



# HOLDFAST

DECEMBER 2005

NUMBER 5

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE VIETNAM TUNNEL RATS ASSOCIATION INC

## Return Visit for the Tunnel Rats?

There's renewed talk amongst the Tunnel Rats of a trip back to Vietnam as a group. Some of us have already been back individually or with a few mates, and everyone who has made the journey has thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

The suggestion is that we make the trip as a Tunnel Rats group, restricted to those who served in one of the Field Troops in Vietnam (3 Field Troop, or 1, 2 or 3 Troop of 1 Field Squadron). No exceptions.

We already have indications that special tours, just for us, can be organised for the Cu Chi tunnels, the tunnels at Long Phouc, and also into the Long Hai's (bring your own flack jacket and helmet!).

Roughly, the plan is we'd arrive in Saigon, stay for two nights (during which the Cu Chi trip would be made), then move to Vung Tau by hydrofoil up the Saigon River. We'd stay in Vungers for five nights, during which time we'd visit all the key places including Nui Dat, the Horseshoe and the minefield site, the Long Hai's, Long Phouc Tunnels, Long Tan, and various villages that were familiar to us. We'd then return to Saigon for two further nights before heading back to the world.

The important thing on trips like this is to stick together as a group rather than break off into little sub-groups. To promote this we'd organise a bus large enough to carry us all, plus we'd all stay in



*ABOVE: View from a chopper, with Vung Tau back beach bottom right, town and front beach middle, front, and looming ominously in the background, the infamous Long Hai Mountains.*

the same hotels and most dinners and lunches could be organised. There'd still be plenty of free time for those who want to explore the delights of Vungers or Saigon.

At this stage we're just fishing for levels of interest, then we can cost it up and give accurate pricing before anyone commits.

So, if you'd like to explore the idea of heading back to the funny farm with a bunch of fellow Tunnel Rats, let us know.

Write, phone or email Jim Marett (see contact details on the back page) and give us an indication. There is some debate also on whether this would be a "boys only" trip, just like our first posting there, or whether wives or partners would join us. Let us know what you think.

A warning to the residents of Saigon and Vungers: - Lock up your daughters, restrain your dogs, put your valuables in safe places and chill the beer, the Sappers are coming back.

### Membership renewals

It's over a year since we started taking members. The first lot of membership renewals will be posted out shortly. Unfortunately our system was a bit basic at first so we don't have exact dates on when some people joined (we've since fixed this up). So if you receive a renewal notice and you feel it's a bit early, let us know and we'll adjust the records. Or, if you're feeling generous, pay up anyway. Newly issued cards now have the date of issue on them, and they still provide that 15% discount at the Peter Badcoe Club in Vungers!

# 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



## An Idol Moment

Sapper Jim Trower inspects a carved wooden idol found in April 1968 while he was with a Splinter Team attached to 2RAR during Operation Cooktown Orchid in the foothills of the Long Hai mountains. The carving was found while searching ruins in the area which had earlier been occupied by the Viet Cong.



## All dressed up and nowhere to go

Two seriously pissed-off Sappers at Camp Alpha, Saigon. Sapper "Blue" Rantall of 1 Troop and Sapper Brian Sheehan of 2 Troop have got as far as Saigon on their way to R&R in Hong Kong - and so far nobody has issued them with any pay. Worried that they may not be able to afford the Temple Tours they so looked forward to, the boys are naturally peeved. The cash eventually arrived.



## "Follow me"

Sapper Jock Quinn of 1 Troop humps through the boonies in the heat of the day. Jock was on Operations in the sandy scrub area of Phuoc Tuy, close to the coast near Long Phuoc Hai.



### Rocket Men

Sappers Craig Cornell and Bill Jones, both of 3 Troop 1 Field Squadron carry two Chinese-made 122mm rockets captured during operations with 9RAR. Craig and Bill later destroyed the rockets, along with other captured weapons and equipment. The 122's were inaccurate but packed a punch.



### Bangalore Torpedo

Sapper Ian Lauder of 3 Troop proudly displays a Viet Cong-made Bangalore Torpedo. Packed with explosives, this device was used to breach an opening in wire entanglements surrounding base camps. If one of these went off you knew you could expect some VC visitors pretty soon afterwards!



### Ready to roll

Two Sappers from 1 Troop get ready to go out bush on operations with the Infantry for a while. It was 1967 and Sappers Norm Hedge and Eric Thompson were heading for 1 Troop's stores hut to pick up their supply of rations, explosives, ammunition and other essential gear.



### Beep Beep!

Corporal Darryl Binns, a Tunnel Rat with 3 Troop, 1 Field Squadron listens for signals on his mine detector. Darryl was on an operation in 1970, in an area of Phuoc Tuy Province notorious for mine incidents. Old shrapnel in the area created many "false" readings that had to be looked at.



### Brad wimps out to SAS

Sapper Brad Hannaford did a tour with 2 Troop 1 Field Squadron in 69/70, then came back for a second tour, this time with SAS. Seen here in 1971 in the Ho Tram Cape area on his SAS tour, Brad is with a ten-man fighting ambush patrol, preparing a night lay up point (LUP). Go for it Brad!



## Moving Experience

On Operation "Ainslie" Sappers Les Carruthers and John Todd search for mines and booby traps left by the Viet Cong at Xa Bang Village. The September 1967 operation was aimed at moving the villagers to a more secure settlement.



## Outrageous boast by 3 Troop

At some point in 1971 this sign was erected by 3 Troop, stating: "Through this arch pass the greatest FE's in the world". We can only assume they were referring to when 1 or 2 Troop lads were visiting. It's amazing this sign wasn't blown to bits by a 1 or 2 Troop Sapper.



## Saved by the Sappers

Lance Corporal Peter Ash (left) and Sapper Ian Biddolph, both of 1 Field Squadron chat with villagers from Binh Ba in August 1966. The village had just been cleared of Viet Cong infiltrators during Operation "Holdsworthy" conducted by 5 RAR north of Nui Dat. Peter and Ian were attached to 5 RAR for the Op.



## Two of the original Tunnel Rats

Here's a piece of history- two of the original Tunnel Rats who served with 3 Field troop in Vietnam during 1965-66: Lance Corporal J. Sutton and Sapper Les Colmer. They were on radio watch while out with 1 RAR in the Vo Dat area during Operation "New Life". On this operation they worked closely with United States Engineers. It was 3 Field Troop who searched the famous tunnels of Cu Chi during Operation crimp. This was a massive tunnel complex, and the troops had to move on before it could be fully searched. However they uncovered hordes of enemy weapons and documents, and for the first time gained a glimpse of the extent of these underground complexes.



