



NZ GUNNER

Royal New Zealand Artillery Association Newsletter

Issue #176 - March 2018

EARLY WARNING ORDER

The 84th Annual Gathering and AGM of the Royal New Zealand Artillery Association will be held in Dunedin over Labour Weekend 19-21 October 2018. Further details will be promulgated in this newsletter and on "Muzzle Flashes".

See the last page of this newsletter for a draft programme for the weekend.

Presidents Report 1st Quarter 2018

Greetings fellow gunners. The year appears to have got off to a quiet start, but let me assure you things have been happening behind the scenes. At our December meeting the committee considered the way ahead for the RNZA Assn ; 161 Battery (SVN era) has formed the `core` of the RNZA Assn over the past 50 years but their ranks are now thinning rapidly. It is considered that the immediate-mid term future (next 10 years) lies in fostering the esprit de corps within personnel from the TF Batteries (now mostly disestablished). Regional activities based on these groupings need to be encouraged, whilst work on improving contact with the serving elements of 16 th Field Regt continues. It seems logical that in the longer term it is the operational tours of the 1990s and 2000s which will supply the bulk of ex regular members, but with recognition of the fact that most ex-soldiers are not interested in groups such as ours until they reach more `mature` years.

Last Post



896519 **Mitten**, GP Garryowen, 161 Bty VN
Died 28/4/2015 Buried in Timaru

410473 **Sorensen**, EE (Eric), NZA, 4th Anti Tank
Regt, Died 16 January 2018 at Stratford

203768 **Baker**, CA (Charlie) , Sgt 161 Bty Korea
Died 21 January 2018 in the Far North

128015 **Piercy**, Leonard C , Gnr 5th Fd Regt
WWII Died 16 January in Auckland

Osborne, Dr John C, Associate member
RNZAA, Died 29 January 2018, in Kaitaia

207855 **Haines**, PE (Ted), Gnr RNZA Korea.
Died 28 January 2018

203768 **Moody**, Richard Allen (Snow), Gnr 161
Bty, 16 Fd Regt Korea. Died 10 January 2018

206906 **MacLean**, Aeon Duncan James, Bdr
RNZA. Died 11 March 2018

592373 **Trye**, Francis (Frank), Gnr RNZA.
Died 14 March 2018

203279 **Washer**, James Victor (Jim), 31 Bty,
7th Anti Tank Regt, WW2. Died 14 March
2018

446421 **Bullick**, Alan Francis, Gnr 4 Fd
Regt, 46th Bty WW2. Died 22 March 2018

S211271 **Collier**, Laurence Charles (Winky)
RNZAOC, 161 Bty VN Died 25 March 2018

Just as we will not forget, so we WILL keep plugging away!.

So several of our new Regional reps are ex Territorial Force, and I would like to mention in particular Martin Coomber in Wellington, Kent Horsfield in Fielding, Robbie Gardiner in Dunedin, Craig Hewett in Auckland, Jack Mills in Waikato, and Chris Morris in Tauranga/BoP , all of whom are making significant contributions to the Assn . We are all grateful for your unseen but invaluable contributions.

Our Operation Ubique team under Colin Jansen has been very active and have now branched into a mobile `L5- era Gun Display Team`, spreading the word for the Assn at the Pukekohe Fair and the Kumeu Militaria Fair. Op Ubique has brought together people from throughout the country who share the common love of maintaining the guns and this is not only of huge benefit to our heritage and image, but also serves a very significant `welfare` function for those who attend.

Our Quarter Master Colin has also taken up the task of trying to harness the various offers made by our Australian counterparts Kim McGrath and Graham Hampton, so keep your eyes open for an exciting new range of Q Items in the near future.

Tony McLeod

President RNZAA

16 March 2018

The Colonel Commandant

The Royal Regiment of New Zealand Artillery

matthew.beattie@insteplimited.com

1 March 2018



Fellow Gunners

Almost a year ago I became your Colonel Commandant stepping into the big shoes of Barry Dreyer and having to face the might of the RNZA Band, the needs of our officers and soldiers and the strong opinions and suggestions of the retired and their families. It has been quite a journey and what a pleasure – Barry did say it was the best Army job he ever had and I agree.

Three Things I Currently Enjoy

The Vitality of our Alumni. I love to get an alert from our RNZAA page on Facebook that tells all of us about something that either happened recently or long ago, is going to happen in a few days or is a photo that requires identification and context. The network starts buzzing and we all get connected again. Some may have left the Army but we never left the Regiment, so I do thank Tony McLeod, Bernie McCort and so many of you for keeping us talking to each other. I am fortunate to see the Chief of Army quite often as I live in Wellington and I bother him from time to time

as Chairman of the National Army Museum – Major General Peter Kelly has told me more than once that our vibrant Association, the legacy of Korean, Vietnam and Afghan active service is admired by so many. We are organised, we assist veterans and our political lobbying spreads to support others who aren't part of our family.

