



ROYAL AUSTRALIAN SURVEY CORPS  
ASSOCIATION  
Queensland Branch  
**BULLETIN**

PO Box 5784 Stafford Heights 4053  
Website: [www.rasurvey.org](http://www.rasurvey.org)

ANZAC EDITION – No 62

APRIL 2016

**ANZAC DAY – 100<sup>th</sup> Centenary**

Join your mates for our Anzac Day celebration on Monday 25 April.

**Dawn Service:** We are invited to join RAE at their Dawn Service commencing 0500h at the RAE Memorial, Ubique Lines Enoggera (adjacent to Samford Rd).. Enter via Lloyd St gate. President Alex is to place the Survey Association wreath. Breakfast at the temporary Sportman's Club following the service.

**City March:** The City parade commences at **1000h** – order of march this year RAAF. RAN & Army. This year we are ably led by Dave Anderson. We are positioned immediately after the RAE Aust Water Tpt Assn and before the RASigs Assn. FUP is in George St. between Charlotte and Elizabeth Streets. Keep an eye open for our distinctive Banner. The great theodolite will be carried by a fit young member of 1Topo in the usual regimental manner immediately behind our leader and in front of the Banner – also carried by stalwarts from the Topographical Squadron. We anticipate a large marching contingent from I Topo Svy Sqn.

Post-march reunion is confirmed as being at the Alderley Arms Hotel with finger food/snacks being provided (funded by the Association). The bar opens at 1300h. Alderley railway station is very close by and the Council bus route goes past the hotel. Ample parking is available at the rear of the hotel. (enter the hotel from the car park) 1 Topo Svy Sqn members are particularly welcome.

**Please note** - All transport is by private arrangement.

**March Protocol** – Refer back to Bulletin 41 (Mar 2010) to refresh on March protocol.

**Berets:** Don't forget to wear your Association purple beret.

**FROMELLES**



*In August 2014 my son Christopher and I had five days on the Western Front and nothing we saw during those five days had a greater emotional impact on us than the few hours we spent at Fromelles, the scene of the greatest single military disaster in Australian military history. The story of Fromelles follows.....*

## FROMELLES

Bob Skitch

The Battle of Fromelles took place on the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> of July 1916. It was the first significant engagement of the AIF on the Western Front after arriving from Gallipoli and spelling in Egypt. Of course the Gallipoli force was greatly supplemented from Australia and two brigades of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division AIF were allocated to Fromelles. The German force which by then was well entrenched was the Bavarian Reserve Division. The attack took place in daylight on the 5<sup>th</sup> July and despite some initial gains it proved disastrous. The Australian losses were 5,513 killed and wounded, the greatest loss of Australian soldiers within a 24 hour period in any war. Of course there were very heavy losses by other British units who greatly outnumbered the Australians but it seems that the Australians wore the brunt of it. (E.g. only one Australian surviving from a whole battalion – subsequently died of wounds). The AIF suffered greater losses on the Somme over a more protracted period.

There are three Australian cemeteries and places of remembrance at Fromelles..... **VC Corner, the Australian Memorial Park** and **Pheasant Woods**

### VC CORNER:

It took some years after the end of WW1 for bodies from the Fromelles battlefield to be recovered, identified and re-interred. The Germans who re-occupied the area after the battle buried the enemy bodies in a series of shallow trench graves. Many were progressively recovered in the years following; Australians where they could be identified were buried in an exclusively Australian cemetery at VC Corner, the largest in France. I haven't been able to establish exactly why it is called 'VC Corner' other than it has something to do with the military historian Charles Bean who visited the battlefield in all its devastation and horror at the end of the war. Perhaps it was his response to a comment at the time *'they all deserve a VC'*. There are 400 Australians buried at VC Corner but no headstones. None could be individually identified and their names are inscribed on the wall at the back. Set into the ground are two large white concrete crosses and the unmarked and unidentified graves are contained within.

### VC CORNER



The entrance to VC Corner & Chris



Within VC Corner Cemetery – One of the two large in-ground concrete crosses – graves lie between the two. Names of those buried are on the wall behind.

## THE AUSTRALIAN MEMORIAL PARK:

The Australian Memorial Park was opened in 1998 and features the 'Cobbers Statue' There is a story....