### Sappers on a charge

Sappers John Schofield (left) and Brian Peters setting up a charge on an unexploded RPG round. It was August 1971, and the Sappers were utilising a generous amount of C4 plastic explosive to do the job.



### My God - the Hoa-Long "Stomp" was real!

It was a great scam tried on almost every REO. Bewildered and confused on arrival in Vietnam, they were told to muster at 6pm in dress uniform for transport to the Hoa-Long "Stomp". Instead of a night of cultural exchange, they were the butt of a great joke. But can anyone explain this photo, which seems to be promoting the event?



### Dave's Pest Control System

Corporal Dave Wilson served with 3 Troop in 1971, and somehow managed to end up with a pet snake. It did keep the rats and mice out of his tent, but unfortunately not many Sappers were willing to go in there either.



### Shame File - stop this man!

Trevor Shelley (seen above in the Gold Coast Marathon) is busily destroying the reputation of Vietnam Vets as fat slobs. Trevor was a Tunnel Rat with 1 Troop in 1966/67. He now lives in Brisbane, works in PNG and runs regular marathons.

# Black Saturday

A successful 8 RAR ambush on February 15th 1970 triggered Operation Hammersley, an incursion into the Long Hai Mountains that led to "Black Saturday", February 28th, a day on which there were 35 Australian casualties, including 7 Tunnel Rats from 3 Troop.



On February 15, 9 Platoon, C Company, 8 RAR left Fire Support Base (FSB) Isa to conduct an area ambush, a routine security operation that would escalate into a battalion-sized assault on the VC headquarters complex and a major disaster for the Australians.

Though 8 RAR had only been in-country a few months, 9 Platoon, headed up by 2 Lt Peter Lauder, was experienced in the art of ambushing having successfully hit the VC hard several times already, and they were well equipped for it. Instead of the usual three sections built around a single M-60 machine gun each, 9 Platoon was reorganised into two heavy sections, each with two M-60s for a total of four guns. The plan was to ambush a rough clearing in the fire break that had been created earlier by land clearing teams to deny the VC concealment as they moved into and out of the Long Hai's.

The ambush position was on the other side of the Long Hai's from FSB Isa, but Centurion tanks were able to deliver 9 Platoon to within 500 metres of the objective.



*TOP: After three days of action, 8 RAR and the Sappers from 3 Troop withdraw from the Long Hai's to await the B-52 strike*

*ABOVE: Sapper Paul Scott, a Tunnel Rat from 3 Troop cleans his rifle before the 18th Feb assault on the Long Hai's*

The entire region was peppered with anti-personnel and anti-tank mines, which was why the Australian Task Force had resisted going in there for some time.

A team of two Tunnel Rats from 3 Troop were attached to 9 Platoon, and their first task was to clear a safe path from the point where the tanks would drop them off. Using the mine detector in shifts to maintain alertness, it was a slow process for the Sappers, and it took the afternoon and all that night to cover the 500 metres into the ambush site. The Platoon had little experience with mines, so they were all extremely alert and cautious. Nobody moved or touched anything that hadn't been cleared by the sappers.

Unusually, because of the high probability of mines in the area, helmets and flak jackets were worn on this ambush and the subsequent Operation

“Hammersley”. They were hot and heavy, and the flack jackets stank, but the benefits outweighed the bitching and everyone wore them.

The killing zone for the ambush was a small hill overlooking the fire break trail that ran for most of the length of the Long Hai's. Fire lanes were established for the M-60s, banks of Claymore mines linked with det cord covered the zone with fragmentation, and extra firepower was placed on the flanks in case of any VC counter ambush drills.

While the ambush team was moving to its night time ambush position, one of the gun pits signalled that they had seen enemy - it was a very large group of VC and NVA, and it couldn't have entered the killing ground at a worse time.

The two Tunnel Rats from 3 Troop were just working their way back from the killing ground after arming all the Claymores for the night ambush, when the enemy appeared. With these sappers still out in the danger area, and half the platoon unaware of the enemy's presence, the ambush was suddenly looking very untidy.

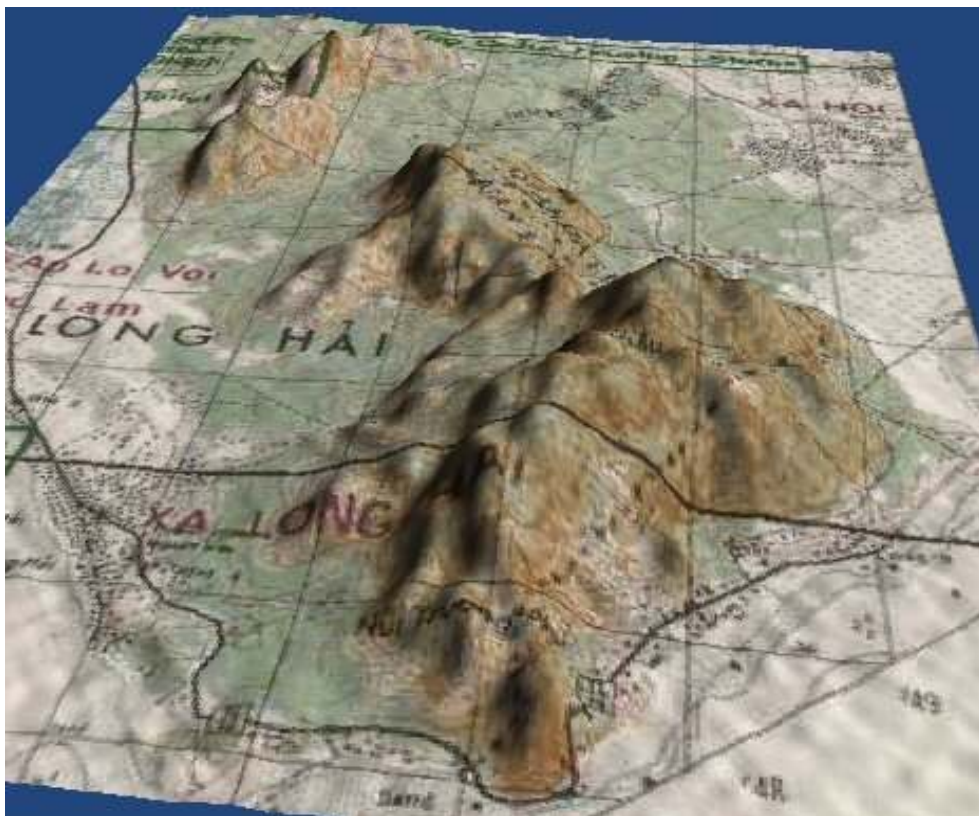
The enemy forward element was let through, and the main command group was in the middle of the killing ground when they began to see movement amongst the Aussies

Tex Weston of 9 Platoon and the Lieutenant were in the initiation pit, grappling with this problem compounded by the fact that the Sappers had naturally disconnected the 'clackers' (hand held firing devices) for the Claymore mines before they began re-positioning them for the night ambush.