That We are a Whanau. 16th Field Regiment boldly stepped out on 27 January this year to host a family day for the loved ones of their soldiers and about 140 folk arrived onto the Moor Gun Position in the Argo Valley to find out what field gunners do. It was quite a day, my wife Sarah came with me and a few memories linger:

10 year old girl I sat beside afterwards on the bus ride back to Camp. Her Dad was from 163 Bty and is currently in Iraq. As a family they still came all the way from Linton despite Dad not being there. I asked her about how as a middle child she helps around home with Dad away. Simple answer was "I look after my little brother and do a bit of cooking, particularly breakfast in bed for Mum. Myself, thinking perhaps muesli and a piece of toast, she politely scoffed at that idea and said, "Scrambled eggs and bacon... Mum deserves the best... she is a chef and has high standards."

A young reserve officer from 11/4 Bty had been on Ex Titan with the Regular Force, gone back to Auckland and brought his grandparents (without any English, I think) down to Waikanae from Auckland - they left at 0500. Not only was he so proud of the way he had been adopted by the officers and soldiers, being mentored as a section commander, recon officer etc but he kept a weather eye out for his 4 or so reservist soldiers who also deployed and rounded out the Regiment. He is in no doubt that they will be in the Reserve for years to come because of the positive experience they all had. Boy, if we could bottle that formula, the Army would never have to recruit - word of mouth would carry the day.

Sarah and I had a great lunch in the 800 Man Mess beforehand and sat with a mother from Waikanae. She had come to see her eldest daughter perform as a senior medic in the Regimental environment. She says that the last two years her daughter has just taken off with confidence and purpose - never really found her voice at school but now due to the great environment, ever present field work and affirmative action for women that the Regiment provides, she will serve for a good while yet in the Army.

Sarah sat one on one in Hotel 1 with a CPO to learn about what goes on. She was very impressed with how this YO explained her role and enthusiasm for her job. Also of note was

how the subbie talked about the inclusive diverse nature of the Gunners and how refreshing it was compared to other Army life elsewhere. I talked outside with other members of the CP team and they each had a voice about soldiering, about the big tab off Korenoff's Airstrip a day or two before - so proud that none of them fell over.

I must also say that over the last 12 months I have met the Colonels Commandant of the United Kingdom (Master Gunner St. James' Park), and the Australian and Canadian gunners and there is no doubt that each country has the back of the other to ensure that opportunities are fully invested in and that we do not miss a trick looking after common Gunner interests. Please use my office to advance the wider needs of the RNZA. The Colonels Commandant want this to happen – just ask.

I Love New Toys. The Gunners love technology and we have always embraced the opportunity to speed up the call for fire and get rounds on the ground accurately. I am very confident that working in the enhanced joint fires environment that involves training in Norway, Alaska and other offshore countries embeds us into the operational ability of tomorrow's force. I saw this myself as a young officer with 29 Commando Regiment, Royal Artillery in the early 1980s and I see that same skill today being enjoyed by officers and NCOs at the sharp end – making ourselves indispensable to the joint forces of the future. I am also delighted that RPAS is going to offer another pathway for the Gunners to be the tactical specialists in finding out “what lies over the hill?”

So, thanks for hosting me and saying hi when I visit – much appreciated.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Beattie". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. There is a small circle above the 'i' in "Beattie".

Matt Beattie

Colonel

Colonel Commandant, RNZA

THE BATTLES OF FSB CORAL AND BALMORAL MAY 1968

The 12th/13th of May this year will mark the 50th Anniversary of what became known as the Battle of Fire Support Base Coral and FSB Balmoral. The following two articles cover aspects of the battle from two perspectives. Neil Bradley recounts the various stages of the battles from his experience as a Forward Observer with B Company 3 RAR at Coral and Balmoral, and I have written of my recollections of the first 24 hours at FSB Coral.

The Battles of Coral and Balmoral

The battles for Coral and Balmoral in South Vietnam during May-June 1968 were the biggest battles that the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF) was involved in during its time in SVN. In all 25 Australians were killed in action and just under 100 wounded. There were no NZ casualties. Of the North Vietnamese, 276 were killed with a possible further 69. An impossibly low 9 North Vietnamese wounded are also recorded.

I was a newly arrived FO attached to B Coy 3 RAR. I was c/s 32 and had two sigs, Bdr Truck Carr (the older of the two brothers who both served) and Gnr Red Whyte. Red was rotated back to the Battery during the Operation and I gained in return, Gnr Dick Wharerau. I had no Tech Assistant. 1ATF(-) deployed on the 12 May into AO Surfers. 3RAR and 161 Bty were redeployed there from another operation. There had been no real warning. We were in the field after replacing 2 RAR in-place in AO Columbus, when we received the warning order. Columbus was just to the north-east of Long Binh and about 15 Km south-east of Surfers.

Everything at my level was organised by word of mouth or by laborious decoded messages. We did receive marked maps, and picto maps for the area. I cannot remember how. But as is normal, it was an Operation to take place at the join of four maps.