The title comes from a letter written a few days after the battle and that was quoted in Australia's official history of World War I.... *"We found a fine haul of wounded and brought them in; but it was not where I heard this fellow calling, so I had another shot for it, and came across a splendid specimen of humanity trying to wriggle into a trench with a big wound in his thigh. He was about 14 stone weight, and I could not lift him on my back; but I managed to get him into an old trench, and told him to lie quiet while I got a stretcher. Then another man about 30 yards out sang out "Don't forget me, cobber." I went in and got four volunteers with stretchers, and we got both men in safely."*

### THE AUSTRALIAN MEMORIAL PARK



**The Cobbers Statue**



**A German Block House Bunker**



**.PHEASANT WOOD CEMETERY:**

In 2007 337 bodies of soldiers were found in five or six pits. These were exhumed in 2007. 173 were Australians. A new cemetery was created at Pheasant Wood and opened in 2013 and the adjacent Museum in July 2014

**PHEASANT WOOD AUSTRALIAN CEMETERY**



**Through the entrance arch**



**Australian Graves**



**Within the Museum – the floor battle map**



**The Cross of Sacrifice**



***Lest we forget!***

## CALENDER 2015

**25 April – Anzac Day** – Dawn service at Enoggera and City march.

**10 September** – Annual Reunion and AGM (location TBA)

**December** – Drinks at I Topo and Derek Chambers Award presentation.

### COMMITTEE

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**Note:** Refer Veteran's Affairs matters to Peter Bates-Brownsword and Barry Lutwyche

### NOTICES

#### **POST OUT OF BULLETIN**

Our post-out by email continues with only about twenty members requiring hard copy. Keep in mind if you require hard copy let Secretary Greg know and hard copy will be sent.

#### **BERETS – BERETS – BERETS**

Our stocks of our ever popular beret are now nearly depleted. However, stocks are held at Christie's in Sydney. Be distinctive in the RA Survey Association headdress. Contact Alex Cairney email [alex.cairney@hotmail.com](mailto:alex.cairney@hotmail.com)

**Note:** Christies can be contacted as follows:

Unit 4D; 1-7 Unwin Bridge Rd, St Peters, NSW 2044. Phone 02 9519 0784

#### **VIETNAM – A TECHNICAL TOUR by Bob McMillan-Kay.**

Copies can be obtained from Bob McMillan-Kay at a cost of \$36.00 including postage. We commend this highly successful book of Bob's Vietnam experience. Bob's address is 14 March Lane, Maryborough, Qld, 4650.

**RA SURVEY HISTORY by Dr Chris Coulthard Clark** – copies are still available. Contact Secretary Greg Knight for details.

### MAPMAKERS OF FORTUNA

Copies may be purchased from the Ex-Fortuna Survey Association (PO Box 865 Bendigo 3552) at \$60.00 plus postage of \$11.50 which includes cost of a padded postal bag.

### ASSOCIATION TIE or SCARF & BADGE

Cost of tie or scarf is \$25.00 plus postage. Association badges are still available from the Queensland Association. Place your order with the Queensland Association. Phone or email Secretary Greg Knight

### OUR HISTORY PROJECT – WHAT DID WE DO, 1946 – 1996?

Our 'What Did We Do' project remains open for further contributions. Have a look and see if you can fill a few of the gaps. Email your contribution direct to Bob Skitch [bob@skitch.me](mailto:bob@skitch.me) or enter your data on our website – [www.rasurvey.org](http://www.rasurvey.org).

### MEMBERSHIP

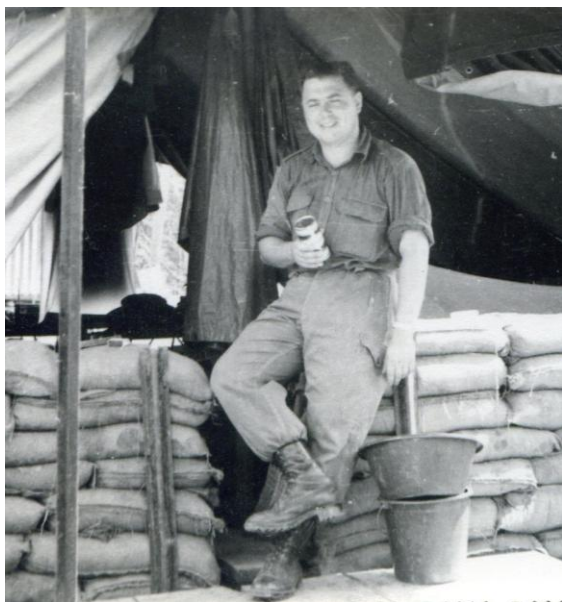
Keep your membership alive. Paid-up status for Ordinary Members terminates with the AGM on the first Saturday in September. Annual subscription is \$15.00 per year. We suggest that paying three or more years in advance is a good idea.