Tex eventually found and then

*TOP: The infamous Long Hai Mountains, peppered with mines, enemy caves, bunkers and tunnels.*

*BOTTOM: 8 RAR troops with Sappers from 3 Troop tread carefully through the hills on Operation Hammersley*





*TOP: Tex Weston of 9 Platoon, 8RAR, who triggered the initial ambush  
ABOVE: On the 18th Feb assault into the Long Hai's, Private John Sandry of C Company, 8 RAR clammers through the rocks in his flak jacket and helmet*

reconnected the four Claymore clackers, then set them off, initiating the ambush with a blast of 15 claymores pushing thousands of ball bearings into the killing zone.

Unfortunately for the Australians, there were 60 to 80 NVA who weren't in the killing ground at this stage, and they hooked around in an immediate assault with machine guns, RPGs and AKs. The fire-fight



*ABOVE: The nine-man team of Tunnel Rats from 2 Troop brought into Operation Hammersley to assist the 3 Troop Sappers attached to 8 RAR. (Left to right: Cpl Frank Brady, Spr Bob Smith, Cpl Ash, Spr Peter Scott, SSM Janvrin, Spr "Ba Ba" Lamb, Spr "Grumpy" Foster, Spr Mick Van Poeteren, and Spr Brad Hannaford*

continued for five hours, with the Australians outnumbered five to one, and relatively isolated, but putting out a massive amount of controlled fire. In the fading light the VC could be seen running amongst the bodies in the killing ground and all through the night they could be heard dragging the bodies out.

Back at Company HQ at FSB ISA, in reaction to the radio reports from the growing fire-fight, the balance of the battalion and its supporting armour were drawn into the Long Hai's.

Centurion Tanks carried 8 Platoon out to relieve 9 Platoon, and after dropping them off, they swept through the killing ground with their search lights on, firing splintex into the enemy positions.

Miraculously, none of the Aussies was seriously injured. Five 9 Platoon men were slightly wounded as was one of the Tunnel Rats from the two-man team who had spent the night fighting like infantrymen. The Platoon, including the two Tunnel Rats was officially credited with 34 enemy KIA for the action.

There was obviously a lot of enemy activity in these hills and by early morning the entire 8th Battalion was

on its way to the Long Hai's.

9 Platoon's impressive body count had now stirred up a new 8 RAR Operation, code-named Hammersley, with B Company ambushing likely escape routes, while C and D Companies pushed into the Long Hai's on APCs and tanks with the aim of destroying the NLF units or driving them into B Company's ambushes.

More Tunnel Rats were now added to the operation as well, to cope with the expected mines, tunnels, bunkers and caves. More two-man teams from 3 Troop were attached to the 8 RAR Companies and Platoons and an additional nine-man Combat Team of Tunnel Rats from 2 Troop was assembled and also attached to 8 RAR.

Charlie Company was tasked to assault the D445 HQ complex within the Minh Dam Secret Zone, with the tanks of 2 Troop A Squadron 1st Armoured Regt and the APCs of 3 Troop B Squadron 3 Cav Regt in support. Many M-16 "Jumping Jack" anti-personnel mines were laid to protect D445's HQ, but because Charlie Company was mounted in APCs, the mines were exploding harmlessly (but noisily) under the vehicles.



As the C Company column approached the D445 HQ bunker complex, enemy fire erupted from every direction. The lead APC, carrying company headquarters took a direct hit from a rocket propelled grenade and burst into flames. The APC commander and the driver were killed, and the five member C Company HQ team were alive, but badly wounded.

The contact intensified, with massive enemy fire forcing the Aussies back from the burning APC, but finally the five wounded were recovered by Lance Corporal Coe of 8 RAR and Corporal Macey of 3 Cav, (both awarded Military Medals for their bravery). The action was so intense that while they were extracting the casualties, the enemy were trying to get the .50 cal machine gun off the top of the APC.

C Company and the attached Sappers from 3 Troop had pulled up right in the middle of the enemy bunker system and were under fire from what appeared to be all sides. It was obvious that the APCs would have to withdraw.

After pulling back to regroup for another assault, 8 RAR watched artillery and air strikes pound the positions before returning to the bunker complex the next day.

By the evening of Feb 18, three companies of 8 RAR were locked in the Long Hai's and poised to make a co-ordinated attack on the remaining pockets of NVA/VC resistance at first light next morning. Then the entirely unexpected happened - everyone was withdrawn a couple of kilometres while they put a B-52 bomber strike down on the entire area.

On re-entering the main HQ area, the Aussies found underground hospitals, caches of weapons, and hundreds of bunkers. The Tunnel Rats searched and destroyed these bunkers and caches over the next ten days. With the constant threat of mines and booby traps, it was an intense period of action for the Sappers.



*TOP: On the 18th of February 1970, Sapper Colin Heley of 3 Troop clammers out of a cave in the Long Hai mountains after finding a cache of rocket-propelled grenades while attached to 8RAR during Operation Hammersley. BOTTOM: Just some of the many enemy weapons found during the operation*

When Alpha Company joined the Long Hai action February 21st, the entire battalion had now been drawn into the heavily mined area that the 1 ATF had so assiduously avoided for so long. A steady stream of killed or captured VC was still coming from various actions in the bunker systems, and through ambushes, but luck was running out for the Infantry and Sappers on Operation Hammersley.

On the 18th a "friendly fire" incident saw an APC crew open fire on Bravo Company, wounding 10 men.

With hundreds of personnel now operating in an area peppered with mines, it was bound to happen, and on February 28 it did.

Alpha Company's 1 Platoon, was heading into an ambush position and had an attached two-man Tunnel Rat team with a mine detector to clear the route as they moved. They followed the path cleared by the Tunnel Rats, stopping every 80 to 100 paces to allow the Sappers time to rest.

An M-16 "Jumping Jack" mine



*TOP: An APC from 3 Cav after it hit an anti-tank mine on 25th February 1970 while supporting 8RAR on Operation Hammersley  
ABOVE: Commanding Officer 8 RAR Lt Col K. O'Neill accepts the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry Citation from ARVN Lt Gen Do Cao Tri for the Battalion's efforts in the Long Hai's during 1970.*

### The 7 Tunnel Rats from 3 Troop killed or wounded by mines on "Black Saturday", 28th February 1970



Sapper R.N. Hubble

Rank	Name	Age	Cas	Location
Sapper	R.N. Hubble	19	KIA	Long Hai's
Sapper	E.T. Baker	29	WIA	Long Hai's
Sapper	T.R. Binney	20	WIA	Long Hai's
Sapper	J.M. Harrison	25	WIA	Long Hai's
Sapper	D.J. Jensen	22	WIA	Long Hai's
Sapper	J.A. Miller	24	WIA	Long Hai's
Sapper	M.T. Nevins	20	WIA	Long Hai's

with a grenade anti-lifting device was found and the Sappers were tasked to destroy it. As the Tunnel Rats moved to do the job, they detonated the mine.