Securing the LZ

B Coy 3RAR, under OC Major Burt Irwin to which I was the Direct Support Forward Observer, had the task of securing the fly-in LZ for the FSB Coral. We started out from our night defensive position some distance to the pickup LZ, before first light.

The area of the fly-in LZ had been secured by a small detachment from the US 1 Division known as Big Red One. They had met us as we landed as a company group. Shortly after, the Recce Party from 161 Bty under the command of the Battery Captain (BK) Major Clyde Stewart arrived. Other recce parties arrived from then on. There was initial confusion as the person responsible for the layout of Coral, namely the 2IC 12 Fd Regt, was not there.

The fly-in LZ showed on the Picto Map to be an open field. It was a field of rubber saplings about 2m tall. These had to be cleared by hand and it held up a lot of the fly-in movement, until it was complete. There were open areas round us, but some inflexibility said we could not move.

The delay probably more than anything, caused total confusion within the airlift plan. Aircraft, whose tasking was being controlled at levels above 1ATF, were diverted to other tasks. They only came back to their fly-in task in dribs and drabs. The fly-in never really recovered.

My FO party did our bit along with the rest of the rifle company, swinging machetes. There was no security as the urgency of getting troops on the ground, left no time for it.

161 Battery Arrives

At the same time, 161 Bty guns were aboard a flight of Chinook helicopters (CH47s) circling above. I was told that the BK received an ultimatum from the lead CH47 to tell them where to put the guns down or they were going to have to take them away and refuel. As no one else seemed to be in charge, the BK made a decision to put the Bty down on what he understood to be the grid reference for the FSB.

The 2IC of 12 Fd Regt RAA, a Maj Murtagh, eventually arrived and found us clearing the LZ. I can recall he had a very large map folded in a concertinaed way that he was flicking back and forward while we were talking to him. He was disorientated and clearly out of his depth. He had a desperate look about him. I pointed out to him on several occasions where we were on his map. It went straight past him. This was the first and thankfully the last time I saw the Regt 2IC during my tour.

Problematic Location

Histories about the choice of Coral's layout are many. The decision on where to site Coral, left 161 Bty in splendid isolation about 1000m to the West on open ground. It also meant that a rubber plantation to the east, was next door to the 1RAR Mortar Platoon and a substantial tree line about 150-200m to the south of 102 Fd Bty RAA.

When we finished clearing the LZ, we were then directed to move West to the rear of 161 Bty's position. This was our first stop since the early morning fly-in. Bert Irwin and I sat quietly behind the Bty position and talked about the situation that was developing round us. We did have that sense of discomfort that you get when you know you are part of a stuff-up.

D Coy 3RAR under the command of Major Peter Phillips with our FO Martin Steeds at c/s 34 had been tasked to provide FSB defence within the defence plan provided by the Regt 2IC. They arrived late in the afternoon while we were still located behind the Bty. With their arrival we were released and directed to move off into our Area of Operation (AO) across the other side of Route 13 to our immediate West. A and C Companies of 3RAR with Mike Harvey as c/s 31 and Wally Steward as c/s 33, had been deployed on arrival into their AOs as had all the companies of 1RAR.

FSB Coral Attacked

The fly-in to Coral had been observed by reconnaissance elements of 141 NVA Regt. The opportunity that they observed of a poorly prepared position with few infantry was too good to miss. Their main elements ran about 20km as I was told in the debriefs, they formed up to attack Coral in the tree line to the East and South of 102 Bty.

The fighting started at about 0230 hrs on the 13th, with the springing of an ambush by one of 1RAR companies operating in their own AO, about 1000m from Coral. This was simply a mistake by a small party of the NVA and they quickly broke off that engagement and re-joined their main body to attack the main position an hour later.

Fortunately for 161 Bty, the speed with which the attack was mounted, limited their time for recce. The enemy were unaware of the Bty's location. There is little doubt that if the NVA had been more thorough in their reconnaissance, the Bty would have been at a distinct risk.

When the battle started, B Coy 3RAR had a ring side seat. We had stopped for the night on the other side of Route 13 in an area that had been land cleared and had large parallel windrows of cleared trees. These provided both protection and shelter, as well as good elevated observation over the flat cleared land to the East and the emerging battle.

Full-scale battle

It quickly became apparent that what we were seeing was a bit more than an encounter battle. It involved a sizable force of about 1000. I can recall the plop sounds of mortars as they were fired. I recorded a compass bearing to them and called it in for a possible counter battery fire task. I saw the fiery whoosh as RPGs arced towards impact. Also, there was very distinctive green tracer that was fired by the enemy to provide direction to their attack.

Most of the HQs elements were not yet deployed, but were due on the 13th. This included Arty Tac HQs, normally responsible for coordinating all fire support. It quickly became apparent that communications were not as good as they should have been.

The 77-set in my FO Party that was used on the Regimental Net, was one of those unique sets that just happened to get everything right. Bdr Truck Carr, my Regt Sig could get communications almost anywhere. I can vouch for plus of 40km on regular occasions, from a set designed for 10 km. Truck and Red Whyte spent a good part of the night relaying messages that involved organising the air support and generally keeping the Arty Tac HQ informed.