## VALE

### STANLEY RAYMOND CAMPBELL

*(Prepared by Bob Skitch with help from Peter Bates-Brownsword and Helen Campbell)*

Stan passed away peacefully in his home at 6.00am Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2016 attended by his remarkable wife Helen..



### Stan enjoying a beer at his donga during a quiet time at Nui Dat – 1967

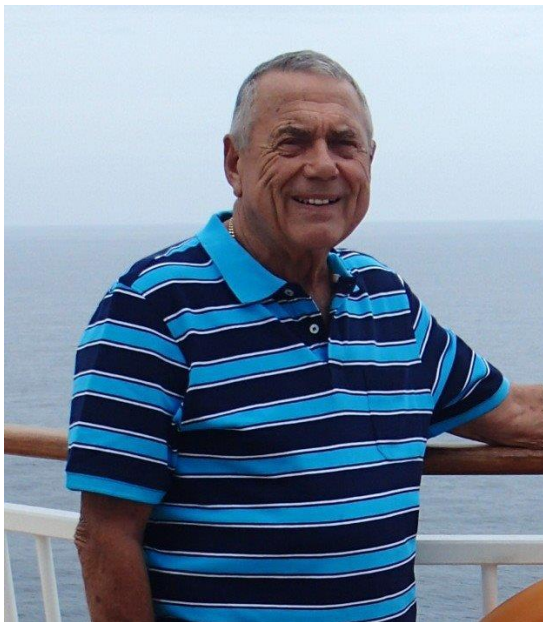
Force. Stan was included in the Detachment of 17 personnel as the survey sergeant and sailed to Vietnam on the HMAS Sydney accompanying the Detachment stores departing Sydney on the 17<sup>th</sup> May 1966. Stan's account of that voyage and his 'tactical' arrival and disembarkation at Vung Tau makes amusing reading. As the Detachment's Survey Sergeant over that 12 month period of active service Stan was an outstanding performer. Whatever success the Detachment had in that blighted country was substantially due to Sergeant Stan Campbell.



Stan returned to the Sydney based Eastern Command Field Survey Unit and then in 1968 he was posted to the Western Command Field Survey Unit and in 1969 was promoted to Warrant Officer Class 2. 1970 saw the start on the Indonesian survey operations with Operation Mandau based at Pontianak in west Kalimantan and then Gading 1 (1971) and Gading 2 (1972) in Sumatra. Stan, now posted to Sydney and 2 Field Survey Squadron served on Gading 1. In 1972 Stan was offered and took an 'Admin & Tech' commission graduating at the rank of Lieutenant. Stan was then appointed 2IC of 4 Field Survey Squadron in Adelaide with George Rickets as OC and served over two successive years on New Guinea survey operations.

Stan undertook the Royal Engineers exchange appointment with 42 Engineer Survey Regiment during the early 1970s and spent some weeks on survey work in Kenya and Belize. Stan once told me, as part of a regimental training program he parachuted out of an aircraft at 4,000 feet.

On return to Australia and 2 Field Survey Squadron in Sydney Stan's overseas operational commitment was not over. With Don Swiney he undertook the early reconnaissance for Operation Cendra Washi in Iran Jaya (now West Papua) and then Operation Pattimura in Maluku in 1981. Stan retired from full time service on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 1982 to the Army Reserve and filled a part time staff appointment at Victoria Barracks in Sydney. It wasn't the end of his survey career. After moving to Brisbane on two occasions he was called back in to administer command of 1 Field Survey Squadron for a few months each time during absences of the OC.



### **Stan enjoying retirement on a cruise**

Stan had married Hillary during his early years at the Regiment before his Vietnam posting. Hillary was a member of the Woman's Royal Australian Army Corps and a draughtswoman at the Regiment. Stan and Hillary had three children, Jo-Ann, Cindy and Lisa. Hillary as a true army wife accepted Stan's many absences but their time in retirement was to be cut short when Hilary tragically passed away in 1985. Soon after Stan's retirement Stan and Hillary had bought the Lawnton post office franchise from another with strong Survey Corps connections, the daughter of Corps identity Jack Gore. After a period of training Stan took over as postmaster. That was where Helen had been working for some years and continued on as Stan's assistant. But Stan couldn't resist the offer of further adventure. When Lieutenant Colonel Phillip Robinson of the British Royal Engineers came to Australia recruiting army trained surveyors to work in the Sultanate of Oman, Stan couldn't resist the challenge and left the post office in the very capable hands of Postmistress Helen.