There were seven dead (including one of the Engineers) and thirteen wounded (including the other Engineer), some very seriously.

Bringing help was agonizingly slow. The few survivors had to use their bayonets to clear safe paths to their wounded mates ever conscious that a careless move could bring more destruction on themselves and those already wounded.

A safe path was cleared to an LZ for dust-off of the wounded and arrival of assistance.

First to arrive was another Tunnel Rat team and the A Company medic. They were led along the cleared path to the platoon where the medic started working on the wounded.

One of the Infantry was looking up at the helicopter, helping guide it in, when he stepped back, slightly out of the cleared safe area and stood on another M-16 mine, killing himself and wounding another Infantryman. The blast also damaged the helicopter and wounded the Tunnel Rat suspended under it on the winch.

For the rest of the day the survivors, and the Tunnel Rats and medical personnel brought in to assist, assembled the casualties for helicopter evacuation, cleaned up the area and prepared to depart.

On this single horrific day of Operation Hammersley, a total of nine Australians were killed and 24 were wounded.

Among these casualties were seven Tunnel Rats from 3 Troop, including Sapper R. N. Hubble who was killed in action, and six other Sappers who were wounded in action. It was a "Black Saturday" indeed.

# March under our banner in your city

The Tunnel Rats did a unique job in Vietnam. We worked with APC's and tanks, but the thing that really sets us aside is the fact that we were attached to Infantry, went bush with them, patrolled with them, fought with them - and then on top of all that, we performed our specialist tasks of searching for, and dealing with mines and booby traps, searching and blowing up enemy bunkers and tunnels, plus of course the odd unexploded bomb.

This is something we're extremely proud of, and rightly so.

In Melbourne the Tunnel Rats have discovered that one of the greatest expressions of that pride is to march under our own Tunnel Rats Banner. Next ANZAC Day will be the third time they've marched, and each year the numbers grow and the chests swell further with pride. The TV commentators each year have had special comment to make about the Tunnel Rats and their tasks in Vietnam.

Previously we've all marched with a combined Engineers group in each city, and this has been fine, but over the years there has been a creeping tendency for these combined groups to call themselves Tunnel Rats, either publicly on their banners or simply amongst themselves.

Cutting straight to the chase, they don't have a right to that title. That title rests firmly, and only with the men who served in the Field Troops (3 Field Troop and 1, 2 & 3 Troop of 1 Field Squadron). To march under a banner branding yourself a Tunnel Rat when your job was nothing of the sort dilutes the Tunnel Rat's special role in the eye of the public.

They don't have a right to do that.

The best solution to the "confusion" already built up over the years, is to stand up and be counted under our own banner. March in a group restricted to those who served in the above units.



*Our first ANZAC Day March in Melbourne, 2004*



If you feel you'd like to organise marching under the Vietnam Tunnel Rats Association banner in your city, contact us and we'll do everything we can to assist. We have the artwork needed to produce the banner, but you'll need to raise the money to have the banner made locally (or we can have it made in Melbourne if you wish).

The cost in Melbourne was about \$600 including the poles, the leather carrying straps and a storage bag. You may be able to have it made cheaper in your city. The companies that make them are usually the flag makers such as Evan Evans who produced the banner in Melbourne.

If ten of you can get together in a city, you'll need to put in \$60 bucks each. This can be reduced to \$30 bucks each if you can muster 20 blokes. Or run a raffle, or hit your local RSL for the loot. We can assist with any application if required, to gain permission to march as a new group in the ANZAC March in your city.

If you are interested, contact Jim Marett by mail, email or phone:

Email: [tunnelrat@optusnet.com.au](mailto:tunnelrat@optusnet.com.au)  
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 43 Heyington Place  
 Toorak Vic 3142

## Sapper Snippets

### Rule number one - never volunteer for anything



Volunteering for anything in Vietnam meant you'd end up doing something stupid or dangerous. When volunteers were called for helicopter familiarization demos in 1967, these Sappers forgot the golden rule. (Top left): Sapper Murray Walker being winched up in a casualty cage. (Bottom left): Sappers Dave McGlinn, Murray Walker and Dave Cook alight the chopper after the demo. (Below): Sapper Dave McGlinn being winched up on a rope - SAS-style!



**"I think we'll have to wait till the dry season arrives!"**



Two Sappers were attached to each Troop of tanks in Vietnam, and in the wet season the Sappers soon discovered that some days you spent more time getting out of bogs than actually moving. This tank of 1 Troop, B Squadron, 1 Armoured Regiment is sunk "to the gunnels" and isn't going anywhere until help arrives in the form of a recovery vehicle. It was 1969 in the Long Greens at the base of the Long Hai Mountains.

## A Viet Cong battle casualty ward out bush

Any Viet Cong wounded in battle did it pretty rough. In many cases, Viet Cong wounded were left behind, but if they did manage to walk or be carried away, it was a long trek to any medical facility.

If they were still alive when they got there, the facilities were basic at best. The extraordinary photo (right) from the enemy archives gives us a glimpse of the dreadful conditions. The chances of infection were high, and the chances of recovery were relatively low for serious wounds.

It was very comforting for Aussie soldiers to know that if you were wounded, you'd be in a state-of-the-art air-conditioned hospital within an hour or less.

The medical evacuation "Dust Off" chopper pilots and their crew were truly angels in the sky. And you soon learnt that the hospital was staffed by the best doctors and nurses in the world.

It was often said that wounded Viet Cong were left behind because they knew the Australians and Americans would evacuate them and treat their wounds till they were recovered. The VC would then escape and return to their VC units.



## The RSM Factory

For some unexplained reason, 2 Troop 1 Field Squadron in Vietnam was also a prolific breeding ground for Regimental Sergeant Majors for SME (School of Military Engineering). Pictured right are Bevan Percival (former Troop Sergeant, 2 Troop 69/70) and Bob Smith (former Sapper with 2 Troop 69/70). This was on the night Bob took over from Bevan as RSM at SME. Another former 2 Troop Sapper, Les Shelley (69/70) also became RSM of SME. Bob Smith is pictured below (left) with Brad Hannaford in a tunnel complex in Vietnam on 8RAR's Operation Hammersley.



“WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR DADDY?”