As the situation developed, Burt Irwin and I started contingency planning for a counter attack task if 161 Bty came under attack. We were the closest, 500 to 1000m across fairly open ground, over which we had just travelled. The move would have been OK, but it would have been messy once we got there.

Air support was brought in from Bien Hoa – initially a flare ship and then helicopter gunships. They quickly ran out of ammunition and were finally replaced by a Spooky Gunship (DC3 type of aircraft that fired flares and mini guns out of the side door). It slowly lumbered round above the flares and even with a moon, it was difficult to see. Its own tracer made it look like dragon's breath coming from the sky with an accompanying roar from the mini gun. It was good for morale and I would not have liked to have been on the receiving end. The NVA attack lasted until dawn.

The reality of combat for the front guns of 102 Bty that night was that anything that went bang was fired over open sights. The next day, gunners of 102 Bty with whom I spoke at a reunion, told me of finding blinds and unplugged rounds, as well as illumination and smoke shells. One of the guns was captured, but the Sgt had the presence of mind to take the firing mechanism. In time, the gun was captured back.

As a result of the attack, the whole defence of Coral was restructured. The 1RAR rifle companies were taken from their patrolling locations, back to defensive tasks on the FSB. 161 Bty along with the HQ 3RAR, D Coy 3RAR and APCs were redeployed to a new FSB Coogee some 4 km to the North-West on the western side of Route 13. A Squadron of Centurion tanks and the US 155mm Self Propelled (SP) Artillery known as Husky Alpha, were called forward. It would take a number of days for them to get there.

Second Attack on Coral

One history that I have read about this period of re-defending Coral was the shortage of defence stores. I have seen photos of wire in front of the infantry at this time, being down to one roll, without pickets or pins to hold it down and often with large gaps. Such poor defences were observed by the enemy. This drew the direction of the next attack by another NVA Regt on the night of 15/16 May. This time I was not able to observe the battle, but could hear it in the distance. It went straight into the areas with the least wire. The enemy fire support was also better targeted. However the defence had been well sited by 1RAR. It worked, including ground attack aircraft at night, which at that time was most unusual. While the attack went on for 4 hours, the enemy was not as effective as the earlier attack on the night of the 12/13th. 161 Bty did fire in support of the defence as did 3RAR mortars. Operations continued in the 3 RAR AO for the next few days where a number of small groups of NVA were intercepted mostly moving North away from Saigon. A Coy 3RAR with Mike Harvey (c/s 31), operating to the immediate South of Coogee, successfully ambushed paths along a small stream that proved to be a main movement corridor.

B Coy worked further to A Coy's South-West and only had small contacts. On 17th of May, I used 161 Bty to fire on a platoon size group that was observed moving across open paddy fields, about 2km away. It was an airburst mission. We did not to see the results for several days when we discovered 6 dead and clearly a number of wounded had been moved off without their equipment. It was the only time in two tours that I fired an observed fire task as taught at the School of Artillery in Waiouru. More normally in the bush, you fired artillery missions based on sound.

On the 23rd May, OC B Coy was picked up by helicopter to fly to FSB Coogee for orders for the next phase. That was to be a move by 3RAR to a new FSB Balmoral in AO Newport to the north of AO Surfers. B Coy had no Coy 2IC and as had been Burt's practice, he left me in command to move the company (about 5 km in a direct line) and meet up with him at FSB Coogee. We went by foot. At the area of an earlier artillery engagement, we gathered the equipment and papers off the dead and buried the bodies in shallow graves.

On the 24th May leaving at first light, a two company group of D and B Coys with D Coy leading, then walked the 5 km into the new FSB Balmoral. The 3RAR HQ moved in APCs. My real memory of it was a long hot move full of hurry and wait. This was caused by D Coy having a number of contacts with small groups of NVA along the way. Once the site of Balmoral had been secured, both A and C Coys flew in by helicopters.

Balmoral and the Surrounding Countryside

Balmoral was sited in light bush on the southern side of a large clearing. The clearing was natural, caused by a depression in the sandy soil making it too wet for bush to easily grow. Cart tracks ran through the area, with a main track running parallel to the southern edge of the clearing but about 50m into the bush to avoid the wet ground. There was also a track across the centre of the clearing running north-south. Sections of the land were pockmarked with artillery and bomb craters.

It was thought that any attack, given the lack of any other feature, would use the bush to cover any approach as they did at Coral. Then use the main track parallel to the southern clearing edge as an axis. Both B and C Companies covered these approaches, with D Coy covering the open ground to the North and A Coy the bushland to the South. A tank troop which consisted of four tanks, was due to arrive the next day and were split into two groups of two covering the two most likely approaches, east and west as well as the clearing to the north.

Defence stores were flown in. The position was dug in with full fighting pits and wire put up. I spent some time helping the B Coy soldiers pin the wire down so it could not be lifted.

