



Greetings fellow Sappers and Friends.

1 FIELD SQUADRON GROUP
THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN ENGINEERS
QUEENSLAND INCORPORATED

... At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them.

Words we have heard and no doubt have spoken many times. This Armistice Day, this Remembrance Day though, has special significance as we are all well aware. This is the Centenary of the signing of the Armistice. One hundred years ago, the document was signed that brought the guns to silence. We have reflected on that momentous day when the German's signed the agreement to end the fighting. It happened in the railway carriage of Marshal Ferdinand Foch, located in the Forest of Compiègne which is about 60km north of Paris. The actual Treaty of Versailles was signed about 6 months later. Germany's war debt was in the order of \$35billion. No doubt that left Germany crippled and ripe for discontent. Globally the economies of many countries suffered. The German population was clearly vulnerable and bitter at the punishment imposed on it from the victors. So emerged Hitler. The Great War; the war to end all wars, saw another world war.

'FOLLOW THE SAPPER'

Webpage - www.1fieldsappers.org
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Ironically after Hitler and his army rolled over France, another 'agreement' or really surrender, was signed by the defeated France in 1940. That took place in the very same railway carriage; Foch's carriage, at Compiègne. Hitler sat in the very seat that Foch sat in back in 1918. He was making a clear statement and rubbing the Allies' noses in the mud. We know our history and the outcome. That was a war that had to be fought. Whether the 'war to end all wars' had to be fought is entirely another question.

* Engineers at work
Western Front

There is no doubt in this writers mind that there was nothing as horrid before and nothing to compare with since, that could possibly match the horror of the Western Front. Some may disagree. My Grandfather was at Gallipoli with the 5th Australian Light Horse. He survived. It must have been terrifying. My Dad was in 1st Australian Parachute Battalion in World War 2. I went to Vietnam. Could any of these experiences come close to the Western Front? The futile charges across 'no man's land', the cold, the mud, the gas, the death! We must NEVER forget the sacrifice of those thousands who did not return, of those who did return but who were physically and mentally scarred for the rest of their lives. And we must NEVER forget those of following conflicts. We honour them all at the going down of the sun and in the morning.



We must however continue to shine a light on the positives. The signing of the Armistice at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918, is one such light. Can any of us begin to imagine the relief, even perhaps joy, felt by all the nations involved in that terrible war – friends and foes alike. After all, back then as with now, service men and women simply did (and do) the bidding of their Government. Service men and women may not agree with Governments of the day, but they serve. LEST WE FORGET.



* One of the earliest Battalions to enter the trenches in France. Perhaps this was what they looked like when Armistice was announced.

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* Source, From the Australian Front, Cassell and Company Ltd, Melbourne 1917

Unit Citation for Gallantry Parade at 1 CER

4 and 5 October 2018



1 FD SQN was awarded the Unit Citation for Gallantry on 13 May 2018 for its contribution to the Battles of FSPB Coral and Balmoral, 12 May to 6 June 1968. This is the highest level of honour to

be bestowed on a unit that has performed extraordinary courage in the face of the enemy. The UCG is worn by every member who was present at the battles and includes a Federation Star in the middle of the UCG – this is a lifetime honour to be worn on the right breast. Members of the current-day 1 FD SQN receive the UCG albeit that it does not include the Federation Star, on the right breast of their uniforms. They receive the UCG on marching-in to the unit and then return it when they march-out. They may only wear the UCG while they are members of the unit.



On 4 October 2018, George Hulse presented the UCG to every member of 1 FD SQN on a special parade which was drawn up inside the 1CER flag station/wall of remembrance. Hulse spoke to every

member of the unit and paid special attention to the NCOs, the SSM WO2 Mark Everingham and the OC Major John Leathley reminding them that they, and their replacements, are the custodians of the reputation created by 1 FD SQN GP RAE during the Vietnam War. They needed no reminder of that fact but accepted the words with pride and respect for those who had served the unit in war.

The next day, 1CER paraded in ceremonial uniform for an official address by the Commander of the 1st Brigade, Brigadier Matthew Pearse AM. The 1CER parade was commanded by the Commanding Officer, LTCOL Barry Mulligan and his RSM WO1 Russell Perl. It is interesting to note that the COMD 1 BDE is from RAE and commanded a Combat Engineer Troop, 1 FD SQN and 1 CER during his career. The CO 1CER is an ex-Army Apprentice who has had a brilliant career as a soldier and clearly loves what he is doing. The Head of Corps, Brigadier David Wainwright DSC, was represented at the parade by the CO/CI SME, LTCOL David Evans and RSM WO1 Stephen Di Tulio. Very importantly, the dog section was on parade as was the unit mascot – a sand goanna.



The Sovereigns' Colour (The Corps 'Colours') was marched across the front of 1CER and then took its place in centre of the parade. The UCG Coral/Balmoral Streamer was conspicuous as it flew out in the breeze attached to the Crown on the flagstaff.