# Beaucoup Bunkers!

In our continuing series covering the weird and wonderful things we did in Vietnam, this issue we look at the searching and demolition of enemy bunkers, one of the key tasks carried out by the Tunnel Rats when on operations with the Infantry



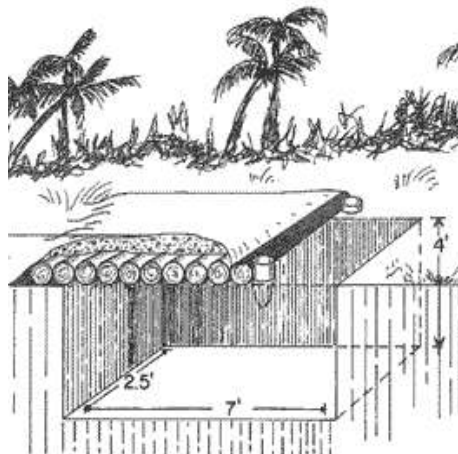
*ABOVE: Pistol and bayonet in hand, Sapper Peter Scott emerges from an enemy bunker while on operations with 7 RAR*

The Australian forces in Vietnam utilised a technique of constantly patrolling to find and destroy the enemy. This patrolling generally involved following signs of the enemy's movement, eventually leading to their base camp. This base camp was invariably a bunker system.

Two Tunnel Rats from one of the Field Troops were attached to each Company of Infantry, and patrolled with them for the full four to six weeks. These two-man teams were called “Splinter Teams” (or “Mini Teams” if they were carrying a mine detector).

Once the bunker systems were found, the Tunnel Rat skills of the Sappers would be employed. The bunker systems varied in size and complexity from three or four bunkers, to a complex of 30 or more bunkers, with some being interconnected with tunnels or trenches. The average bunker was 6 ft x 8ft and about 5ft deep, plus 3ft of overhead protection OHP). The OHP consisted of logs with earth

packed around them. The outside of the roof was covered in packed earth and camouflaged with reed matting or leaves. There were sometimes two entrances into each bunker, enabling rapid entry or exit if required. The soil in the region was perfect for the purpose. Straight walls with sharp corners could be created, without crumbling or falling away of the soil. After a relatively short time, the walls of the bunkers “seasoned” and in many cases looked remarkably like concrete



*ABOVE: One-man fighting pit, found in larger bunker systems*

rather than the red laterite clay in which they were created.

Sometimes the bunker systems were defended, sometimes they were empty of enemy. On many occasions the enemy had just left, leaving behind still-warm food and lots of valuable documents.

If the enemy defended the bunkers, the Aussies often called in support. They had plenty to chose from. Jets could drop bombs or napalm.

Helicopter gunships could be called in to blitz the system with rockets, 40mm grenades and a storm of gunfire from their mini-guns.

Artillery and mortars could be called in from the nearest Fire Support Base, but the troops would have to pull back to a safer distance if these were employed - sometimes giving



the enemy the chance to slip away.

The tanks could also be called in, but they were slow-moving through the jungle, so they needed to be relatively nearby to be employed. Tanks were superb in bunker assaults, with their massive firepower and intimidating size and noise. Once these boys entered the fray the VC quickly and invariably decided to was time to “ditty mau” (disappear or go away).

After the supporting fire, and if return fire from the enemy had ceased, it was time for the Infantry and the sappers to make an initial sweep through the bunker system. As they walked through the system on full alert, they usually threw grenades into each of the bunkers. This was great for the Tunnel Rats because apart from flushing out any enemy, it also got rid of the bats and spiders they'd otherwise confront when it came time to search the bunkers.

After the initial sweep, the Infantry would form an all round defensive position around the perimeter of the bunker system. The Company or Platoon HQ would set up in the

middle of the position. While the Infantry provided security by guarding the perimeter, and the Tunnel Rats now went to work.

First task was to establish how many bunkers there were, and call in for a helicopter delivery of enough extra explosives if they were required. These would be dropped in if no suitable landing zone was



*ABOVE: 1968: While Sappers search the bunkers, these Infantry relax and dine at a VC table*

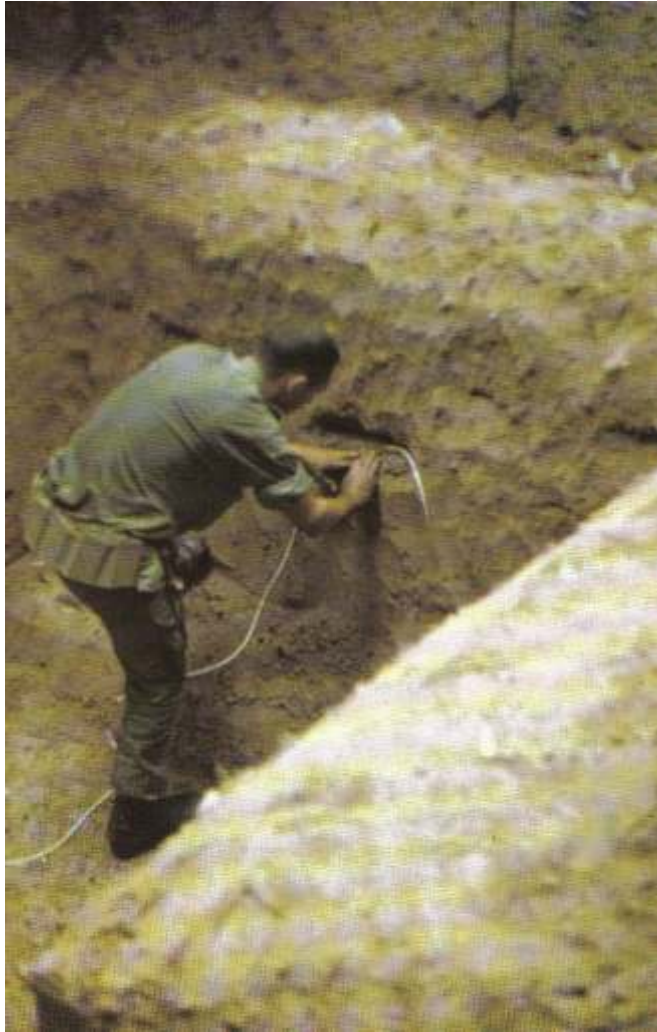
*ABOVE: Corporal Derwyn Hage (left), a Tunnel Rat with 1 Field Squadron shows Syd Webster (D Company CSM, 9RAR) documents found in bunkers during Operation Goodwood on January 15th 1969*

nearby. Some of the Infantry were visibly shaken at the sight of boxes of C4 explosives tumbling towards them out of a hovering helicopter! It was perfectly safe, as long as no detonators were included in the same drop.