Extensive patrolling took place, initially in company groups. A lot of time was also spent registering targets round the base as close as possible. Registration missions were restricted to being an evening activity. Everyone was very tired but spirits were high.

Positions had been prepared for two tanks at each end of D Coy. They were not put into their positions until last light so any reconnaissance would have been unaware of their tactical locations.

The Balmoral Attack Begins

On the second night, Balmoral was attacked by 165 NVA Regt. It started at about 3am with a mortar barrage and a peppering of RPGs. Three soldiers were killed or wounded by this, usually because they were sleeping or moving above the ground. At the same time a coordinated mortar attack was made against FSB Coral.

The bombardment did serve as a warning to stand-to. This was followed by the attack. Unexpectedly, the attack came across and down the eastern side of the clearing. The enemy seemed unconcerned about being in the open and used the side of the clearing as a flank axis of attack. This took them directly into D Coy right flank, two tanks head on and B Coys left flank.

The enemy made use of the movable wiring kniferests that were used to close gaps in the wire left there for vehicles to get in and out of the base. They also lifted and bounced the concertina wire ahead of themselves in front of D Coy, which had not been pinned down. However inside the concertina wire, the low wire entanglement slowed them right down so they became easy targets, having been silhouetted by flares that were being fired behind them.

The rightmost extremity of D Coy bore the brunt of it, although that quickly spread across their whole frontage as the enemy spilt round to their right. The tanks got good lines of fire, especially with their canister. Their hulls and the bunds behind which they were sited, obstructed the planned enfilade machine gun fire from B Coy.

The Bty FO with D Coy FO, Capt Martin Steads, called in fire support from both 161 Bty and the US SP155s. I was covering the eastern approach and used 102 Fd Bty firing danger close missions right down to the wire. This had the effect of forcing the enemy further out into the clearing. The artillery proved to be devastating. The GPO of 102 Bty let me know that they were being mortared while this occurred.

The attack lasted about an hour and was fought off. In cleaning up the battlefield the next day eight NVA bodies were found, signs of blood trails and dragged bodies existed and discarded weapons. Balmoral continued to be developed and a very active patrolling programme was put into effect with two platoon company sized patrols. Without a Technical Assistant in my FO Party who was capable of calling in fire, or a B Coy a 2IC, this meant that both Burt Irwin and myself were almost continuously on patrol during daylight hours. I would spell my signallers by carrying one of the sets myself.

A Second Attack

A second regimental size attack occurred on the night of 28/29th starting about 2:30am. The pattern was the same with mortars and RPGs, except this time the mortar fire was more accurately targeted. At my B Coy HQ location, a mortar round landed in an open fighting trench, killing one Coy HQ soldier in his sleeping bay. Our location backed onto the 3RAR Mortar Platoon mounted in Mortar APCs. This had been targeted by the enemy and while the Mortar Platoon protected, our HQ and my FO party took many of the near misses.

The ground assault started with a diversionary assault on the wire fronting onto A Coy. The attack blew a gap in the wire and the small ground assault was halted by small arms fire. It then faded away as diversions do.

The main attack came across the clearing to the North rather than down the clearing's edge as previously. This provided great fields of fire for both D Coy, all four of the tanks and Martin Steads with his artillery. This attack was pushed harder than the previous one, but the defences were also stronger, including the wire.

The defence was again supported by flare ships and helicopter gunship teams. After two hours the attack started to give way. However a number of the enemy took up positions in old bomb craters and had to be cleared out the next day, with several taken prisoner.

In all, 42 NVA bodies were found and 7 prisoners taken as well as the usual mess of equipment that

was left behind with accompanied drag marks and blood trails. Over the next few days a number of wounded and further bodies were found by patrols in areas to the North-East.

Everything went quiet after this last attack. We still patrolled extensively but it was clear the NVA had left the area for now. Eventually we were to be pulled out, having achieved our mission. Defence stores had to be either destroyed or salvaged. By this time Balmoral was being serviced by trucks out of Coral. So a lot of the stores were returned his way.

B Coy provided security for the base as it packed up and the companies flew out. We were last to fly out for Nui Dat with a blaze of Door Gunners on the helicopters shooting up the area as we flew out. Not bad for a first Op.

Neil Bradley, Lt, 161 Bty RNZA, FO B Coy 3 RAR Vietnam 1968

The Battle of Coral – The First 24 hours

Much has been written in recent years on the perceived errors surrounding the first battle of Fire Support Base Coral. What follows are my recollections of the first 24 hours. On the 12th of May 1968, 161 Battery was located at FSB Anderson in direct support of 3 RAR on 1 ATF Operation Toan Thang I in AO Simpson. At that time I was a Battery Surveyor working in the Command Post, but I was to spend the last six months of my TOD in an FO party with 3 RAR and 9 RAR. Early on the morning of the 12th of May, I was told, 'Gunner Barrett take a director and stand and 6 gun marker's and meet the GPO (Lt Rod Baldwin) at the chopper pad. At that point my major concern was for my gear, which I was assured would follow with the main body. Soldiers hate being separated from their gear and that initially caused me some concern.

