

# CONCERNING VIETNAM VETERAN, DON TATE



Capt Bernie McGurgan (Rtd)

(The following letter was sent to Mr Bernie McGurgan — a former Captain in the Australian Army Training Team, Vietnam, the highest decorated Australian unit to serve in the war, and men who have won the greatest respect of fellow veterans. Mr McGurgan has since died. He received this letter in April, 2014, and it had been sent around the veteran community. The author of the letter called himself ‘CATHCART’ and puports to have investigated this author over a period of time between 2005 and 2014 after my contentious memoir — *The War Within* — was published. McGurgan’s tour of duty may be seen at: <http://www.aattv.iinet.net.au/mcgurgan.htm>)

(**Note:** I have added some photographs and additional information to the original letter for the interest of readers.)

This is that letter:

Dear Mr McGurgan,

I am not one of your email addressees (nor wish to be for privacy) but receive your emails from time to time from another source.

I will say I do know you personally as both a former officer and as a man of some integrity (as well as perseverance!) and for that reason would ask you to disseminate the following information about Mr Don Tate to the veteran community.

I have bided my time in doing this (perhaps procrastinating might be more appropriate) but in light of recent events, perhaps the time is now right to take this action. It is long overdue.

For my own reasons, and I must make this clear, I am not one to enter debate or give an opinion on any forum, especially the internet, but as a former officer of the Royal Australian Infantry, I feel obliged to do so in relation to Mr Tate, about whom much has been said and written over these last years.

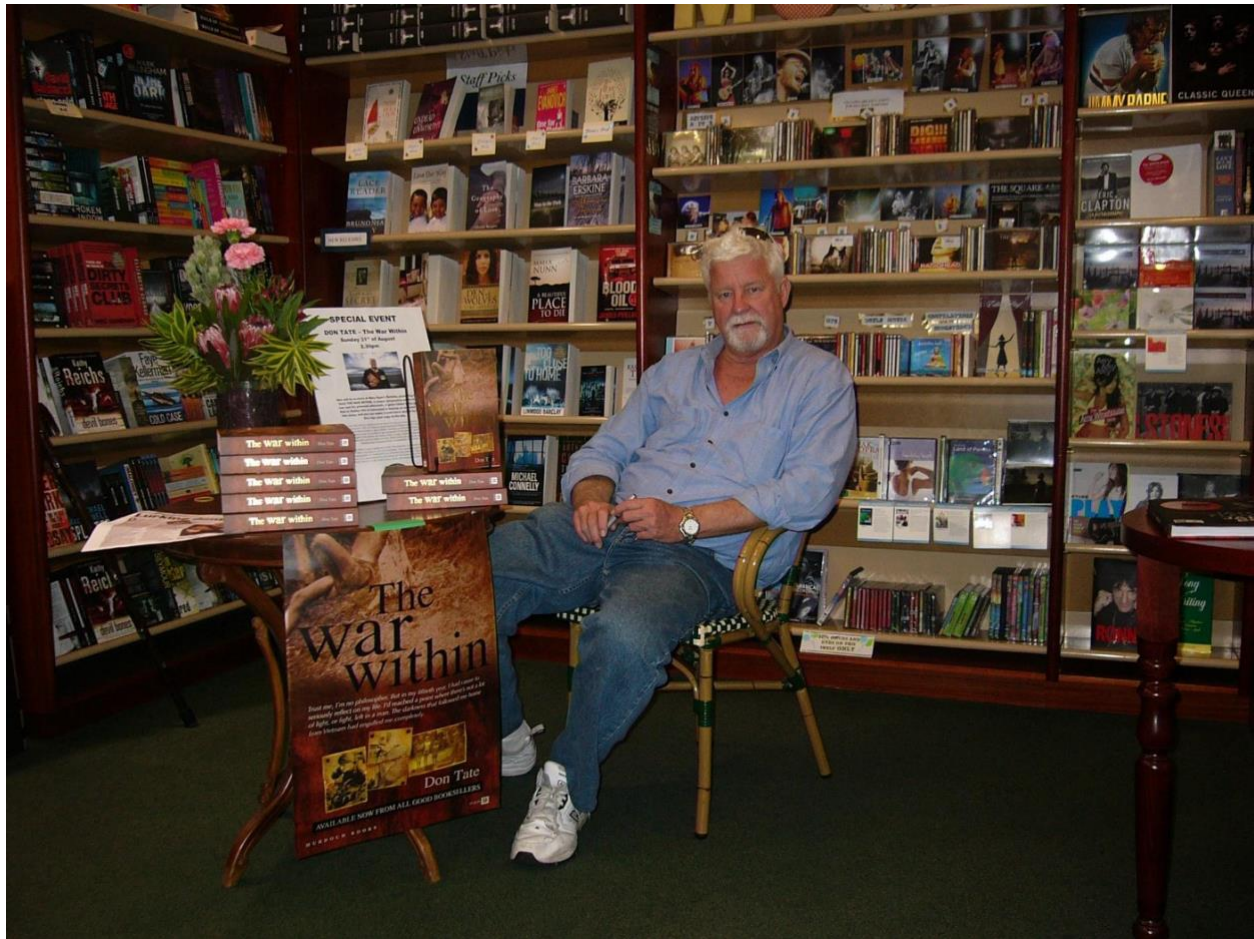
And for reasons which would be obvious to everyone in the veteran community, I will not disclose any further information about myself, other than that the rank of Captain was not the highest level I attained. I have seen too many fine reputations shredded by shrill, vicious, and small-minded veterans who say they once fought for this nation to expose myself to the same viciousness. If that sort of man did fight for their country (and I sincerely doubt some ever have) it shocks me that they surely could not be now so debauched in view and character as they appear to be at this time of their lives.