After the COMD inspected the troops, the Regiment conducted an 'Advance in Review Order' to the march of the Grenadier Guards, presented arms to the COMD and then marched the Colours off the parade ground. The unit marched off the parade ground and reassembled in the Reynolds Club boozers for some well-earned rehydration. It's interesting to note that 1 FD SQN was first to march onto the parade ground and last to march off. This was a poignant moment for the reputation of the combat engineer – first in and last out.



George Hulse

Vale - 1 FD SQN GP RAE members:

The following list is of our brothers who have marched out since our last newsletter.

WO2 Bob Tough	1 FD SQN GP 1970/71	Passed away 26th December 2017
SPR Geoffrey Milligan	21 SPT TP RAE 1968/69	Passed away 20th January 2018
SPR Clem Edwards	1 FD SQN GP 1970/71	Passed away April 2018
WO2 Bob Silk	1 FD SQN GP 1967/68	Passed away May 2018
SPR Max 'Doc' Livingstone	1 FD SQN GP 1965/66	Passed away 8th July 2018
WO2 Bill Unmeopa	3 FD TP RAE 1965/66	Passed away 11th July 2018
SPR Allan 'Blue' Rantall	1 FD SQN GP 1968/69	Passed away 29th July 2018
CPL Peter Carrodus	1 FD SQN GP 1968/69	Passed away 5th August 2018
SSGT Harry New (102 years old)	2/2 FD COY RAE 1939/45	Passed away 10th September 2018
WO2 'Henry' Young	1 FD SQN GP 1968	Passed away 16th September 2018



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We can all be justly proud of the achievements of those who participated in the battles of Coral and Balmoral. When I read the account that our President, George Hulse, provided and which I will build in part, into this edition, I am truly astounded by the chaos that must have prevailed at the fire bases. I am overwhelmed by the bravery, the heroism, the grit, that those who were there, displayed. They really did stick it to the enemy. And our unit; 1 Field Squadron, was there in the thick of it. Here below is the Unit Citation for Gallantry signed by our Governor General and Commander in Chief of our Defence Force, Sir Peter Cosgrove. The Citation was long overdue but so well earned. George's account will be included over the next couple of newsletters. Well done those men.



Governor-General of the
Commonwealth of Australia
and Commander-in-Chief
of the Defence Force

BE IT KNOWN that with the authority of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Second,
Queen of Australia, I have awarded the

UNIT CITATION for GALLANTRY

to

**1ST AUSTRALIAN TASK FORCE (FORWARD) which includes
Headquarters 1st Australian Task Force (Forward)
1st and 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment
A Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment
C Squadron, 1st Armoured Regiment
12th Field Regiment, Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery
1st Field Squadron, Royal Australian Engineers
Detachments in direct support of and located with
1st Australian Task Force (Forward)**

in recognition of acts of extraordinary gallantry in action

CITATION

*For extraordinary gallantry in action in the Binh Duong/Bien Hoa Provinces of South Vietnam
from 12 May 1968 to 6 June 1968, during Operation THOAN THANG.*

*GIVEN at Government House, Canberra
this fifteenth day of May 2018.*

By His Excellency's Command

Official Secretary to the Governor-General

The Battle of FPSB Coral and Balmoral - Part 1

Operation Toan Thang
12 May to 6 June 1968

11 May 1968

OC 1 FD SQN GP RAE, Major John Kemp, delivered his Operational Order to the command element of his unit at Nui Dat. In these orders he deployed a forward element of a SQN recon party and combat engineer splinter team plus a tracked tractor fitted with bulldozer and winch as a part of the fly-in on 12 May 1968 to FPSB Coral in support of HQ 1ATF (FWD), 1RAR, 3RAR and 12 FD REGT RAA. The main party would travel by road convoy from Nui Dat to an enormous US Army Logistics Base located at Long Binh near Saigon. The date for movement was 12 May 1968.

12 May 1968

1 FD SQN GP RAE deployed into Operation Toan Thang with a forward element arriving by helicopter at FPSB Coral on 12 May 1968. The SQN arrived at Long Binh late on 12 May 1968. Major Kemp reiterated his orders with the following priority of works:

- Dig-in TF HQ, the Fire Support Control Centre, and the TF RAP,
- Dig-in the HQ bunkers for the arms and supporting units,
- Construction of roads, tracks, HLZ and logistic hardstands,
- Wire-in the TF HQ area,
- Water supply,
- Provide combat engineer teams (CET) to the infantry units, splinter-teams to infantry patrols and mini-teams to the Armoured Corps units.
- Assist in the security of a portion of the perimeter of FPSB Coral.



Map 1

3RAR inserted two companies into FPSB Coral to secure the helicopter landing zones (HLZ) for the fly-in of 1RAR, 12 FD REGT (Artillery comprising 102 FD BTY (Australian) and 161 FD BTY (NZ), and the HQ 1ATF (FWD) plus advance parties of supporting units (such as 1 FD SQN GP). 1RAR inserted its Companies by helicopter and they immediately went off on their allocated Missions to search for and destroy the dispirited NVA.