That was in 1992. It was a two year assignment and during that time Helen was able to visit for three months. Returning to Australia Stan married Helen in 1994 and sold the post office in 1995. That was the end of Stan's working career and what a remarkable career it was. Stan and Helen took to caravanning in the company of past Corps colleagues Peter and Irene Blaskett and fulfilled the ambition of any surveyor by visiting the 'Four Corners' – Poepell's, Cameron's, Haddon's and Surveyor General's, the junctions of the state borders of New South Wales, Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia – quite an adventure, equal to few. Stan and Helen

continued to enjoy a quiet life in their delightful home at Lawnton. Helen has been a wonderful support to Stan during his failing years. Her continuing ebullient happy personality has been remarkable.

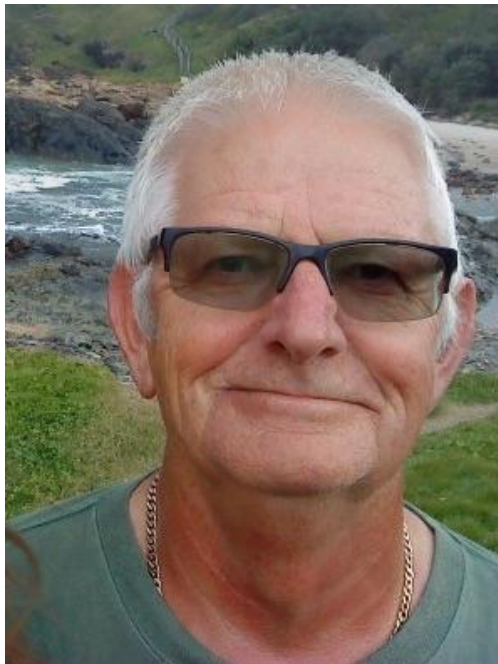
Stan.....Rest in peace. You have made a great contribution to all during you lifetime and dare I say to Australia.

## Memorial Service

The memorial service celebrating Stan's remarkable life took place at the Kallangur RSL on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> March. To say it was well attended would be an understatement. At a guess there would have been between 150 and 200 attending with old friends and colleagues from all over Australia. Stan's daughters Jo-Ann, Cinty and Lisa and Helen's children Andrew and Lynn reflected on their own memories of a wonderful Dad and friend. Bob Skitch outlined Stan's extensive military career in the Survey Corps and his life in retirement. Blue Blaskett provided a computer slide pictorial of the Campbell's and Blaskett's tours together and Helen a series of pictures covering Stan's life from early childhood to the present with appropriate commentary. A local padre gave a short repose and the RSL rep conducted a short traditional 'poppy' tribute. Then followed a lavish afternoon tea with many personal reflections on Stan being swapped.

It was a fitting tribute to an old mate and Corps colleague.

**CLEMENT JAMES (JIM) MITCHELL** 23 April 1940 - 5 March 2016 *(prepared by Kym Weston)*



Jim served 27 years with the Corps and rose from Sapper to Major. I have known him since our first days waiting course at Balcombe in mid 1964 and we were both on the same Basic, Intermediate and Advance Courses.

Jim joined the Army at the advanced age of 24 when most of us were 17 or 18. He had previously been a hair dresser for seven years and at his funeral we learned that a broken wrist gave him the excuse he needed to leave Gippsland and join the Army. He left school at year 9.

His lack of formal education did not prevent him from topping both his Basic and Intermediate Courses and as we both did the first Photogrammetry Advance Course he did not have the opportunity to make it three in a row.

Posted from his Basic Course to the Regiment, Jim spent most of his time from 1965-72 in Aerotrig. Here he had many notable firsts and John Bullen has been able to confirm that Jim as a Sergeant brought him a paper setting out the benefits of photographing PNG with high altitude photography, flown from coast to coast, north - south. This was the genesis of the successful SKAIPKSA project. Jim's talent was recognised and as a result he was the first SNCO of his generation to be selected for civil schooling. He was sent to study photogrammetry at University College London for 18 months.

On return to the Regiment Jim was commissioned. He subsequently served at:

The School of Survey in 1976,

5 Field Survey Sqn 1978,

Back to University in WA in 1981 to complete his Masters,

Returning to the Regiment in 1982,

OC of 1 Field Survey Squadron in 1984,

In 1985 he went to Washington in the exchange posting, and

On return to Australia in 1987 Jim was posted to JIO where he served until he retired in January 1991

On leaving the Army Jim worked for the NSW Central Mapping Authority in Bathurst.

[Former colleague Paul Barry gave a very fitting tribute for his efforts at the funeral].