On arrival at the chopper pad Rod and I boarded a Sioux helicopter, which is little more than a bubble attached to a flying framework. Boarding is probably a bit of an understatement as it took some maneuvering to get Rod and I (both about 6 foot 2 inches tall), a director and stand, 6 gun marker's and my SLR into the cockpit. We duly took off and headed north west into War Zone D.

We landed outside part of the US 1st Infantry Division (the 'Big Red One') command area and I secured our gear while Rod went off to confer with the powers that be. There are very good reasons why the army operates as an autocracy rather than a democracy and why soldiers are only told enough to allow them to do their job. Had I known that while I was chatting with the yank sentries that their main body was heavily engaged with the Viet Cong a couple of grid squares over, I'd have been more worried than I already was. After a short time Rod came racing out, grabbed the gun marker's and shouted "the battery is on its way, follow me", and headed off into the long grass. One of the yanks turned to me with an incredulous look on his face and asked, "are you guys going out there on your own?" To my mumbled response of "apparently", he replied "man, you Kiwis are crazy". A sentiment I whole heartedly agreed with. By this time I had loaded up the director and stand and, like the faithful Tonto, followed the rapidly diminishing figure of Rod as he forged on ahead into Charlie country.

I am not sure how far we walked, but it was a hell of a long way from any friendly faces. Eventually we stopped at what was to become the Battery's position. This had a large mound on which I could stand (how convenient), and set up the director while Rod set out the gun markers. It was a very uncomfortable period of time standing up on the mound, feeling like a target at the range, until the guns started arriving and I could call "Number 1 aiming point director". During the deployment I counted 66 helicopters of various types in the air over us at one time.

The gun position rapidly became a hive of activity and I was employed with the other surveyors and sigs, digging in the Command Post. At that time the first stage of CP construction consisted of digging two parallel trenches waist deep and erecting an 11 x 11 tent over the top. The plotters and check map would be set out, on a table top, between the trenches with the duty officer and surveyors on one side and sigs on the other. Depending on how long we were going to occupy a position dictated the progress of overhead protection etc. At the same time the guns were being dug in and local defenses set up. Which on this occasion consisted of some concertina wire and a platoon from 3 RAR. After eventually tracking down my gear, I had time to dig a shell scrape, put up a tent half and toss my gear in before going on duty in the CP. The night started off relatively quietly with some fire missions and the setting up DF's (Defensive Fire" plans) and establishing H and I's (harassment and Interdiction missions) for use overnight. At some point the monsoon struck and we came in for a real drenching.

When I came off shift in the CP that night I discovered that my hastily erected hoochie had surrendered to the elements and collapsed and my shell scrape was now a mud hole. I was too knackered to try and remedy it in the dark, so pulled my sodden bedroll up on to the ground beside the hole and got a couple of shovels to use as tent poles to hold the tent half up. So cold, wet and miserable, I crawled underneath and went to sleep.

It hardly seemed like I had been asleep at all, when all hell broke loose from the direction of 102 Battery RAA, located about 800 metres to the north east of us, as the night echoed to the sounds of mortars, rockets and small arms fire. Instinct took over and I immediately rolled into the hole. At this point the gods of mischief decided to add a moment of farce into a life threatening situation. As I rolled into the hole with my SLR, my tent half came with me and I ended up thrashing about in the mud like a giant green maggot. It was at this point that I questioned the wisdom of digging my hooch on the extreme edge of the gun position. With the help of a surge of adrenalin I managed to extricate myself from the tent half and lay there getting my breath back as the odd RPG explode over our position and the sounds of battle intensified in the distance.

As I lay there gathering my scattered wits a large figure appeared above me outlined against the night sky, fortunately for both of us, before I could react the stentorian tones of the BSM (WO1 Yogi Young) boomed out, "Gunner Barrett, get your arse out of that hole and go and carry some ammo. The rest of the night was spent unboxing ammo and delivering it to the guns as they continued to engage multiple fire missions. Getting on towards dawn as the eastern horizon started to lighten a helicopter flew over and was fired on by a .50 calibre machine gun not far from our position. Sometime later the chopper returned and the .50 cal opened up again with tracer arcing up towards the chopper. In the meantime several gunships and 'Spooky' (a C130 armed with Gatling guns), had moved into position above us. When the .50cal opened up, the night sky lit up as rockets and tracers converged on its position. Despite several more passes, unsurprisingly, the .50 cal did not fire again.. As usual, we stood to at dawn then started cleaning up the position. So ended the most hectic and one of the scariest 24 hours of my TOD.

Once again 161 Battery lived up to its reputation as a lucky unit as we were not attacked even though a large enemy force had passed close to our position, early in the night, without realizing we were there.