Enter 'Mr Murphy' – you know the guy who says that "if anything can go wrong, it will, at the worst possible time". The helicopter insertion did not go to plan. It was confused, rushed and badly executed. The NZ guns arrived at the wrong time and were landed at the wrong place. The Australian guns were landed 1500 metres away (both BTY should have been co-located). The 1RAR Mortar Platoon arrived late in the afternoon and unintentionally placed on to a perimeter position of FPSB Coral. HQ 1RAR arrived and were met by an American Brigadier who told them. "You don't need to go looking for them, they will come looking for you" – that should have told us something, but it went unheeded.

The Gun Position Officer of 102 BTY, LT Ian Ahearn ('Scrubba') found fresh NVA diggings suitable for a PL close-by together with some evidence that the enemy platoon that had recently departed were well fed, organised and ready to fight. He passed that information up the line. It also went unheeded. 'Murphy' was chuckling.

13 May 1968

1 FD SQN GP departed Long Binh early on 13 May 1968 and formed a part of an extended 1 ATF convoy in-bound FPSB Coral. On arrival at FPSB Coral, Major Kemp was informed that there had been a significant engagement between 1RAR, the artillery and a large force of enemy troops but no detailed information was passed on at that time. Upon entering FPSB Coral it was obvious that a major engagement had been experienced by the Australian defenders. There was a line-up of Australian hutchies on the side of the road covering the bodies of the Australian KIA earlier that morning. Major Kemp received orders that his unit would revert immediately into its secondary role and occupy a perimeter position as an infantry company, dig-in like an infantry company and stand-by to fight like an infantry company. The priority of tasks would still be required in addition to the urgency of defending a significant portion of the fighting perimeter. 1 FD SQN came under command of HQ 1 ATF (FWD).

What happened earlier that day?

It all started to come unravelled on the afternoon of 12 May 1968. Every unit was briefed that the North Vietnamese Regular Army (NVA) were in a world of hurt after their hopeless attempt at capturing Saigon (the then Capital of South Vietnam). We Australians were told that their soldiers were wandering the countryside trying to get back to safe havens closer to the Cambodian border and that 1 ATF would mount a Brigade sized battle group and insert into an area where the NVA might best be interdicted and captured. These NVA were described as moving in small dispirited groups in the Area of Operations (AO Surfers) in which FPSB Coral was to be located.

NOTE: This was the first and only time since WWII that Australia mounted a Brigade Battle Group and inserted it into an Operation where the regular troops of another country were located.

The guns of 102 BTY were positioned where the helicopters landed them rather than where the gunners wanted them to be and the bulldozer operator, SPR Ted 'Territory' Stanton, did his best to bund up three of the six guns with an earth wall for their protection. Then he had to stop because it was getting dark and 'Stand To' was about to be called. 'Murphy' was rubbing his hands with glee. Darkness fell and night routines commenced. Three of the six guns were out in the open.

During the night, the infantry Companies came into contact with strong enemy patrols where artillery and mortar support was requested and fire missions delivered.

In the early hours of darkness on 13 May 1968 (Mother's Day in Australia) the NVA attacked FPSB Coral with a Battalion of regular army soldiers (not local force Viet Cong). Their Mission was to capture or destroy the six guns of 102 BTY. With flares, whistle blasts, bugle calls and a roar of exhilaration, the NVA swarmed toward 102 BTY in a human-wave attack and within a short time totally over-ran the 1RAR Mortar Platoon. The charge went on to the guns. No 6 Gun was captured – Number 2 gun received an RPG and had both front wheels hit and a hole punched through a gun trail – Number 1 gun had its ammunition bay hit and the ammo caught fire forcing the gunners away from the gun and obliging them to fight using their personal weapons until the fire subsided.

The Mortar Platoon Commander, LT Tony Jensen, ordered deadly fire on to his position and the Gun Position Officer of 102 BTY, LT 'Scrubba' Ahearn had to order his Gunners to fire Splintex rounds straight at their mates at point blank range. If this wasn't bad enough, the Gunners had to lower their barrels, load Splintex and fire at point blank range at the NVA who were swarming their position.

Every gunship that could fly, 'Spooky' and every gun and mortar that was in range was brought to bear on the assaulting NVA. By a miracle of survival, backed-up with the refusal by all the Australian diggers on the ground to neither surrender nor retreat, the NVA were forced back. Daylight arrived and the FSPB was still in Australian hands.

Read Scrubba Ahearn's account on this night's engagement in "Cannonball" Journal of The Royal Australian Historical Company. Number 84 of September 2012. ABN 66 084 470 539. Colonel I. F. Ahearn (Retd). As a result of exceptional good luck, LT Jensen gathered what was left of his Mortar Platoon and counted four diggers. He ordered them back to Nui Dat. But one digger, a NS PTE Jack Parr refused to leave. Jack was Tony's radio operator and he decided that he would stay for what they both knew would be bigger and more determined attacks on the Australians by the NVA. 1RAR replaced its mortar platoon and within three days it was ready to fight again as a potent fire support element.



US Army Duster

filled. Late in the afternoon, 161 BTY was airlifted out to FSPB Coogee and the SQN conducted an adjustment of its front line. Both forward Troops were tied-in but were very thin on the ground.