Later on Jim and his wife Trish managed several blocks of units in the southern suburbs of Brisbane



before retiring to Port Macquarie. During this period he successfully spread his skills and devotion to Lawn Bowls and family in Bali and Dubai.

What is missing from the above is a sense of Jim's personality. At work he strived for perfection, but was always willing to help others if they showed an interest. In his early days he played basketball and squash and in the mess could always be found at the dart board. If you were a friend of Jim's you were a friend for life. Right to the end he had an enquiring mind and one of his personal highlights was being part of a group that established the Lambert Centre Permanent Survey Mark at the geographic centre of Australia in September 1988. Jim left a Survey Corps hat badge set in the cement surround. This was still there when he revisited the site with his son in May 2014 as part of his bucket list. Another wish was to see the sun first rise over Australia from the summit of Mt Warning, with his family on his 75th birthday. He did not make it to the top but said the effort with his family was worth it. He still plans to get there however, even if it is just his ashes scattered from a helicopter.

Big in more ways than one, he will be sadly missed by family and friends. Farewell Jim.

### **A MEMORIAL TO VETERANS IN A LITTLE TOWN IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

*Bob Skitch*

Australia has a reputation worldwide for commemorating and honouring the veterans of past wars. Where else would you find a national memorial in any way equal to the Australian War Memorial? It is more than a memorial; it is also a war museum that would have few if any equals in the world. I have spent time in the Imperial War Museum in London on two occasions and it is certainly grand but in no way as comprehensive as the AWM – at least to my mind! New Zealand does well at their National Army Museum at Waiouru on the North Island and of course there are many others – South Africa, France and the Western Front and no doubt throughout Europe and I do not claim to have seen them all – even Japan! In our Queensland Bulletin 52 of March 2013 is the story of the Vietnam Veteran's Commemorative Walk at Seymour Victoria completed in 2013. I think it goes beyond the Vietnam War but I am not sure – I haven't seen it. It features especially 'Luscombe Bowl' and the article gives something of the history of Luscombe Bowl. There would be few Australian towns that do not have the traditional statue of the Aussie Digger resting on 'arms reversed' in the main street surrounded by a small park area.

There is another one that John Leworthy has drawn to my attention, a new memorial at a small village in South Australia 44 kilometres north of Adelaide on the Old Port Wakefield Road. The 'village' is called 'Two Wells' in the Mallala local government area. The town was officially named in 1990 and has a population of 700. How did it town get its name? The first settlers used two aboriginal wells in the area as a freshwater source. So the memorial is called the 'Two Wells Memorial'. From the photos below obtained from the website it would appear to commemorate the soldiers who lost their lives in the recent wars of Iraq and Afghanistan.



**Note the dog. No doubt significant!**



## **TWO WELLS MEMORIAL**

And who is the lovely lady? I do not know but she features on the web site. I am sure she will not mind.

### **WE ARE STILL REMEMBERED.....**

*Bob Skitch*

In 1989 I became aware that the Survey Corps during WW2 had occupied the old Hamilton Town Hall. There are a number of these quite grand 'town halls' within the older suburbs of greater Brisbane. They reflect the period before 1925 when the *City of Brisbane Act 1924* amalgamated the twenty towns and shires forming Brisbane to create a single large local government area – the City of Brisbane as we now know it. The several grand old town halls became used for other purposes. The then former Hamilton Town Hall became a general use public hall, part taken over by the Red Cross and a School of Arts Library. In about 1941 the Army requisitioned the property for the use of the Australian Survey Corps.

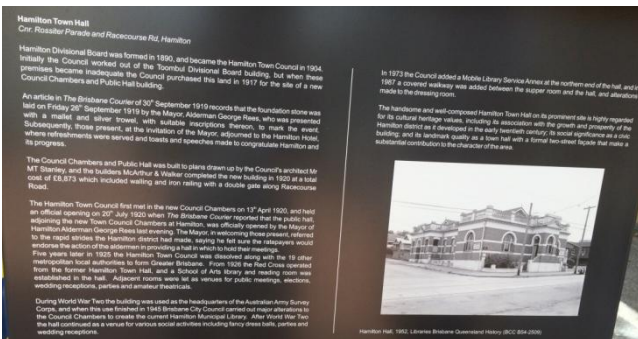
The then 'Survey Corps Ex-Servicemen's Association – Queensland Branch' (later the Royal Australian Survey Corps Association – Queensland) decided that it was time to formally recognise the use of the building by the Survey Corps during WW2 by having a suitably inscribed brass plaque placed on the inside wall of the Hamilton public hall. This duly happened on the 6<sup>th</sup> December 1990 with a remarkable level of pomp and circumstance, much of which was organised by past member Kevin Walsh.. A well turned out Guard of Honour was provided by the (still Survey Corps) 1<sup>st</sup> Topographical Survey Squadron. Significant guests included Major General Arthur Fittock AM, Commander 1<sup>st</sup> Division, Brigadier Mick Harris MC, Commander 1<sup>st</sup> Military District, Major Dave Sankey, OC 1<sup>st</sup> Topo Svy Sqn, Mr Bruce Wilson, Director General Department of Lands, Dr Neil Divett Surveyor General and

