a couple of beers after work. As time went on the 'Dat Do Shire Council' became an accepted part of the community and locals who were previously shy or afraid of the Australians found the crew friendly and willing to help them and readily approached them for advice, assistance or just a friendly yarn, feeling completely at ease in their company. However should the Council be visited by other Australians, many of these people melted from the scene to return only when the visitors had left.



Tasks became many and varied and besides road

maintenance the Council assisted the villagers by doing running repairs to motor cycles, treating injured cattle, laying out building foundations, ploughing up areas for corn crops, clearing small building sites, one dental job and also cured a couple of previously considered incurable cases of migraine headache (with a Bex).

The time eventually arrived when the IC of the Council was, to his sorrow, due for RTA. The villagers expressed their sorrow at the parting. Addresses for future correspondence were exchanged and a farewell party was organised by the Village Chief. The party was held at the Chief's residence with tasty Vietnamese dishes filling the tables and the drink flowing freely. After the speeches the departing Council member was honoured by a Vietnamese custom by which the Chief showed his respect for the member by having him eat the head of the chicken, and his own humility by eating the feet.



After RTA the ex Council member heard that the Council remained in Dat Do for only a short period after the party and was moved to Hoa Long to try their hand at pacification in a more hostile village. However the result of their effort in Dat Do, if not far reaching, was at least self satisfying to the Council crew and they found that though weapons and force may win respect through fear, it takes kind words and a helping hand to win friends.

President's Report December 2017

Australian Unit Citation for Gallantry

The Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal (DHAAT) convened hearings in Brisbane, Sydney and Canberra between 30 October and 9 December 2017. I represented both the 1 FD SQN GP RAE Association as well as the overarching submission authored by myself and Jack Parr of 1RAR (an unsung hero of the Mortar Platoon 1RAR who were over-run on 13 May 1968).

The Tribunal was chaired by a senior public servant, and contained an Air Vice Marshall, an ex-RSM of the Army and a civilian lawyer. They were very open-minded about the facts of the Battles of FSPB Coral and Balmoral but have an issue with a couple of matters listed below. They allowed us ample time to present our case and asked some intelligent questions after each individual had said their piece (including telephone hookups). Every person presenting evidence to this Tribunal were asked to swear an oath of truth - either by affirmation or on the Bible - before we were allowed to speak. We each gave a personal opening statement and this was followed by questions from the members of the Tribunal.

The DHAAT will deliver their recommendations to the Minister for Defence Personnel, Mr Dan Tehan, and it will be up to the Government of the day to decide if all units involved in the Battle of FSPB Coral Balmoral will be awarded the Australian Unit Citation for Gallantry. This should be announced prior to the 50th anniversary of the battles on 13 May 2018. The issues that are proving to be complex matters to be resolved by the Tribunal are:

1. *The notion of "collective gallantry". They have any number of personal anecdotes in addition to our all-encompassing submission. However, their charter is to define and to describe (for the Government) the element of how every unit in the OP (26 days) particularly on 13, 16, 26, 28 May, the three bunker battles and the 57 contacts came together synergistically in an environment of extreme peril to deliver a fight that was 'above and beyond' that expected of a fighting force in the field. Our answering of their questions provided some of this but not all of it. Most of us stated that we all relied upon each other at both the individual level and between units. The Tribunal warmed to this approach. They were looking for a statement that said - if one of our units succumbed, then there was the very real possibility that we would all perish. Hence "collective gallantry".*
2. *The business of what constitutes a "unit". This is wrapped around our insistence that every unit at Coral-Balmoral should be recognised with the award of the UCG. The stumbling block was the associated logistic units as part of the TFMA FWD. There were parts of logistic units there - eg 10FP with its detachments of ammunition point/petroleum platoon/rations etc etc (bullets/bandages/beans/bodybags). We argued that even if a percentage of a unit/sub-unit was present, then that unit should receive the UCG. They wanted to hear that. But. The complication is "where do you draw the line in the sand?" If we were supported by HQ AFV in Saigon, then what about them? Our answer was that they would NOT be included - just the units/sub-units of those who were present at the*

Battles (for a part of, or for the full period of 26 days). The Tribunal could see our logic, but we could see that they had to get their heads around this thorny issue. It remains unresolved. It is the notion of "unit" that they are still trying to get a handle on when considering detachments and those groupings that are not easily identifiable as a 'unit' (the RAAF detachment at the FSCC eg).

The other element that the Tribunal might like to consider is our statement that it was the battle on 16 May 1968 that was the pivotal and most crucial battle. This where the whole of the TF (Fwd) and the TFMA (Fwd) plus several major units were on the ground when that attack by 141 NVA REGT (3 BNs +) was delivered. Had the NVA been successful on that day, the Australian presence in the Vietnam War would have been very tenuous indeed. It is our opinion that the Federal Government would have had a very hard time with the electorate and the anti-war movement given a 'free kick' at forcing us out of the war in May 1968. That it did not happen was down to the resilience of the troops on the ground and the over-whelming amount of air support and indirect fire support from the Americans. In the end, it came down to the 'No Surrender - No Retreat' attitude of every soldier on the ground including the perimeter units and the loggies in the middle. The ammo kept coming despite the incoming artillery etc. etc. etc.

50th Anniversary of the Battle of FSPB Coral Balmoral

The Canberra commemoration event will be conducted by DVA on Sunday 13 May 2018. This will take the form of a Commemorative Service at the National Vietnam Memorial on Anzac Parade commencing at 1030 am. There is no restriction on the number of people that can attend and will include members of all units that were involved in the battles of Coral and Balmoral and the general public.