There were a number of adjusting moves before the SQN was in its permanently allocated fighting position. A check of the SQN's left and right extremities demonstrated that the FSPB perimeter was dangerously porous between the 2 TP left extremity and B COY 1RAR and 1 TP right extremity and D COY 1RAR. These vulnerabilities were reported to Major Kemp and he arranged for the 1RAR ASLT PNR PL to come under command 1 FD SQN and for a pair of 'Duster' anti-aircraft tanks to fill the eighty-metre gap between 1 TP/ASLT PNR PL and B COY. The positioning of the Dusters was to prove an invaluable fire platform in the near future. The gap between 1 TP and D COY was filled by the COMD 1 ATF sacrificing his entire D&E PL to fill that gap – another invaluable contribution to the defence of the base. Another unexpected sapper task was the slotting of a massed grave using a bulldozer and then assisting to police up the enemy KIA using the bucket of a FEL.

It was crystal clear, that the enemy were neither wandering nor dispirited. These were aggressive, well trained, well equipped and fearlessly led regular soldiers of the 7th NVA Division. 7 NVA DIV had a fierce reputation for aggressive fighting and we had set ourselves up about 7,000 metres from their HQ. They were going to destroy us for being so impertinent. FSPB Coral was an objective that was a potential target for annihilation (that word was in their principles of war - see 'Victory in Vietnam. Pribbenow & Hoang Van Thai et al. University Press of Kansas. 2002. p103 and p458'). 'Murphy' was having a field day with the Australians.

Every 1RAR COY was rushed back to the FSPB. D COY had to fix bayonets and charge a group of NVA so that they could get back to the FSPB. They were supported by a moving box pattern of artillery and mortar support in front of them.

A couple of hours later, the remainder of 1ATF arrived – mainly by road convoy – and were amazed at the sight that greeted them. Dead NVA lying about, shattered body parts, battle field detritus and some very tired looking Australian diggers. And a long row of Australian hutchies covering the Australian KIA lined up along the entry road into the base, waiting for evacuation by helicopter.

The SQN was allocated a perimeter position on each side of 161 BTY RNZA. The SQN disposition was two Troops up and One Troop in depth. The machines, equipment and HQ were quickly slotted into the ground by the bulldozers. 21 SPT TP was allocated water supply duties and conducted recons for water sources. Excavation of deep holes for the priority of works commenced and sandbags were hurriedly

14 May 1968

The SQN allocated a number of combat engineer teams (CET) to the infantry companies. A CET consisted of a JNCO and six Sappers. The CET could be broken down into three 'Splinter Teams' each of two Sappers. There were 'Mini-Teams' allocated to the Armour. A mini-team consisted of two Sappers. The combat load for a combat engineer included the usual infantry combat load and in addition, an electronic mine detector (a couple per Section), 5 Kgs of HE, 20 metres of detcord, a box of detonators, 3 metres of safety fuze, a 9mm pistol, a tunnel torch and a mine prodder (usually a bayonet).

By the end of 14 May 1968 all major HQ were dug in albeit overhead cover was not completed, wiring work was almost finished around HQ 1 ATF and some wire spread on the perimeter. The main HLZ was opened but there was a frustration with denial of permission to use the wrecked remains of French villas as road base. Quarries were not only too far away, but their yield was insufficient to provide a useful quantity of road material. The road plan was scaled back to minor maintenance only.

The water supply sources produced insufficient yield to satisfy the water demand from all the 1 ATF units and so water was trucked in by jerrican as well as air-lifted in by helicopter in mobile bladders.

Contacts between 1RAR patrols and the enemy were heard many times over and were clearly large-scale violent clashes requiring armour, artillery, mortar and airborne ground attack missions to support the ground troops.

... continued on page 8



Clearing and construction at Coral



Dozer at work at Coral

President's Report November 2018

Engineer Monument to WWI Sappers in France

I visited Amiens (France) on 8 August 2018 and maintained the momentum for the idea with our French friends. They have nominated a project manager who has assured me that the bridge will go ahead. There is no time line for this project and we await the advice of the Amiens City project manager. The RAE HOC, Brigadier David Wainwright DSC is interested in the 1 FD SQN GP RAE Association project and is supportive of it. Financial backing for the idea will be another challenge, but we will move into that space when we have solid estimates of the financial requirement to work with.

The French project manager sent a long brief supporting two bridge sites in the Botanical Gardens in the heart of Amiens. They are wet gaps of approximately 25 metres each with the invitation for us (Australians) to choose one of them – or both if we want. The suggested bridge design is that of a single/single Class 3 Standard Width Bailey Bridge and further to that, a suggestion that it be launched by current-day combat engineers from RAE. This is still in proposal status but it does have traction in both Australia and France. I will visit Amiens in December 2018 and walk the ground, get some technical specifications and report back to our HOC for his consideration. The HOC has mentioned that he intends to raise this matter at the next Corps Committee Meeting.

We have also made contact with the Amiens (Queensland) historical group under Professor Roger Willis who have constructed an excellent memorial to the soldier-settlers who returned from WWI and were given land for farming. We have the idea of building a bridge in Amiens (Queensland) that is the same as the one in Amiens (France) – should the project go ahead. More to follow.