representatives of many related professional organisations and academia involved in surveying and mapping, also city councilors and state politicians. All were formally welcomed by our then President Lieutenant Colonel Ed Anderson (ret). The plaque was unveiled by Mr Alex Yeates, past member of the Corps and a past Surveyor General of Queensland and was then blessed and dedicated by the Reverend Phil Armstrong, wartime member of the Australian Survey Corps and Association padre. Our then recently created banner was prominently displayed at the end of the hall.

A lavish afternoon tea was provided by the ladies of the local chapter of the Red Cross some of whom remembered 'the Army boys who occupied the Hamilton Hall during the war'.

Recently a story board was erected adjacent to the hall telling the history of the old Hamilton Town Hall and it contains this paragraph...

**During World War Two the building was used as the headquarters of the Australian Army Survey Corps, and when this use finished in 1945 Brisbane City Council carried out major alterations to the Council Chambers to create the current Hamilton Municipal Library. After World War Two the hall continued as a venue for various social activities including fancy dress balls, parties and wedding receptions.**



**The story board**



**The old Hamilton Town Hall from Racecourse Road**



**WW2 photo of the Hamilton Town Hall with military vehicles parked adjacent in Rossiter Pde (from photos between pages 86 & 87 of Coulthard-Clark)**



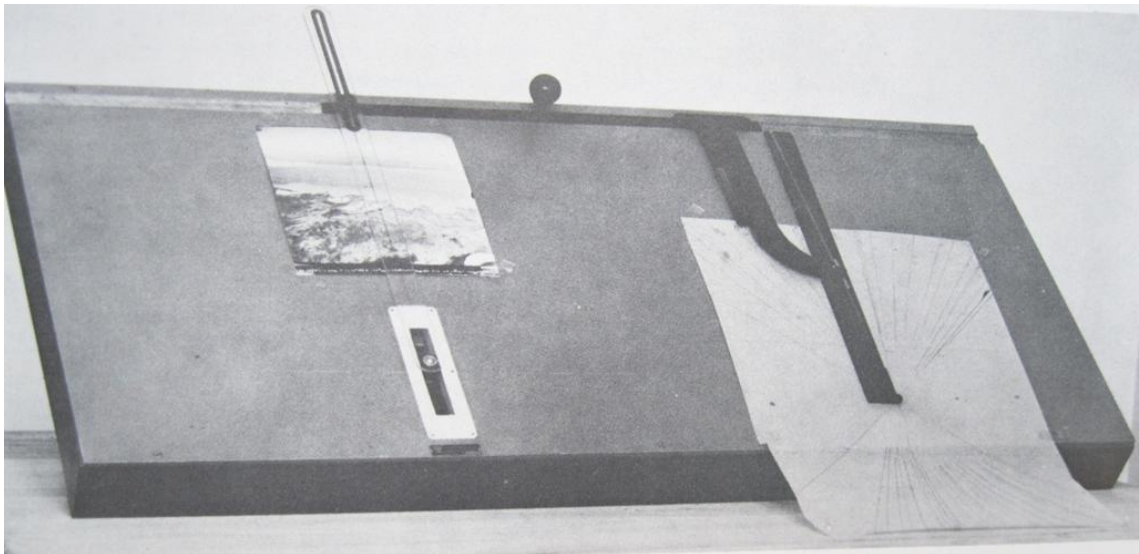
## DARYN RADFORD IN SOUTH SUDAN



The photo is of two ex-RASvy chums on operations in Juba, South Sudan. I am in the process of handing over to Graham as the Staff Officer GIS, United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). It has been a great experience providing GeoInt to the mission and I am sure Graham will enjoy it as well. If you would like to help support Graham you could always jump to [openstreetmap.org](http://openstreetmap.org) and trace a few roads, tracks and villages in South Sudan. 'Openstreetmap' has been an invaluable source of data and a great help for the Humanitarian Community. I used the data to make the Juba map behind us for example.