The main task for the Tunnel Rats was to search the bunkers and then set them up for demolition. Before entering each bunker, he'd carefully check for mines or booby traps. The most common forms used by the VC were mines in the track close to the bunker entrance or grenades connected to trip wires in the opening leading down into the bunker.

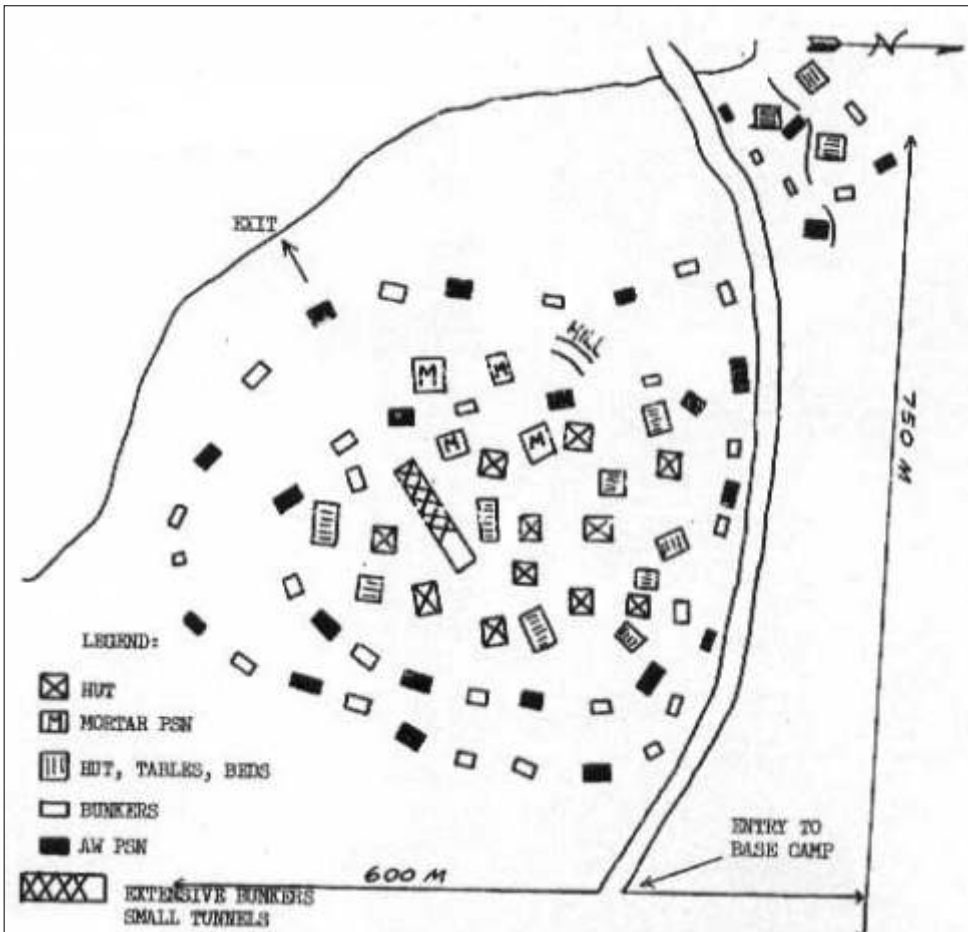
Next task was to search for enemy weapons, documents and stores, and at the same time see if there were hidden trapdoors leading to tunnels or additional rooms.

There were varying amounts of stuff



*RIGHT: A Tunnel Rat from 1 Troop, 1 Field Squadron places a plastic explosive charge into one of the walls of a bunker - the white "Det Cord" connects all of the charges in the whole demolition job.*

*BELOW: Sketch of an enemy base camp, comprising bunkers, fighting pits, small tunnels, huts and other facilities*



left behind, depending on how rapidly the VC vacated the base camp. It was a unique experience to see and sift through the enemy's stuff. It really brought it home that they were real and they were out living in the bush, just like we were.

In addition to booby traps, the bunkers held other surprises. Bats roosted there during the day, along with snakes and spiders. Lots of them.

One species was a bit like Australia's Daddy Long Legs, but with a much bigger body. There were so many, they sometimes covered the entire inside roof like a carpet and as you moved, they moved in a wave, giving off a chilling rustling sound.

The occasional pig, or porcupine, or armadillo was encountered, usually resulting in a one-sided shooting match and a desperate dash for freedom by the animal and you.

And firing your pistol down there was a dilemma it just about busted your ear drums you couldn't hear for hours.

The other dilemma was using your torch you had to, but it made you a perfect target.

Once searched and cleared of any documents and weapons, the next task for the Tunnel Rats was to set up the demolition charges that would destroy the entire system.

Each bunker was individually set up, then all the bunkers were linked by "Det Cord" to form a single ring charge, with one ignition point.

Slots were dug into each interior wall, about mid-way between the



roof and the floor. A slab of C4 was placed in each of these slots and a slab of C4 was placed on each end of the main beam supporting the roof on opposing sides, to “spin” the beam and cause maximum damage to the structure. All of these charges inside the bunker were linked with “Det Cord”, which in turn was connected to the main ring charge line of “Det Cord”.

Once it was all set up, it was time for the Infantry to move off. As the last of the Infantry left, the Sappers would light the fuse and walk away, catching up quickly with the rest of the patrol.

The length of fuse determined the time before the explosion went off, and depending on the terrain (how far away you could walk in the time), the fuse usually burnt for five to ten minutes. Waiting for the big bang was always an exciting and anxious time, and it was incredibly satisfying to watch the dirt, logs and debris hurled into the sky.

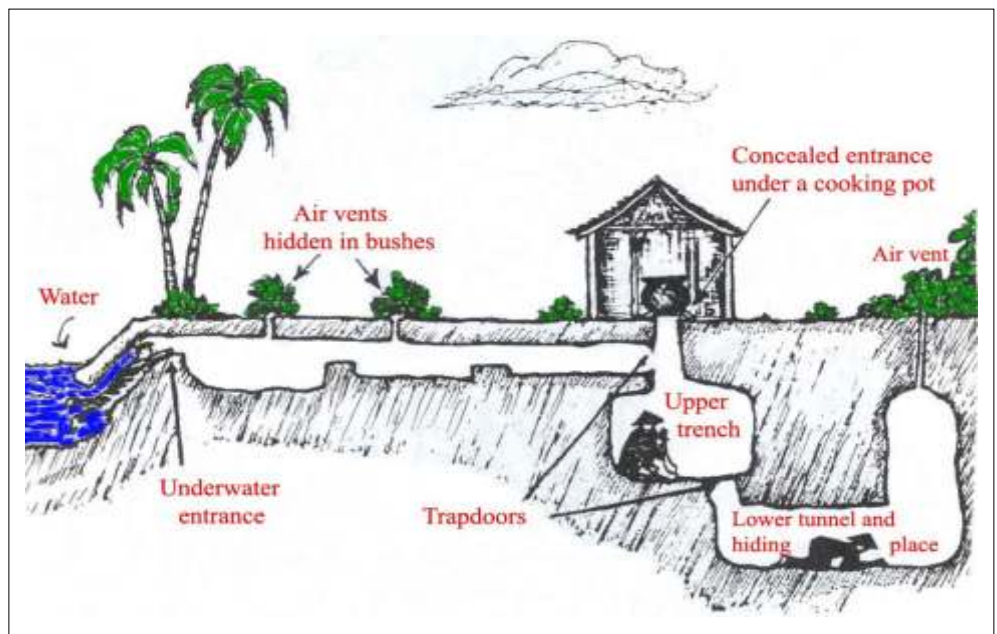
It was typical for a two-man Tunnel Rat team to search and destroy in excess of 100 bunkers on a single four to six-week long operation.