Reunion 2019

Our reunion for 23/24/25 August 2019 at Tweed Heads is set to be a meeting of celebration as well as remembering our lost brothers. We will be celebrating the UCG for our Sappers who served at the battles of FSPB Coral and Balmoral, promoting a Dr to the rank of Sapper, and meeting with our mates from past and present conflicts. The format will be similar to previous memorial services and the President will arrange for the Band and other administrative services to be present on 24 August 2019.

The UCG was posted to our members through the standard mail system and there was no hand-shake or 'well-done' offered to the recipients. We need to make sure that our 1 FD SQN GP RAE recipients wear their UCG with the pride and dignity it deserves. Come along and help make that happen by giving a 'goodonyamate' to them.

Dr Leonie Jones was instrumental in donating a shedload of time and effort in the production of videos supporting our campaign for the UCG. She is also an internationally celebrated documentary publisher of a wealth of other subjects. Her video on FSPB Coral in the 1990s went viral around the world and has been a source of reference about the Australian Army's involvement in the Vietnam War. OC 1 FD SQN, Major John Leathley has donated a pair of Sappers slides and arranged for a Certificate of Promotion bearing the Chief of

Army's seal. The President will acquire a DPCU shirt of Leonie's size for her to wear at the reunion dinner and Leonie will be promoted during the dinner scheduled for the evening of 24 August 2019.

Please come along and help celebrate the UCG as well as the promotion of Dr Jones to the rank of Sapper.

Website

The Association website is about to receive a much-needed update. Will let you know when this task has been completed – or you can tap into our website and see for yourself – www.1fieldsappers.org

New Computer for the Association

The Association has applied for a Grant from DVA to help us buy a new computer. The next round of Grants is expected to be announced early in 2019.

Committee

I thank every member of our committee for their support and ongoing interest in this Association for 2018 and again into 2019. The support of these volunteers ensures that the Association will go forward with alacrity and determination. I congratulate Jim Weston and Robin Farrell for their excellent handover/takeover of the Treasurer's position. In conformance with the Queensland Law, the Secretary must reside within Queensland or a very short distance from Queensland's borders – the incoming Secretary is George Hulse who now wears the dual hats of Secretary/President. However, please keep all correspondence going to Jim Weston at his address given in this newsletter.

Christmas 2018

On behalf of every member of our committee I extend the warmest greetings to all members for a Happy, Safe, Healthy and enjoyable Christmas and New Year. Drive safely into 2019 and I hope to catch up with you at the reunion in August.

Follow The Sapper



George Hulse
President 1 FD SQN GP RAE Association
23 November 2018

This email from the outgoing OC of 1 FD SQN

Morning George, I hope you are well.

As promised, please find attached the final product of the photographs of the UCG parade in Canberra, the Sqn UCG and Regt UCG parade in Darwin. This will remain in the Sqn forever and act as a reminder for the new and young soldiers who are privileged to be a part of the Sqn and will also act as a reminder of their predecessors – I hope you and the association like it.

Myself and 4 SPRs returned from a Counter IED exchange in India with the Indian Army last week. It was a great experience for all involved. The SPR performed to an excellent standard and were held in very high regard for their skills, professionalism and pride.

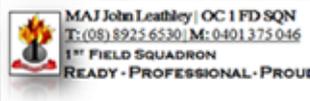
I am in my last 2 weeks of the job, I depart the Sqn and Darwin on 23 Nov bound for Canberra. It has been a wonderful experience being part of a Sqn with such rich, important and proud history. I have thoroughly enjoyed the experience of commanding such high performing soldiers, SNCOs, Warrants and Officers.

The Sqn is in good hands, the men and women of 1 Fd will continue to work hard as always, remain ready, professional and be proud they belong to the best Sqn in the RAE.

The incoming OC is MAJ Simon Young (0422 580 280), the incoming SSM is WO2 Jo Macklan (0417 238 133). I have included your details and the association in my hand over.

It has been a privilege getting to know you, your efforts in the campaign for the UCG, the men of Coral and Balmoral and the association have been inspirational. I hope when my time comes to depart Army, I can follow in your footsteps.

I will keep in touch
Regards



The Unit Citation for Gallantry for the Battle of FSPB Coral and Balmoral

The UCG has been well reported in previous issues of Follow The Sapper. The personalities involved in this three-year campaign were:

- *Brigadier Neil Weekes AM MC (passed away during the campaign). Neil commanded 3 PL A COY on 16 May 1968.*
- *Major Gary 'Pepe' Prendergast. Platoon Commander B COY 1RAR. Pepe passed away during the campaign.*
- *LCPL Jack Parr. Jack was the Mortar Platoon digger who refused to go back to Nui Dat after the 13 May disaster on his platoon. Jack became the lynch pin of the campaign after we lost Neil and Pepe.*
- *LTCOL George Hulse. Commanded 1 TP 1 FD SQN GP RAE.*
- *Dr Leonie Jones. Produced any number of professionally executed videos and documentaries on FSPB Coral Balmoral.*



The framed UCG Citation and images of the Parade October 2018

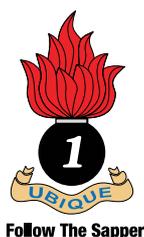
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15 May 1968

All HQ were finished and overhead protection 80% completed. Contacts with the enemy continued close to the base. The SQN area consolidated into its defence posture and the two US Army Dusters positioned themselves in the gap between 1 TP and B COY 1RAR.