## 'MYSTERY OBJECT'

The photo below – the 'Mystery Object' – was emailed to me by my British RE colleague and correspondent Colonel Mike Nolan. It is of course taken (with due acknowledgement) from *'Lebanon to Labuan'* by Brigadier Laurence Fitzgerald.



The following explanation of the 'Object' is provided by Mike to the editor of 'Ranger'. Brigadier Fitzgerald provides no explanation in *Lebanon to Labuan* (Page 57) – just the photo.

**The Mystery Object is an Angulator.** The angulator was - "An instrument for converting angles measured on an oblique plane to their corresponding projections on a horizontal plane."

The 8<sup>th</sup> Photo Reconnaissance Squadron of the American Air Force was involved in the early part of the second world war with the U.S. Geological Survey, possibly on the America-Alaska Highway project

and it is believed it had been involved in the early use of tri-metrogon photography for small-scale, quarter-inch mapping (ie, 1:253,440 or 4 miles to an inch). In April 1942 the squadron, equipped with Lightning PR aircraft moved from the U.S.A. to Melbourne. In the Pacific Theatre of Operations it became involved in the flying of photography for the quarter-inch mapping of New Guinea and other areas, working together with the 648<sup>th</sup> Engineers U.S. Army and the Australian Survey Corps.

The unit was equipped with Angulators and Sketchmaster instruments. The first-named was used to project the oblique photographs on to a horizontal plane. The more familiar sketchmaster was used for simple optical restitution.

The 648<sup>th</sup> Battalion U.S. Engineers obtained three angulators and three sketchmasters from the 8<sup>th</sup> Squadron for map compilation from tri-metrogon photography.

The Australian Survey Corps also adopted these instruments for use with tri-metrogon photography and developed new techniques and improved versions of the equipment.

**A SEA VOYAGE TO SOUTH VIETNAM  
on the good ship *HMAS Sydney***

*by Stan Campbell*

A 'nice sea voyage' That was the proposal put to me by my Officer Commanding, Captain Bob Skitch, as we were preparing for the departure of our unit "Detachment 1 Topographical Survey Troop" for South Vietnam in early 1966.

We had recently finished our DP1 military training at Holsworthy and the prospect of Vietnam was very much on our minds. It wasn't until 8 March that the Prime Minister announced that the 1<sup>st</sup> Task Force of two battalions with supporting arms and services would be deployed to South Vietnam to replace the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Royal Australian Regiment. Our Troop was part of the Task Force – would we be going? It was some days later that Captain Skitch assembled all Troop members at Randwick and confirmed that Survey had a guernsey and read the names of the twelve members present who were to form the Detachment for Vietnam. It was a few days later that we were told that while the Detachment would be inserted by air, two members, a senior NCO and a Sapper, would be required to escort our vehicles and survey stores to Vietnam on the *HMAS Sydney*.

I wasn't sure whether this proposal of a sea voyage was subject to discussion or a polite order but in any case the idea appealed to me so I put my hand up. Sapper Brian Firms and I became the nominated escort personnel to escort two Landrovers with trailers all packed with an assortment of survey, drafting and basic reproduction equipment together with a small amount of consumable stores, on a voyage aboard *HMAS Sydney* to the South Vietnamese port of Vung Tau. But first we had to complete our three weeks battle efficiency training at the Jungle Warfare Centre at Canungra and that is another story. We returned to Randwick on 2 May to find preparation for our departure well under way.



Photograph supplied by Brian Firms

**Sergeant Stan Campbell and Sapper Brian Firms escort our stores and equipment to Vung Tau, South Vietnam (Stan and Brian circled – centre top)**

The embarkation was relatively uneventful considering the apparent lack of trust between the Army and the Navy evident from time to time. Our Troop's preparation was fairly straightforward, all stores were securely packed, labeled with our unique colour code and loaded into the vehicles and trailers which were then driven to the wharf at Woolloomooloo and placed in the care of the army movement's staff. On the day of departure I said my farewells to my family at Randwick Barracks, as the situation down at the wharf would be somewhat chaotic and a bit traumatic for my wife and two small children. Brian and I were then driven to Woolloomooloo wharf where we boarded the *HMAS Sydney* and were placed in the hands of the ship's army staff, processed through the administrative system and allocated our respective quarters. My living/sleeping area, called in navy terms a mess deck was a small bare room about 10 metres square which I was to share with 25 other senior NCOs. There were some lockers along one wall and several poles with hooks mounted at various heights going from floor to ceiling. Four bins were also fixed against the wall and contained rolled and tied objects which I later found out were hammocks. I was assigned a locker by a member of the crew and after depositing my few belongings went up to the flight deck to watch the procedure for the ship's departure. Several shore patrol vehicles were unloading reluctant and inebriated crew members who were escorted on board and impounded in the brig to await subsequent disciplinary action. Other fairly 'well oiled' but well behaved army personnel were shepherded up the gangway including some cheerful NZ gunners from the NZ Battery which formed part of our artillery regiment.