Beaucoup Boom Boom!

*TOP: Sappers Ian Pitt (left), and Ralph Schaefer, both of 2 Troop, move “Det Cord” and C4 plastic explosives into an enemy bunker during Operation Long Tan with 7 RAR in June 1970.*

*MIDDLE: Small tunnel systems, designed for hiding or escape were often found in the larger enemy bunker systems. This tunnel provided two levels of hiding spots and allowed escape to a nearby creek*

*BOTTOM: “Into the unknown”. A typical VC bunker entrance, showing the overhead protection. These entrances were always carefully checked for trip-wires and other forms of booby traps*



# A Piece of 1 Field Squadron History

This original minefield map, signed by Captain G.J. Moon of 1 Fld Sqn on 20th May 1967, details a total of 9,920 anti-personnel mines laid, all fitted with M26 anti-lift devices. This fascinating document from Australia's involvement in Vietnam came into our hands from a source who wishes to remain anonymous!

SECRET (WHEN COMPLETED)

## MINEFIELD RECORD

AF-W 4  
Number of  
strips 3  
SHEET 02

1 FIELD SQN R.A.E. LAYING UNIT      20 MAY 1967      COMPLETION DATE AND TIME      G. J. MOON      CAPT      342155      OFFICER-IN-CHARGE      RANK      SERIAL NO)      59      MINEFIELD NUMBER

LANDMARKS			INTERMEDIATE MARKERS		
No	CO-ORDINATES	DESCRIPTION	No	DESCRIPTION	
1	YS 471516	LONG HILL 1015 - CRIST	1	Well YS 49455870	
2	YS 49256646	BACK # CONCRETE GATE POST - NORTH 4 RW 20	2	SW CORNER NEST HOUSE YS 49455878	
3			3		
4			4		

DESCRIPTION OF BOUNDARY FENCE: TYPE 2

No OF STRIPS: 3      DESCRIPTION OF STRIP MARKERS: 19" STEEL PICKET FLUSH

LANES			MINES (IF LAID)		
No	WIDTH	HOW MARKED	TYPE	TYPE	TYPE
1		NIL	No	No	No
2					
3					

MAP SHEET Pictomap Supplement      NAME 6429 1 N      SCALE 1:25000

SHEET No 6429 1 N      RECORDER 215570 Lt J. CAZEY

**NOTES**

Detailed report attached as Appendix 1.

STRIP	ANTI-TANK MINES						ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES				
	TYPE	TYPE	TYPE	TYPE	TOTAL A T MINES	BOOBY TRAPPED	TYPE	TYPE	TYPE	TYPE	TOTAL A PERS MINES
TOTAL (LESS 100)	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
IDE											60
A											3368
B			NIL								3292
C											3200
D											
E											
F											

Total 9,920 all with M26 anti-lift devices

LAI D      BAND  
(BY HAND OR MECHANICALLY)      (BY HAND OR MECHANICALLY)

SECRET (WHEN COMPLETED)

# More Tunnel Rats found

Here's our updated list of former Tunnel Rats from 1 Field Squadron RAE, Vietnam 1965-71.

If you can help with names and numbers, please contact our "Master of The List", Graeme Gartside on 08 8725 2845, or by mail to Graeme Gartside, 9 Park Street Mt Gambier SA 5290 or by email: [hawthorn@anson.com.au](mailto:hawthorn@anson.com.au)

## 3 Field Troop (1965-66)

Alan Tugwell 08 8552 5229  
Keith Mills 07 4770 7267  
Les Colmer 08 8087 3817  
Ray Forster 07 3409 1907  
Barry Harford 08 8088 4371  
Wilfred Eyles 02 4390 0150  
Bill Corby 07 5502 1193  
Snow Wilson Jnr 02 6649 3998  
Des Evans 07 5486 3886  
Warren Murray 03 5728 3341  
Ian Biddolph 02 4472 9434  
Bernie Pollard 08 9248 3178  
Peter Ash 02 6771 4623

## OC's 1 Field Squadron

John Kemp 02 6288 3428  
Rex Rowe 02 4861 6324

## 1 Troop (1966-67)

Ron Rockliffe 02 9789 4302  
Trevor Shelley 0419784954  
John Thompson 0732168906  
Barry Kelly 07 4661 2898  
Ken Jolley 02 6624 4066  
Mick George 02 6882 8574  
Cul Hart 02 4392 0912  
Kevin Smith 03 9787 1506

## 1 Troop (1967-68)

Alan Rantall 03 9434 2031  
Clive Pearsall 03 9459 4470  
Brett Nolen 03 5278 9969  
Bob Coleman 03 5342 0941  
Peter Sheehan 03 9390 2834  
Peter Koch 04 3822 3100  
Phil (Jonah) Jones 07 3390 1130  
Ray Kenny 07 3881 3648

## 1 Troop (1968-69)

Colin Spies 07 4743 4676  
Garry Von Stanke 08 8725 5648  
George Hulse 07 3399 7659  
David Wright 03 9435 4131  
Ken Wheatley 07 4774 0045  
Bob Wooley 03 6264 1485  
Peter Carrodus 02 9759 6383  
Phil Baxter 02 4625 6213  
Ken Ford 02 6645 2738

## 1 Troop (1969-70)

Terry Gleeson 03 5623 2886  
Larry Batze 07 4033 2025  
Jon Fuller 02 4774 1674  
Garry Degering 03 9763 0510  
Paul Cook 02 4946 5321  
Trevor Kelly 08 9538 1184  
Les Slater 08 9361 0603

## 1 Troop (1970-71)

Peter Krause 02 6723 2835  
Jim Weston 02 4987 7179  
Ian Cambell 03 9870 0313  
Mick Augustus 07 3205 7401  
Barry Meldrum 03 5427 1162  
Garry Sutcliffe 07 4684 3229  
John Pritchard 02 9626 3376