Goodness in men doesn't just dissipate.

Born evil; die evil.

I will not name those men I refer to either, in this statement. We all know who owns those voices.

I will say, at the outset, that I do not know Mr Tate personally, though I most certainly know of him, and I will confine my comments to what I do know about him, not offer conjecture about him, or idle thought concerning him.



Don Tate at a book signing at the Australian War Memorial bookshop

I should admit though that I have met him personally, briefly. A handshake. A book signing. He signed my copy of his wonderful memoir *The War Within* at a local library down my way and I was thankful he did. I divulged no information about my former rank, or identity (other than that I was a veteran of the same war in which he fought.)

He met me as an equal, and I surmised he would have regarded me in the same way if he *had* known of my former rank.

I have no hesitation in saying that his memoir takes pride of place on my bookshelves, and is far superior to any other book I have collected in relation to either biographies, or the Vietnam War. That includes those works by Mr Cosgrove, Mr Avery, Mr Buick, Mr Sabben, Mr McKay, Mr Hennessey, Mr McAuley, Mr Brown and Mr Heard, all of whom I hold in high esteem, but whose books are vastly inferior to Mr Tate's in literary merit, in my opinion.

I heard his author talk, and was transfixed by his eloquence, his fluency, and his presence, and was astounded at his ability to grab an audience by the throat. We were struck by the strength of the man's character, the raw emotion, the courage to tell such a story. Mesmerised is the best word I can think of. No one moved an inch for almost three quarters of an hour. No one spoke. Not one person left their seat, or even shifted in it.

**Note:** The author talk was filmed at one of the 180+ libraries I spoke at across Australia—Burwood Library, and can be viewed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IblDRqweWdc&t=87s>

Similarly, viewing his colour movies from the war was quite moving and reduced this old veteran to tears. As a fellow infantryman, I found his films to be so very evocative of that short, rare time in our lives, depicting life as it was for those of us at the forefront of the action. I admit to a rare jealousy that he managed to secure such a rich historical record of being in the field, while my contemporaries and I failed to do so.

Oh, such regret now. What were we really like in our prime?

**(NOTE:** Excerpts from the colour movies I shot in Vietnam were donated to the Australian War Memorial in 1996. Excerpts are on Youtube. Just type in *Don Tate, Vietnam*. This is one extract:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c35VLIZmIk4>

Others contain my name, eg. *Death of an Ideal*.)