At last the lines were cast off and we slipped away from the wharf to the accompaniment of cheers, whistles streamers and tears. We sailed down Sydney Harbour and through the Heads on our way to South Vietnam. As the land faded in the background we were summoned by loudspeakers to our mess decks for a briefing on the domestic arrangements for the voyage. By then our mess deck was filling up fast with sergeants from various corps mainly engineers, infantry and armoured who all seemed to know each other from past exercises. As there was one lone signals sergeant and I was the only survey sergeant we naturally gravitated together and compared job profiles. He was from a small "hush hush" signals unit and like myself was there to escort vehicles, trailers and



equipment, assisted by a signaler who happened to be accommodated in the same mess deck as Brian Firns. Very early in the voyage it was established that the four of us played 500, so combating the tedium was not going to be a problem.

We gradually slipped into the shipboard routine which consisted of breakfast then a morning parade for all army personnel on the flight deck, where any administrative instructions were read out. Then sub-unit commanders and if required other key personnel in the sub-units were dismissed to attend to their own administration or equipment maintenance. This of course included Brian and I and the two RA Sigs so our first game of 500 for the day got away soon after. The other larger units were required to attend lectures (medical hygiene etc.) physical training and military skills revision which included live firing of weapons from the flight deck at targets thrown into the water. Our days then consisted of playing cards, reading, dodging work details and sleeping in the many nooks and crannies that can be found on a non-operative aircraft carrier. The highlight of the day was the afternoon beer issue where one large can of beer (opened) was given to each man. For the Senior NCOs one member of the mess deck would be rostered to collect the beer and bring the cans down to his thirsty colleagues to be drunk at leisure. The ORs and junior NCOs had to wait in a line while the duty NCO (usually a sergeant) would open a can and drink it to ascertain if it was cold enough. He would then open each can and distribute them individually to the troops, the theory being that they could not hoard the beer for a big splurge because it would go flat. It's the only time I have seen NCOs begging to be made duty NCO. Teetotalers naturally gained many friends during this time. The daily routine was interrupted from time to time for special events. When the ship reached the equator a canvas pool was set up for the crossing of the line ceremony where the first timers crossing the equator were initiated with red food dye and shaving cream by King Neptune. Several concerts were held featuring the ships band and a talent quest was conducted which drew out talent of various degrees of competence from the passengers. Movies were screened on deck and bingo, or tombola as the navy call it, was featured most nights in the eating area.

The days seemed to pass reasonably quickly although at the back of our minds was always the thought of where we were going and what we were likely to encounter, especially when the ship conducted an "action stations drill" of which there were several. These reminded us that this was not a leisure cruise. Finally after twelve days at sea we reached our destination. As we sailed into Vung Tau harbour the scene was of incredible activity. Numerous large ships were anchored all around the area where we moored, mainly merchant vessels and the water was teeming with small craft, barges, tugs, landing craft, ships tenders etc. Overhead, helicopters of various sizes were ferrying cargo in slings from ship to shore, an air strike was going on in the distance and the rumble of artillery and the sharp bark of small arms completed the impression of organised chaos. We packed our personal equipment and dressed in full battle gear but with empty magazines, proceeded to the flight deck where we were assigned to groups for disembarkation in small landing craft. The craft had fairly high sides and we were told to keep our heads down, so we couldn't see what we heading into. We were very apprehensive when the craft approached the shore and we felt the scrape of the keel on the sand. The ramp on the bow dropped and I am sure most of us expected to be greeted by a volley of withering gun-fire from the enemy. Instead we were faced by a row of small stalls with smiling locals offering to sell us coca -cola, Salem cigarettes and fresh peeled pineapples. There were representatives waiting from the various units that were disembarking and I was pleased to see two of our survey troop WO2 Snow Rollston and WO2 Dave Christie who had flown in a few days earlier with the rest of the troop. After a few kind words of greeting we were told that our vehicles and stores would be off loaded later so they drove us to the back beach area of Vung Tau where our troop had set up camp in the sand dunes .And so began my 12 months tour of South Vietnam, a lot of which I have forgotten but some that will remain with me forever.....Stan