On the 13th we received orders to move, so we packed up and moved about 3 km to the west and

began establishing FSB Coogee. We were to stay there 11 days providing direct support to 3 RAR. We also were again able to provide fire support to FSB Coral during the attack on 15/16th May. Two incidents stand out from our time at Coogee. While establishing the position the infantry were bedding in their mortars. Due to the onset of the monsoon season the charge bags were wet and when they fired they wobbled out of the tubes and went straight up in the air and on reaching the apex of their flight the noses dropped and they came straight back down. Alerted by the wobble rather than a whoosh, every eye on the position followed their slow climb into the sky and then as they began their descent everyone took cover. There were no injuries, however Archie Moore having spent most of the night waist deep in his hooch holding the tent up with his head, had just put on his spare set of clean greens. As the mortars started dropping he took cover back in his water filled hole, much to the delight of everyone. The other incident of note occurred at stand to one evening when an APC in the middle of the position exploded. This created a lot of confusion as it was first thought that it had been hit by an RPG. Apparently one of the crew was cleaning up when some cotton waste got caught in the pin of a trip flare and set it off. The APC cooked off for hours with grenades and ammunition exploding. On the 24th of May the battery moved back to FSB Coral, which had become a huge fortified bund around it. Unfortunately there was no room in inside the position for the battery, so were put on the outside of the bund. Which made us a handy target for sporadic nightly NVA mortaring. On the 6th of June FSB was abandoned and we moved back to Nui Dat.

John (Woody) Barrett, Gnr, 161 Bty RNZA, Battery Surveyor, Vietnam 1968

KEY UPCOMING EVENTS

[Battles of Coral and Balmoral 50 year anniversary commemorations. Canberra 11-13 May 2018, and Townsville 24-27 May 2018.](#)

Gunners Day, Saturday 26 May 2018. Auckland/Northern Semi-Formal Dinner Evening of Saturday May 26th 2018. Point Chevalier Memorial RSA, Auckland.

The organising group are in the initial stages of preparing this year's celebrations and have arranged to hold the occasion at the: Point Chevalier Memorial RSA - 1136 Great North Rd - Point Chevalier, Auckland.

More information around the event, registration, costings and payment will be following in early April. So put this date into your diary for you and your spouse/partner and prepare for an enjoyable evening with your fellow gunners.

Ubique:
Craig F Hewett (ED)
2018 Gunners Day
Celebrations Co-ordinator
Ph. 09 4736063 Mobile: 027 4736004

[Gunners Day, 26 May 2018. Christchurch. Plans are underway for a "Formal'ish" Dinner \(with partners & friends invited\) on Sat 26 May. Details to follow.](#)

[The Vietnam Veterans Association Re-union, Queens Birthday weekend 1-4 June 2018 Waipoua Military Camp. For further details refer to Muzzle Flashes or contact NZVVA at \[nzvietnamveterans@xtra.co.nz\]\(mailto:nzvietnamveterans@xtra.co.nz\)](#)

[RNZAA 84th Annual Gathering and AGM 2018. Dunedin. Labour Weekend, 19-21 October 2018. See last page of this newsletter for Draft Program.](#)

Behind the Lines: The Editor's Page

Patron	HE The Governor General, The Rt Hon Dame Patsy Reddy, GMNZN, QSO.
Vice Patron	Lt Col (Rtd) Barry Dreyer RNZA
Colonel Commandant	Colonel Matt Beattie. The Col Comdt is an ex officio member of the Association
President	Lt Col (Rtd) Tony McLeod, 09 486 0910, 027 269 8472
Vice President	Gregory Thwaite
Secretary/Treasurer	Bernie McCort, 07 345 3643, 18 Walford Drive, ROTORUA 3010 Email: rnza.association@gmail.com
Committee:	Colin Jansen (Q Store/Facebook/Op Ubique)), Chris Morriss (Webmaster), John (Woody) Barrett (NZ Gunner editor), Andrew Donellan
Committee at Large/ Regional Representatives:	Jack Mills (Waikato), Danny & Bernie McCort (BOP), Chris Morriss (BOP), Kent Horsfield (Manawatu), Roger Newth (Horowhenua), Lyndsay Skinner (Wellington), Martin Coomber (Wellington), Brian (Skin) Francis (Christchurch), Robbie Gardner (Dunedin) Al Martin (Dunedin), David Weston (RNZRSA Delegate)
Welfare Support:	Northern: TBA Central: Lyndsay Skinner 027 5303319 Southern: Pat Duggan: 021 02615773
The Gunner News Editor:	John (Woody) Barrett, 10 Gordet Drive, KATIKATI 3129. Ph 027 583 1338 Email: editor.mzaa@gmail.com
Webmaster	Chris Morriss webmaster.mzaa@gmail.com
Facebook Site:	<u>Facebook, RNZA Assn</u>

Member Registration: New members are most welcome. **All** Gunners are eligible for Full Membership, it is **FREE** and automatic once a gunner has served in the Regiment for more than three months. Associate Membership is available to anyone who has been attached to an RNZA Unit or has had a close affiliation therewith, and to close family of RNZA Gunners and to Gunners of any nation around the world. Membership application forms are on-line at the website: rnzaa.org.nz.

