



# HOLDFAST

AUGUST 2004

NUMBER 1

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE VIETNAM TUNNEL RATS ASSOCIATION INC

## Tunnel Rats march under their own banner at last – Anzac Day 2004



*"If you've got it, flaunt it." The Tunnel Rats set off on their inaugural Anzac Day march, led by former Troop Officer of 2 Troop 1 Field Squadron (69/70), Lt Col John Hopman of Randwick, NSW.*

Close to 50 former "Tunnel Rats" marched proudly under their own banner for the first time in Melbourne's 2004 Anzac Day parade.

The men all saw service with one of the four Field Troops (3 Field Troop and 1, 2 and 3 Troop of 1 Field Squadron RAE in Vietnam between 1965 and 1971.

It was these men who made up the two-man Splinter Teams and Mini Teams which were attached to Infantry Battalions and Armoured units for each operation. Four to six week operations out bush were the order of the day, and

apart from their normal tasks of finding and delousing mines and booby traps and searching and blowing up enemy bunkers and tunnels, these guys also acted a honorary Infantrymen.

They wear the title "Tunnel Rat" very proudly.

Sappers came from far and wide to join the march, many coming from as far as Qld and WA. Interstate visitors were all former 2 Troop lads from the 69/70 era and included: Greg Gough from Perth, Mick ("Grumpy") Foster and Kev Connor from Cairns, Arthur

Davies, Brian "BC" Scott, Monty "Arab" Avotins, Peter "Roo Dog" Scott and Mick Lee from Queensland, and Marty McGrath, Roy "Elroy" Elbourne and John Hopman from NSW.

Former Sappers we hadn't seen or heard from in a long time included Terry O'Donnell from Ballarat, who helped carry the banner on the day, and Jim Burrough, former CO, 2 Troop, 1 Field Squadron.

The ratio of 2 Troop participants in this first march was very high because the organizers were former 2 Troop lads. We hope next year and in the years ahead we will have a more even mix of men from all Troops and all years.

Spread the word. Let all old Tunnel Rats know they can march under their own banner on Anzac Day each year. Contact us if you're interested in obtaining a Tunnel Rats banner for your area.

## 5 RAR invites us to their 2005 reunion



*Brigadier Colin Kahn has invited 2 Troop Sappers to his Battalion's 2005 reunion. Full details inside.*

# NOSTALGIA CORNER



Pics from the past to amaze and amuse. Contributions welcome. Send your pics by mail to Jim Marett at 43 Heyington Place Vic 3142, or by email to [tunnelrat@optusnet.com.au](mailto:tunnelrat@optusnet.com.au)

## Home sweet home



Graeme Gartside makes the best of life while posted to a Fire Support Base – it's a welcome break from walking with the Grunts. Graeme now lives in Mt. Gambier SA and has recently renewed contact with many of the 2 Troop lads.

**“Yes sir – just two cans per man, per day!”**



Captain Doug George (front) attempts to bring order where mayhem rules at a post-operation “happening” in the 2 Troop recreation hut. L to R at the rear: Frank Denley, Greg Gough, Bob Ottery, Brian Scott, Jock McMullen, Jim Marett, (unsure of next man), John Ash.

## On the road



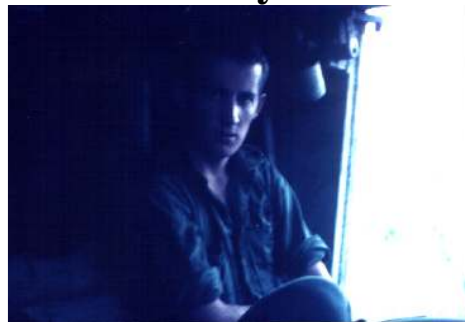
“Pedro” Piromanski and Bruce Bofinger clear a road for mines before the traffic flows.

## On the beach



Jack Power sips on a “Green” while on leave in Vung Tau. Jack now lives in Andergrove Qld.