## 2 Troop (1966 1967)

Richard Beck 07 3208 5808  
David Buring 02 6254 6689  
Ron Cain 02 6586 1412  
Graeme Carey 02 6056 0997  
Stan Shepherd 07 5523 2157  
Mick Shannon 08 8552 1746  
Ken McCann 03 5985 3276  
Bill Harrigan 08 9447 1127  
Bob Sweeney 08 9248 4432  
Rod McClennan 07 3267 6907  
Peter Matthews 03 6250 3686  
Peter Hegarty 07 4169 0372  
Bob McKinnon 07 3267 0310  
Noel McDuffie (Silent number)

## 2 Troop (1967 1968)

Peter Fontanini 08 9301 0805  
David Matulik 07 4055 1915  
Harry Cooling 07 4778 2013  
Peter Perry 08 9756 7780  
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  
Ron Johnston 07 3351 1609  
Ray Kenny 07 3881 3648  
Andrew Rogers 08 8087 5671  
Stephen McHenry 08 9344 6939  
Warren McBurnie 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  
Eric McKerrow (Silent number)

## 2 Troop (1968 1969)

David Pannach Overseas  
(Hong Kong 0011 852 9646 4131)  
Peter Clayton 0418 823 266  
Bill Morris 08 9384 2686  
Robert Earl 02 4990 3601  
Stan Golubenko 03 9361 2721  
Don Nicholls 02 9579 4126  
Peter Laws 02 4942 8131  
Rick Martin 02 6928 4253  
Colin Norris 02 4627 1180  
Ray Vanderheiden 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 Claassen 07 3273 6701  
Bud Lewis 07 3881 1230  
Darryl 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)

Bob Smith 07 5442 9322  
Dennis Wilson 08 8892 2671

David Brook 03 9546 2868  
Colin Redacliff 02 9673 0597  
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)

Mick Rasmussen 0428 790 645  
Denis Crawford 03 9497 3256  
"Sam" Collins 08 8262 6107  
Bob Hamblin 08 8672 3930  
Butch Marsden 08 9921 6183  
Graham Besford 03 9439 2661  
Des Evans 07 4128 2390  
Jock Coutts 08 9279 1946  
Keith Burley 07 5543 0990  
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  
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 Lost contact  
Ray Fulton 03 6288 1176  
Graeme Pengelly 03 5345 2397  
Bruce Arrow 02 6288 3872  
John Stonehouse Lost contact  
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 (1966-67)

Ray Forster 07 3409 1907

## 3 Troop (1967-68)

Barry Gilbert 03 5023 6657  
Les Colmer 08 8087 3817  
Bob Embrey 07 3351 1222  
Bob Yewen 07 5532 4560  
Mick Woodhams 08 9459 0130  
"Jonah" Jones 07 3390 1130  
Bruce Breddin 07 5591 3202  
Bob Coleman 03 5342 0941  
Frank Sweeney 07 3205 4161  
Chuck Bonzas 08 9330 3490  
Viv Morgan 02 9331 3252  
Barrie Morgan 0419 820 290  
David Clark 08 8388 7728  
Jack Lawson 0429 798 673  
Murray Walker 08 9364 2829  
Tom Simons 03 6344 6058  
Norm Cairns 03 6267 4629  
Peter MacDonald 08 9448 5418  
Peter Perry 08 9756 7780

## Three Troop (1968-69)

Bob Pritchard 07 4779 0608  
Geoff Box 08 9731 2757  
John Murphy 08 9493 3771  
Brian Glyde 02 4457 2200  
John Nulty 02 6931 1884  
Ian Lauder 08 9419 5375  
Geoff Neenan 08 9362 4079  
John Hollis 02 6662 6660  
"Sam" Houston 07 5495 5480  
Greg Roberts 03 5941 2269  
Ted O'Malley 07 4091 3561

## Three Troop (1969-70)

Phil McCann 03 5442 3459  
Ray Fulton 03 6288 1176  
Tony Bower-Miles 0412 317 306  
Graham Harvey 07 5445 2636  
Chris Brooks 08 9271 2811  
Bob Done 02 4944 9321  
Norm Martin 0422 508 336  
Chris Muller 07 4653 0457  
Hank Veenhuizen 0407 487 167  
Jim Burrough 03 9885 8285  
Rod Kirby 07 4973 7726  
"Jacko" Miller 03 6267 4411  
Chis MacGregor 02 4472 3250  
Phil Devine 0418 830 169  
Phil McCann 03 5442 3459  
Gerard Rentmeester 03 9735 5236  
Richard Day 08 8088 4129  
Terry Cartledge 03 5367 1472  
Darrel Jensen 07 4938 7203  
Gordon Temby 08 9757 2016  
Vin Neale 03 9786 1549  
Leon Tuttleby 08 8952 6598  
Roelof Methorst (Silent number)

## Three Troop (1970-71)

John Beningfield 07 4778 4473  
Rod Scott 07 4096 5372  
Ray McKenzie-Clark 08 9729 1162  
David Wilson 07 3855 1370  
Robert Reed 07 3351 4440  
Robert McLeay 03 5386 1122  
Ben Passarelli 02 9610 3949  
Geoff Ansell 03 5762 1215  
Ted Clarke 03 5682 2584  
Mal Botfield 02 9872 2594  
Bob Clare 03 5439 5532  
Graeme Clarke 07 4128 4660  
Ian Campbell 03 9870 0313  
John Davey 07 3378 4316  
Les Shelley 07 3264 4041  
Steve Armbrust 07 5545 1073  
Paul Scott 02 6656 0730  
Garry Lourigan 02 4844 5545  
Kevin Hodge Lost contact



Many thanks again to those who forked out the \$38 to support the newsletter. A superb personalised "Tunnel Rats" membership card is provided for all those who join. Let us know if you have joined but not received your membership card.

#### Who can join?

The Association was formed for all who served with one of the Field Troops. Membership is exclusively for men who served in Vietnam with either 3 Field Troop or 1 Troop, 2 Troop or 3 Troop of 1 Field Squadron. This is not an attempt to exclude, but to bring together the Field Engineers. Other units are free to form their own Associations.

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.

#### 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.

**Holdfast Newsletter**  
is edited by Jim Marett  
and published quarterly by  
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Toorak Vic 3142  
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## If you want to help fund the newsletter, here's the Form

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Dates IN Vietnam: \_\_\_\_\_

Service Number: \_\_\_\_\_

#### It's Simple

Fill in the form

Write a cheque for \$38  
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Toorak Vic 3142

Note: If you don't want to cut into this newsletter, photocopy the form or write the details on a sheet of paper and send it with your cheque.