16 May 1968

In the early morning darkness of 16 May 1968, the NVA bombarded FSPB Coral with mortars, RPG, RCL. Heavy machine guns and automatic rifle fire. 141 NVA REGT with three battalions of infantry and supporting elements attacked A COY 1RAR. They penetrated 3 PL forcing them back and capturing the forward weapon pits. The human-wave attacks invested the A COY position and things looked very grim for them. Every form of support for A COY was called in. Mortars, 105mm guns, 155mm guns 175mm guns, eight inch guns, napalm, Cobra and Huey gunships, Spooky, and any other form of fire that could be brought to bear. The huge shells were landed within 25 metres of the 1RAR position. The attack on A COY waned, but the incoming continued. 141 NVA REGT was far from finished yet. There was a gap between A COY and C COY and the NVA tried to rush it. They were met with overwhelming indirect fire. When this attempt by the NVA failed, there was a brief quiet period. The assault re-commenced with a concentrated attack by the NVA on C COY, D COY and B COY. At the same time, probing attacks were received by the D&E PL and 1 FD SQN GP. The attack on C, D and B COY faltered and another relatively quiet period followed.

About 15 minutes later a green flare went up from the NVA and two NVA heavy machine guns fired across the 1 FD SQN GP area followed by bugle calls, whistles, shouts and screams from the NVA as they attacked 1 FD SQN GP. The NVA infantry had formed up into their assault formation just 100 metres to the front of the SQN without detection. They rose as one and swarmed toward us. The two Dusters opened fire and the effect of the flak bursting at waist height tore into the forward ranks of the charging enemy causing instant and numerous casualties.

Those NVA who were not affected by the Dusters continued forward adopting a fire and movement tactic. The assaulting NVA infantry were firing high as they advanced and very little of their fire actually impacted on the Sappers in their weapon pits. The 1 FD SQN GP machine guns were also firing high and required some concerted orders from the command elements to adjust their fire. The machine guns ran out of ammunition and an urgent second line resupply was delivered in the middle of incoming enemy machine gun, small arms, rocket (RPG7), recoilless rifle and 60mm mortar fire. Two artillery DF Missions were registered – one each for the two forward Troops. Both were fired at least two times during the melee. The enemy rotated their attack against the D&E PL and attempted to penetrate that sector of the perimeter. All NVA attacks on the engineers and D&E PL failed and they withdrew. By now it was daylight and we could see them dragging many of their dead and wounded away as they left the area. See Map 2.

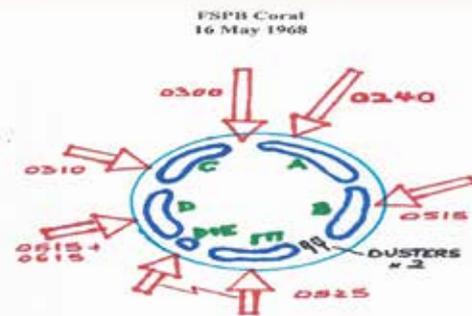
1 FD SQN did not suffer a single KIA during these attacks but scored a number of WIA. Many of the WIA went back to their pit to help their mate after treatment in the Command Post. The worst hit was a serious fragmentation wound and was evacuated under fire. An ASLT PNR digger was seriously WIA and evacuated under fire. After the NVA withdrew it was well into daylight and after a short respite, the SQN was involved with battlefield clearance, bulldozers were used to dig a massed grave and a front-end loader used to convey bodies and body parts to the massed grave. The remainder of 16 May was dedicated to repair of roads, re-establish the main HLZ, urgent attention to the completion of overhead protection to the HQ 1 ATF CP, the FSCC, RAP cum Casualty Clearance Centre and combat support to the infantry and armoured units.

17 May 1968

Because the NVA had successfully approached 1ATF units closely immediately prior to their attacks, the engineers were tasked to create clear lanes through the scrub and old rubber plantation to increase the visual distance as far as possible. The bulldozers cleared low scrub and small trees out to a visual distance as much as 200 metres. For example: the visual distance in the 1 TP location in rubber trees prior to the land-clearing was 25 metres in daylight. This increased to 100 metres by night.

The bulldozer operators reported that their growser bars (tracks) were picking up battlefield detritus and human body parts out to the limit of their push. This indicates that the losses to the NVA were significantly higher than the official count at the grave sites. This is supported by the numerous drag marks and blood trails leading away from the base seen on 17 May.

The SQN continued with consolidation of its area on the perimeter with re-siting some weapon pits and further protection of the plant, equipment, stores dump and ammunition point.



Map 2

18 May to 23 May 1968

Normal duties – infantry role by night and combat engineer/ construction and maintenance work by day. The Centurion Tanks arrived 23 May 1968. Contacts and fire support strikes against the NVA continued unabated throughout this period.