The Service will be followed by a Lunch provided by DVA at the Canberra Convention Centre. Numbers for the lunch are restricted to veterans of Coral/Balmoral and one guest. Also included are Next of Kin of those killed at Coral/Balmoral and Widows/Partner of deceased Coral/Balmoral veterans.

Later that afternoon the Australian War Memorial (AWM) will conduct a special Last Post ceremony dedicated to Coral, commencing at approximately 4.50 pm.

I will send out an email to as many 1 FD SQN GP RAE Coral-Balmoral veterans as I have on my register asking them to send in their names for attendance and the free (DVA) lunch, plus one guest. I intend to organise a dinner on the evening of 13 May in a Canberra restaurant for those that would like to attend. More details to follow.

Battle Honours, Theatre Honours, Honour Titles and Honour Distinctions

In my last report for June 2017, I mentioned a project, based on the current Defence Instructions on Battle Honours etc, that might take several years to resolve, and possibly end up in failure. However, one-time opportunities rarely come our way and one did just that at the DHAAT hearing in Brisbane. The Director of Defence Honours and Awards was present and heard me give a verbal blast on my opinion of the DI on Honours etc.

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After a short meeting with the Director, she informed me that her team in Canberra was at work re-writing the DI. I seized the opportunity to offer some suggestions on the way forward and produced a 28 page paper and sent it off to her on 22 November 2017 (too big to reprint in this newsletter). I asked for comment on the draft paper from a number of veterans and their responses were superb. More in the next "Follow The Sapper".

Engineer Monument to WWI Sappers in France

This project is a work-in progress with the Corps Committee. However, the recommendation for a bridge is still up there and the logic behind the recommendation that the bridge be built in the City of Amiens (not Cerisy) is as follows:

1. Amiens is very Australian-friendly. They have Australian flags (plus UK and French) flying daily at the large train station in the heart of the City. They also have a number of murals painted on to buildings, as street art, of British and French soldiers including unmistakable Australian diggers depicted in various poses.
2. Amiens is criss-crossed with canals and waterways running through City parks and open areas. These waterways vary in span from one or two metres to ten metres in width. It would be an easy solution to build a bridge across such a waterway, in a conspicuous spot, as a symbol of Australian-French links and also as the official Australian Monument to all Australian Engineer (AE) units of WWI - (note that our Corps was not RAE until 1931);
3. Amiens is visited by numerous Australian tour groups and independent travellers every year. It is the start point for many tour group operators for Somme Valley battlefield tours. An AE Monument here would be a likely focal point on an organised tour or for independent travellers who are interested in Australian military history.
4. The Australian military attache team based in Paris has a regional HQ at Amiens and visits this city on a routine basis from its main office. This could provide an ongoing monitor and focus-point for French-Australian events commemorating WWI.
5. The Battle of Amiens opened on 8 August 1918. It is my opinion that had it not been for a successful operation on 8 August 1918, there would not have been an 11th of November. The Germans called 8 August 1918 their 'Swartz Tag' - their 'black day'. This day should be better recognised and celebrated as the beginning of the end of WWI. Today's Royal Australian Engineers, can provide that recognition because had it not been for bridges, roads and tracks, in my opinion, there would not have been the facility to maintain the momentum of the post 8 August operations to their final success on 11 November 1918.
6. We, engineers have a special reason for celebrating 8 August 1918. It was on this date that the only three citations for Sappers to receive the Victoria Cross in our Corps history was made. Two Sappers received the DCM and a 2/Lieutenant received the DSO as a result, but their actions were certainly deserving of the VC.

At the reunion in August 2017, the current OC 1 FD SQN made the suggestion that the bridge could be launched/set in place by a group of his Sappers. Time is running low for this project to be completed by 8 August 2018, however, we will pursue this matter with vigour.

Reunion 2019

At the AGM after the reunion in August 2017, it was decided by a majority of members that the reunion in 2019 would be conducted in exactly the same format as that in 2017. This is a meet and greet/registration on the Friday and Saturday, an afternoon memorial service on the Saturday, reunion dinner on the evening of Saturday, an AGM on Sunday morning followed by a lunch in the venue.

Christmas 2017

On behalf of every committee member, I wish you a very Happy Christmas and a healthy 2018. Be mindful of the extra care needed on the road, look after your health and give the one you love a big hug.

George Hulse
President 1 FD SQN GP RAE Association
December 2017

Just received this notice that our oldest Sapper from 1 FD SQN (WWII) turned 101 years young recently.



Congratulations To Our Fellow Sapper Lloyd Thomson. Well done on such a wonderful milestone. The pictures show the 'then' and the 'now' of young Lloyd.



1 FIELD SQUADRON GROUP

THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN ENGINEERS
QUEENSLAND INCORPORATED

(Including 1 Field Squadron Workshops and 21 Engineer Support Troop)

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(Family Name) Mr _____ (Given Names)

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Unit/Units _____ Which Country Served for? Australia or Other _____

Which duties? (F.E, Plant, Mine Clearing, etc.) _____

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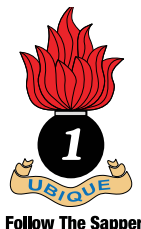
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To all our avid readers and fellow Sappers - I am sure you have some great photos and yarns that we would all enjoy reading. We want more content for "Follow the Sapper". Please, if you have stuff you are happy to share, pass it along to me.

My email address is dvsmith@ozemail.com.au.



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