## Marty retreats from the heat



Martin McGrath cools off in the shade of an APC while attached to 3 Cav in support of 5 RAR during operations in Phouc Tuy in 1969. Marty now lives in Wodonga, and hosted a very successful 2 Troop reunion in 2002.

## Tunnel vision



*Bill "Ba Ba" Lamb preparing for a big bang in a cave/tunnel complex while on operations with 7 RAR.. Can anyone identify the other member of the Mini Team?*



## Beaucoup Boom Boom

Loaded up with heaps of C4 explosives, four Sappers wait on the 1 Field Squadron pad at Nui Dat for a chopper to take them out to a huge bunker system to be searched and then destroyed. Thankfully it's only a one day Op as the boys were suffering major hangovers on this morning, following a monumental "happening" in the 2 Troop lines. Pictured above L to R: Mick Van Poeteren, Chis Koulouris, Mick "Grumpy" Foster and Jimmy Shugg (with lit cigar!).

## No "Pogo" ever looked this good



## BC with the locals



*Brian "BC" Scott of 2 Troop on Ops with a freshly trained group of Cambodians and ARVN.*

## Jock & Bob out bush



*Jock McMullen and Bob Ottery of 2 Trp 1 Fld Sqn out bush. Must be in the early days of their tour as Bob is still lugging the heavy SLR around.*

Only extended bush time with the Grunts involving minimum hygiene, sleep deprivation, a diet of C Rations, bad water, and regular trips down bunkers and tunnels can give you "The Look". Peter Scott (not to be confused with "Roo Dog") and Greg Gough out on operations with 7 RAR in 1970.

## Smoko time for this "Band of Brothers"



*Rare big group of Sappers on one Op. Feb/Mar 1970 Op. Hammersley. L to R: Frank Brady, Bob Smith, John Ash, Peter Scott, CSM Ron Janvrin, Bill Lamb, Mick Foster, Mick Vanpoeteren and Brad Hannaford.*

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# Tunnel Rats invited to 5 RAR's reunion



**“5 RAR and your Mini or Splinter teams were close in Vietnam and we look forward to renewing that active service friendship”**

**Brigadier Colin Kahn - March 2004**

Back in 1969/70 we knew him affectionately as “Genghis”, the charismatic Commanding Officer of 5 RAR on their second tour of Vietnam. Now a retired Brigadier, Colin Kahn has not forgotten the Sappers of 2 Troop, 1 Field Squadron who worked so closely in the field with his men. Indicative of his respect and appreciation of the Tunnel Rats was Brigadier Kahn’s decision to invite us to 5 RAR’s reunion as soon as he heard of our new Association. In a hand written letter he invites us to join him and his men at their 2005 reunion to be held

over February 25, 26 & 27 in Canberra. He has specifically invited former 2 Troop men who were attached to 5 RAR on operations during either of the Battalion’s two tours.

## **Lots of activities**

**Day One – 25 Feb 2005:**  
Registration and Welcome reception.

**Day Two – 26 Feb 2005:**  
Various activities during the day (TBA) plus the Reunion Dinner.

**Day Three: - 27 Feb 2005**  
AWM Remembrance Ceremony and presentation of a plaque, then Sub-Unit functions.

In many ways we were very privileged to have gone out on operations with the Battalions and to have worked so closely and intimately with them. In addition to testing our Tunnel Rat skills to the limit, this also gave us up-front combat experience, something that few who went to Vietnam actually went through.