Associate membership: No annual subscription is payable, but any donations are gratefully received.

Donations: All charitable and welfare donations over \$5 are now tax deductible as the Association is a Registered Charity. Donations can be made by Internet Banking to the Associations Bank Account, or by cheque to the secretary (address above). If you wish to receive a receipt, please let the secretary know by email.

Email Addresses: Are you connected to the Internet? The Secretary may not be aware of your address. If you are not getting messages from the RNZA Association and wish to do so, please forward your address.

Death of a Member: If you know of the passing of someone who was a Gunner or a member of the Association, please advise the Secretary. Where possible a representative of the Association will attend the funeral.

Input into Gunner News: Short stories, especially with accompanying photographs, are always welcome for inclusion. The Editor's email address is: editor.rnzaa@gmail.com. Please send contributions as an attachment in MS Word format.

Muzzle Flashes & website items to Chris at: webmaster.rnzaa@gmail.com

Secretarial/Treasurer matters to Bernie: rnza.association@gmail.com

Items for Gunner News to Woody at: editor.rnzaa@gmail.com

RNZA Assn Bank: Ac # 38 9007 0694501 00

The views and opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Royal NZ Artillery Assn, The Royal Regiment Of NZ Artillery, or NZDEF.

[THE Q STORE](#)

Quartermaster: Colin Jansen

Orders and enquiries to: rnzaaQstore@gmail.com

Polo : Gunners logo on right breast, with Gun crest on left. Black with red piping and embroidered logo's.

\$65.00 each



Fleece Beanie: \$30 inc post



Gunners Tee Shirt:

Quick-dry breathable sports fabric.

\$25 each free-post in NZ



Gunners Hoodie Sweatshirt:

\$75 each free-post in NZ



Baseball Cap: Black with red piping and embroidered Gun crest **\$35 each.**



RNZAA Blazer Pocket Patch:

Edged and ready for adding to a jacket.

\$20 each free-post in NZ



13 Tac Sign Bumper sticker:

90mm x 90mm UV resistant for up to two years.

\$5 each free-post in NZ



RNZAA Coffee Mugs:

Cobalt blue with gold print

\$25 each



RNZAA Lapel Pins: \$10 each



RNZAA Name Tag:

Laser etched with gold lapel pin permanently affixed. Note: Remember to advise preferred name to be etched on it.

\$35 each



RNZAA Bumper Sticker:

70mm x 70mm UV resistant up to two years

\$5 each free-post in NZ

Ordering details and other useful information:

- Post is included on all items within New Zealand. Please enquire for costs to post overseas.
- Please include all relevant details when placing an order, including correct name, size where relevant and delivery address. Purchasers will have 14 days from placement of order to complete payment. If payment is not received within that time, the order will be deemed void. When making payment, remember to include your name and the item being purchased: in the reference fields of the RNZAA account, so that the treasurer can identify who and what the payment refers to.
- Some items are made to order, and requests for items such as name tags or special sized articles will not be placed with our suppliers, nor items dispatched to prospective purchasers until payment has been

RNZA ASSOCIATION AGM/ANNUAL REUNION 2018

Labour Weekend, Friday 19th – Sunday 21st October, DUNEDIN

Centennial – End of WWI

B Battery 155 Anniversary

****THIS IS A DRAFT PROGRAM, AND IS PROVISIONAL UNTIL CONFIRMED AS FINALISED****

Friday, 19 October

1900 hrs Kensington Army Hall for Meet and Greet.
See if we can get the Army Museum open KAH

Saturday, 20 October

1000 hrs : AGM KAH Saturday or Sunday- Saturday at this stage at KAH
1230 – 1300 hrs : Activities

Travel to Taiaroa Heads – bus one way, boat the other way, Disappearing Gun.
If not interested in the Disappearing Gun – Check out the Albatross – Seals – Penguins –
Walk around other gun emplacements. Or stay in town.

1500hrs Afternoon Tea and return to Dunedin. Swap boat for bus and bus for boat

1900 -1930 hrs Semi Formal Dinner:
Bentleys (Victoria Hotel)

Sunday, 21 October

1000hrs Fire gun /guns in the Octagon (waiting for permission from Council to use Octagon)
10 Rounds - Commemoration 100 years end of WW1- B Bty 155 Anniversary
Lay a wreath
Bugler – Last Post

1100hrs Church Service – St Pauls Cathedral Octagon
BBQ lunch and disperse

Remember Monday is also a NZ holiday

The plus, with the Victoria is :

- Walk to Church service
- Walk to Catch the boat
- Walk to Chinese Garden
- Walk to Sports Hall of Fame Railway Station
- Walk to catch train. Taieri Gorge
- Walk to the town shops.
- Walk to Toitu Museum
- Walk to Otago Museum – Butterfly World
- Speights Brewery Tour
- Walk to Cadbury World

Have pricing for accommodation at – all are a block away from the Octagon

- Victoria
- 97 Motel Moray
- Kingsgate
- 97 On York