25 May 1968

1 FD SQN GP supported B COY with a CET and 2 TP C SQN (Centurion Tanks) with a mini-team for the move to FSPB Balmoral. 2 x CET were despatched to 3RAR at their new FSPB Balmoral. NOTE: FSPB Balmoral was deliberately established very close to the HQ of 7 NVA DIV. It was a provocative tactical move by the Australians to dare the NVA to come and fight on a battlefield of Australian choice. The idea worked and the Australians did not have to wait very long before the action happened.

B COY and tanks engage NVA force in bunkers en-route to FSPB Balmoral. No significant damage reported on NVA bunker system – B COY and tanks disengaged and continued to FSPB Balmoral. However, the position of this large and well sited enemy bunker system was reported to HQ 1 ATF.

26 May 1968

In the early morning darkness of 26 May, FSPB Balmoral was attacked by an NVA battalion of 165 NVA REGT concentrating on a penetration of the D COY position. The Centurion tanks used night vision devices to pinpoint the areas where the NVA attackers were concentrating in their human-wave assault toward the Australians and then switching on the white light searchlights exposed the enemy to blinding light providing an excellent aiming reference for the 3RAR machine gunners.

Each of the four tanks had a day position (out of sight of the NVA) and a night position on the perimeter that was occupied after it became dark. The NVA attack was unsuccessful but exposed two vulnerable points to the front of D COY. 1 FD SQN GP was tasked to lay two protective minefields to the front of D COY 3RAR in an attempt to minimise the effects of the vulnerable points. *See Map 2.*

D COY 1RAR with 1 TP C SQN (Tanks) supported by a CET for D COY and a mini-team with 1 TP C SQN attacked the bunker system discovered by B COY during their road escort of 2 TP C SQN to Balmoral on 25 May 1968. The engagement lasted for about three hours with some NVA bunkers destroyed, but no significant intrusion by our forces into the NVA defensive position. There were no Australian casualties in this engagement.

27 May 1968

Two protective minefields were laid by 1 FD SQN to the front of D COY 3RAR. The aim was to provide early warning of attack, inflict some delay on the assault units and channel the attackers out into the open area in front of D COY.

28 May 1968

Using their characteristic early morning darkness pattern of attack, the NVA attacked FSPB Balmoral with two battalions of infantry. The left forward minefield was penetrated by the NVA but did not inflict a delay on the attacking infantry. They just barged straight through it, accepted the casualties and continued with their characteristic human-wave swarming attack toward D COY 3RAR. The right forward minefield appeared to have been dealt with by the NVA engineers at the point when their attack commenced and it is doubted that any effect on the NVA was achieved with this minefield. *See Map 3.*

The NVA attack on 3RAR on 28 May 1968 failed and they withdrew after suffering heavy casualties.

30 May 1968

C COY 1RAR supported by 2 TP 3 CAV REGT (with an engineer mini-team) encounter a bunker system close to FSPB Coral and were pinned down. C COY took a number of casualties and the NVA came out of the bunker system and began encircling the Australians. C COY tightened its all-round defence but were in a tactically untenable situation. Tanks and more Cavalry were rushed forward to assist C COY extricate from the engagement. They did this successfully and returned to FSPB Coral. The NVA bunker system was extensive and well protected. There was no attempt made by the Australians to destroy it after the NVA withdrew despite heavy losses to the NVA both in the bunker system and by indirect fire when an Artillery spotter aircraft rained down mortars and artillery on fleeing enemy who were trying to relocate to another position.

31 May 1968

NVA mortar and rocket attack on FSPB Coral mainly in the HQ 1ATF area. Little damage inflicted and minor repairs were effected by 1 FD SQN quickly. The 1 FD SQN position is reinforced by B COY 1RAR covering the area vacated by the 1RAR ASLT PNR PL.

1 to 5 June 1968

Normal maintenance duties delivered by the SQN without contact with the enemy. Patrol activity by infantry and armoured units continue without contact. 1 FD SQN tasked with preparing for denial operations when the TF units abandoned the FSPB on 6 June 1968.

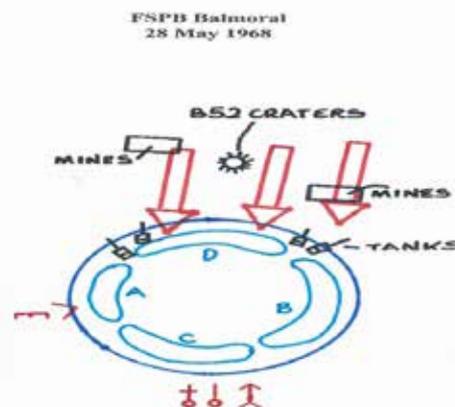
6 June 1968

1 FD SQN heavily engaged on demolition of all major HQ unit CP, filling large field fortifications with earth, recovering barbed wire, decommissioning water points, destroying sand bags with plant (bulldozers and front-end loaders) and generally ensuring that nothing of any military use was left behind for the NVA.

The SQN mounted a convoy using borrowed heavy plant lift vehicles from the US Corps of Engineers and returned to Nui Dat by road. It was the biggest road convoy of the SQN during its time in the Vietnam War.