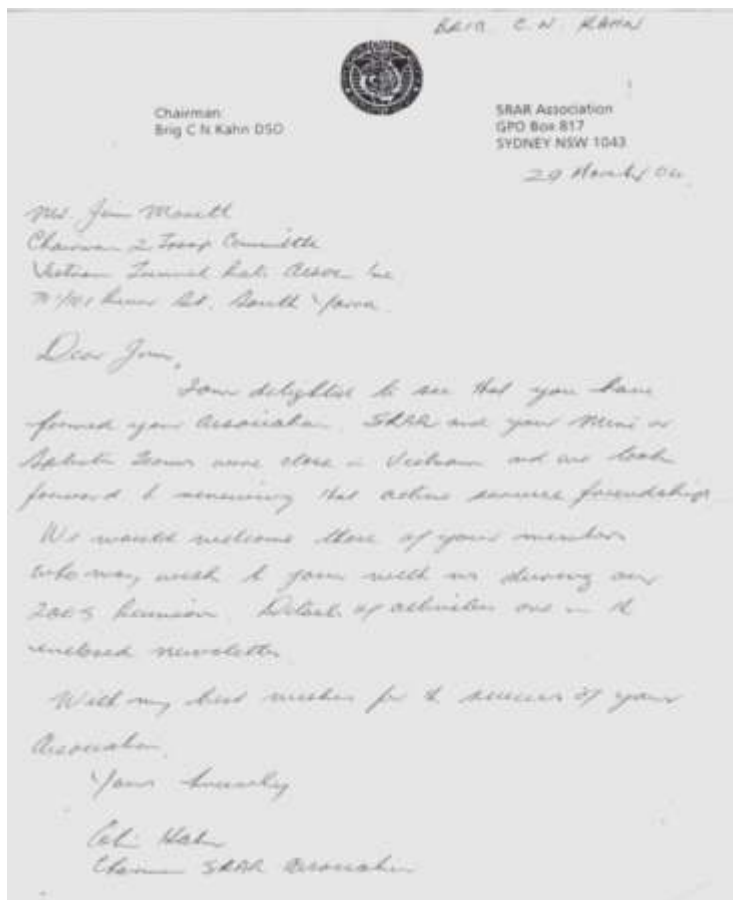


*Sappers Brian “BC” Scott (front) and Greg Gough, both of 2 Troop, 1 Field Squadron, out with 5 RAR in 1969.*

The unbreakable comradeship amongst Tunnel Rats is legendary, and the combat experience we gained with the Battalions played an important role in creating and maintaining that unique level of comradeship we all enjoy. Here’s a chance to get back together with some of the lads we went bush with. A chance to remember some good times and bad times over a few beers. And the good news is we don’t have to bring the C4 for cooking this time!

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## The letter from “Genghis”



## Urgent - We need to know how many are coming!

The 5 RAR Association needs an indication of how many 2 Troop lads will be attending their reunion over February 25-27 in 2005. Let's give it our best shot and make the turnout as big as we can.

As a matter of urgency, please contact Jim Marett to let him know whether or not you will attend, and whether or not your wife will accompany you. Jim's contact details are as follows: Phone: 03-9826 3908 Mobile: 0403041962 Email: [marett@optusnet.com.au](mailto:marett@optusnet.com.au) Address: 701/101 River Street South Yarra Victoria 3141. Please respond within five days of receiving this newsletter.

## The Costs

The costs are unknown at this time, but are expected to be kept to a minimum. Main costs will be for the official dinner and for the accommodation – as usual 2 Troopers will plan to stay in one venue and share rooms to cut costs. The various Company reunions will be at the cost of food and beverages only.

## And don't forget the other reunion – August 2005 in Qld

Separately, and later in the year, the 1 Fld Sqn Group 2005 reunion in the Tweed Heads area will again attract Sappers from all elements of the Squadron and all years of service in Vietnam. The previous reunion in Dubbo, NSW was a huge success. The 2005 gathering from 26-28<sup>th</sup> August looks to be even bigger and better. Get in touch with your mates and make sure you book now. Hotel details are opposite. For function details contact Terry Ward PO Box 93 South West Rocks NSW 2431. Or Fax Terry on 0265-666-5516 or email him on: [terryward@tsn.cc](mailto:terryward@tsn.cc)



*Greg Gough enjoying a beer and checking he's in the right place after returning from Ops with 7 RAR*

## Accommodation

Most people are staying in the one venue – the Twin Towns Resort (Tel: 07-5536 2121) between Coolangatta and Tweed Heads. This place is close to the club where the dinner is being held and they offer free pick-up from the airport. Rooms costs are as follows: Studio \$130 per night, Deluxe Room (2 Dbl Beds) \$150 per night, 2 Bdrm Apt \$200 per night, and 3 Bdrm Apt \$250 per night. These apartments are great for sharing. Book now to ensure you get a room.

# VIETNAM TUNNEL RATS ASSOCIATION



## HELP!

Ouch! It costs about \$350 to print and post each issue of this fantastic newsletter.

To save Jim Marett from going bust producing it for nothing, you can join the Association. Just \$38 per year will make you a member and give you our newsletter four times per year.

Even if you don't join, we'll still send you the newsletter, for as long as we can afford to, so don't feel obligated.

We realise that some are interested and some are not, and more importantly, some can afford it and some can't.

For those that want to contribute, and join, see the form on the following page.

## Why we formed the Tunnel Rats Assoc.

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.

These men (the Field Engineers), are themselves a little uncomfortable with the title "Tunnel Rat" because most worked in enemy bunkers (hundreds of them) rather than tunnels. However, by their role, if anyone deserves the title "Tunnel Rats" it is these guys.

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.



*Sapper Peter "Roo Dog" Scott (left) and Sapper Pat Todd, both of 2 Troop 1 Field Squadron, out on operations with 7 RAR in 1970.*

## Our banner represents all four of the Vietnam Field Troops



*Our banner, with its distinctive rat armed with a pistol and torch is portrayed in the traditional 1 Field Squadron colours of red and blue. Each of the four Field Troops which served in Vietnam are on the banner, along with the dates which represent the span of service of those Troops. Contact us if you want a copy of the banner for your state or area.*

## If you want to help fund the newsletter, here's the Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Troop in Vietnam: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

### **It's Simple**

Fill in the form  
Write a cheque for \$38  
payable to Vietnam Tunnel  
Rats Association Inc.  
Post the completed form and  
cheque to:

*Jim Marett  
Vietnam Tunnel Rats Assoc.  
43 Heyington Place  
Toorak  
Victoria 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.

## Where are they now?

Each issue we'll take a look at where some of the Sappers from the Field Troops of 1 Field Squadron, Vietnam are today. Contributions are welcome from members.



Above (left): Phil "Jonah" Jones down the tunnels at Canungra, Qld where he was invited recently to discuss old times with new soldiers on tunnel tactics. Phil was Tip. Sgt. with 2 Troop in 69/70, (his 2<sup>nd</sup> tour), was with the Qld Police Bomb Squad for years and is now living quietly in Capalapa Qld.



Above: Bob Ottery, seen here at the Tunnels of Cu Chi on a return visit in 1992 (he just can't get enough of those tunnels) has retired and lives in Rosedale Victoria where he does a bit of French polishing of antiques.



Bevan Percival (left), former Troop Sergeant of 2 Troop has retired and now lives near Brisbane. Mick Van Poeteren (middle) has retired from Customs, is active in the Vietnam Veteran's Motorcycle Club, and lives in Yallambie, Melbourne. Bill "Ba Ba" Lamb has retired, recently returned from an overseas trip and lives in Shellharbour NSW. All are regulars at 2 Troop reunions.



Above (at Vung Tau market in 1970): Bruce Bofinger (left) is retired and living in Burradoo NSW. Mick "Grumpy" Foster (middle) was WIA in a mine incident on 23/3/70 and now lives in Cairns, Qld. Jock McMullen (right) ran fishing boats in South Australia, but passed away several years ago.



Left: Nguyen Van Dinh, former squad leader with D445 now lives on the old Nui Dat base, tending cattle.

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