Historical Notes

FSPB Coral was the first and only occasion in the history of the Corps of Royal Australian Engineers where a complete Australian engineer unit was deployed into its secondary role for the full operation and where the unit defended a segment of the fighting perimeter during a series of determined enemy infantry ground attacks in the Combat Zone.



Map 3

Operation Toan Thang ran from 12 May to 6 June 1968. Based on two infantry battalions, this operation was supported by at least two-thirds of the Australian combat units based at Nui Dat and numerous detachments from the Australian Logistic Support Group (ALSG) based at Vung Tau. It was a unique operation. This was the one and only time that an Australian Brigade Battle Group had been assembled since the end of WWII. Operation Toan Thang was the first and only combat deployment, in the history of the Royal Australian Engineers, where an Australian engineer Group was deployed as an integral part of an Australian Brigade Battle Group. It was the first time that infantry and tanks had cooperated in joint assault operations since the Bougainville Campaign of WWII.

Some Statistics:

Australian KIA-----	26
Australian WIA-----	102
NZ WIA-----	3
US Army WIA-----	4
NVA (Body Count)-----	247

NOTE: This is an inaccurate record. When CPL Ben Roberts-Smith VC MG visited Vietnam in 2013 and spoke to the commanders of 7 NVA DIV, they put the figure at closer to 800 KIA (+) and at least three times that many WIA. After the battles of Coral Balmoral, 7 NVA DIV withdrew from Vietnam altogether and relocated in Cambodia to refit and reinforce. The area close to where FSPB Coral was located contains a site where the Vietnamese Government has erected a Monument to their lost soldiers of the Vietnam War – a very rare phenomenon that might indicate what happened there in 1968.

Lest We Forget. Ubique
George Hulse
22 November 2018





1 Field Squadron Group
 Royal Australian Engineers Qld Inc.
 23rd, 24th & 25th August 2019
2019 FAMILY REUNION REGISTRATION FORM
 Venue: Twin Towns Services Club – Tweed Heads NSW

Personal Details

Family Name: _____ Contact Phone: () _____

First Name: _____ E-mail Address _____ @ _____

Postal Address: _____ State: _____ Postcode: _____

'Nickname' or

Preferred Name: _____ Partners Name: _____
(Required for ID Tags at Reunion) (Required for ID Tags at Reunion)

Other guests attending - Number (_____) Preferred guests names: _____
It is preferred by the Executive Committee that all Members Guests are over the age of 18 years.

Cost of Events

Cost: \$175.00 per person.

Covers all events, Friday Meet and Greet, including Saturday Memorial Service,
 Saturday Evening Family Reunion Banquet and Sunday Luncheon.

Payment Details

Please accept my Registration for:

Number attending: _____ Amount: \$ _____

Method of Payment: Cheque. Money Order. Direct Deposit into account.

When making a Direct Deposit, ensure you mark it **'Reunion'** and then your **'Family Name'**
 Heritage Building Society: **BSB 638-070. Account No: 10045570.**

Amount enclosed: \$ _____

Make cheques, money orders payable to: **1 Fd Sqn Gp RAE Qld Inc.**

All registrations to be pre-paid by Friday the 9th August 2019

(This is a huge catering event. Much goes on behind the scenes, therefore
'No Late Numbers will be taken—DEFINITELY.')

Please send this Registration Form to:
 2019 Reunion Treasurer
 1 FD Sqn Gp RAE Qld Inc.
 P O Box 236 Raymond Terrace NSW 2324
 e-mail: info@1fieldsappers.org

DONATION FORM

AMOUNT: _____ Receipt required: Yes
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NAME: _____

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QUEENSLAND INCORPORATED

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Surname Ms _____ First Names _____
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Date of Birth _____ Wife/Partners Name _____
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Private Phone () _____ Email _____ @ _____
(Confidential if ticked) (Confidential if ticked)

Veteren's Service Details or other appropriate information. (If possible)

Name _____ Service No. _____

Period of Service: From ____/____/____ To ____/____/____ Active Service: Yes NO

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

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

Membership Year is 1st July to 30th June in each year. Fees are accepted until 30th September, in accordance with the Association's Constitution. Unfinancial members will not be able to vote at the Annual General Meeting.

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TOTAL \$ 40.00

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Direct Deposit to Heritage Bank BSB 638-070 Account 10045570 with your details.

Ensure you mark it, 'Membership' and then your 'Surname' or 'Regimental Number' for identification.

IF YOU USE THE DIRECT DEPOSIT FACILITY PLEASE FORWARD THIS FORM AS WELL. NO CASH IN MAIL PLEASE.



And what the Editor wrote in his diary on 11 November 1969:

I had a near miss today. Got hold of a .45 pistol for \$25. The armourer was showing me how to strip and assemble. Stuck a full mag on and cocked the weapon. I told him to be careful and he said 'no sweat' then pulled the trigger. Shit!!! We managed to dodge a bullet literally but got away with it. I kept the round as a souvenir. Big lesson learned.

That was my 'remembrance day in 1969.

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