Mr Tate has no such regrets. His enterprise in capturing a wonderful record of his tour of duty has enriched him in ways we can only guess at. Surely this man wasn't just an infantry private in Vietnam, I thought. What might have been, had his life travelled a different route to that which it did, should he have had the opportunities so many of the rest of us had in life? Such a waste of talent, such potential in a man, not realised.

**(NOTE:** I disagree. I graduated as an English/History teacher in 1979; played representative sport, successfully raised a family of five, and written six books — so perhaps I have realised whatever potential I had. — and can be viewed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IblDRqweWdc&t=76s&frags=pl%2Cwn>

It was also my pleasure to meet his wife Carol, as did my wife (now my second one) and one could only glimpse what being married to this man must have meant to her. She was most attractive (somewhat of a shock to me considering what has been said and written about this man) stoic, and thoughtful. My wife and she shared a similar passion which I don't need to elaborate on here.

Suffice to say, we both consider it an honour to have met both Mr Tate and Carol.

**(NOTE:** Mr McGurgan attended my author talk in Brisbane in 2008. A record of that can be viewed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9yGgNaRQfw>)

As to his memoir, and his observations about the military in general, about officers, and about gallantry medals and so on, I make only this point: his comments mirrored mine, at times, and I'm sure they mirrored those of countless others who experienced the army life.

As a young subaltern, I often had similar thoughts about my superiors, and their motives. While my opinions altered with maturity and experience though, Mr Tate's didn't. But this was to be expected of a man whose wound was such that it excluded him from furthering a career in the army where such views may well have altered.

Nevertheless, in writing a narrative from the perspective he chose, that is, his particular, somewhat narrow viewpoint of the world, his words echo that of all ranks (including us officers) and he must surely be congratulated for the honesty of thought he presents, not flayed for it.

Equally, as Mr Gary McKay noted some years ago, Tate's ability to explain how war experiences affect a man and results in PTSD, is of some considerable import.

Mr Tate's naivety is not confined to his experiences in Vietnam in his tome, and I am sure those who read *The War Within* could only have found it a work of great consequence and most considerable merit, especially given the circumstances of his upbringing, and his most basic education.

I must say, I find it somewhat ironic that this man laid his life bare, all his failings and weaknesses, doing so with the most remarkable honesty, and rather than applaud him for it, many of my fellow veterans have used those admissions against him. He has been mocked and ridiculed for them, yet it was he who freely admitted them!

How can this be? He did not brag or boast of military exploits like so many others have done. He claimed nothing grand about his life. Indeed, his memoir follows the travails of a man simply attempting to be a better man than he might otherwise have been, given the circumstances of his family and the environment in which he was raised.

I have read, and watched, this man being ruthlessly attacked and been appalled at the damage done to him, and no doubt to the sales of his book. There has been a travesty done here to one of our own.

### **And So to My Investigations**

That said, now, to the point of my letter today.

As I said, I have left it late to do this, but do it, I must.

I have watched the debate swirling about Mr Tate, for years. About his service records, the Second D&E Platoon matter, and the other controversies embroiling him, either manufactured by others, or foisted upon him by jealous, spiteful, vindictive men who seem to have little to recommend them.

With little else to do now in my twilight years, I have made some considerable effort, over a substantial period, at some financial cost, to investigate Mr Tate and these matters. And now I report back, and it can fall where it may. It will be all I intend to say, as I will entertain no discussion or debate about it afterwards.

There will be two parts. **This is Part One.** Part Two will follow.

I will say I am familiar with some of the more contentious issues involving him, and have met or worked with some of those Mr Tate writes about in his memoir, including 'Sandy' Pearson, George Pratt (or 'P-rat' as he was called viciously by some), 'Pig-pen' Parkin (used affectionately) Lance Logan, Bruce Osborne, Terry Stannus, David Chinn, Steve Gower, Rex Rowe, Andrew Ochiltree, Neil Weekes and others. This allows me a certain subjectivity.

First, there is a document Mr Tate released into veteran circles last year titled, 'Validating My Service History'. He provided this document for 'any senior officers' (and I think General Cosgrove even received a copy) and invited us to check his validating documentation, and asked that should any aspect of his service not correspond with what he has written, or spoken about, to make this public.

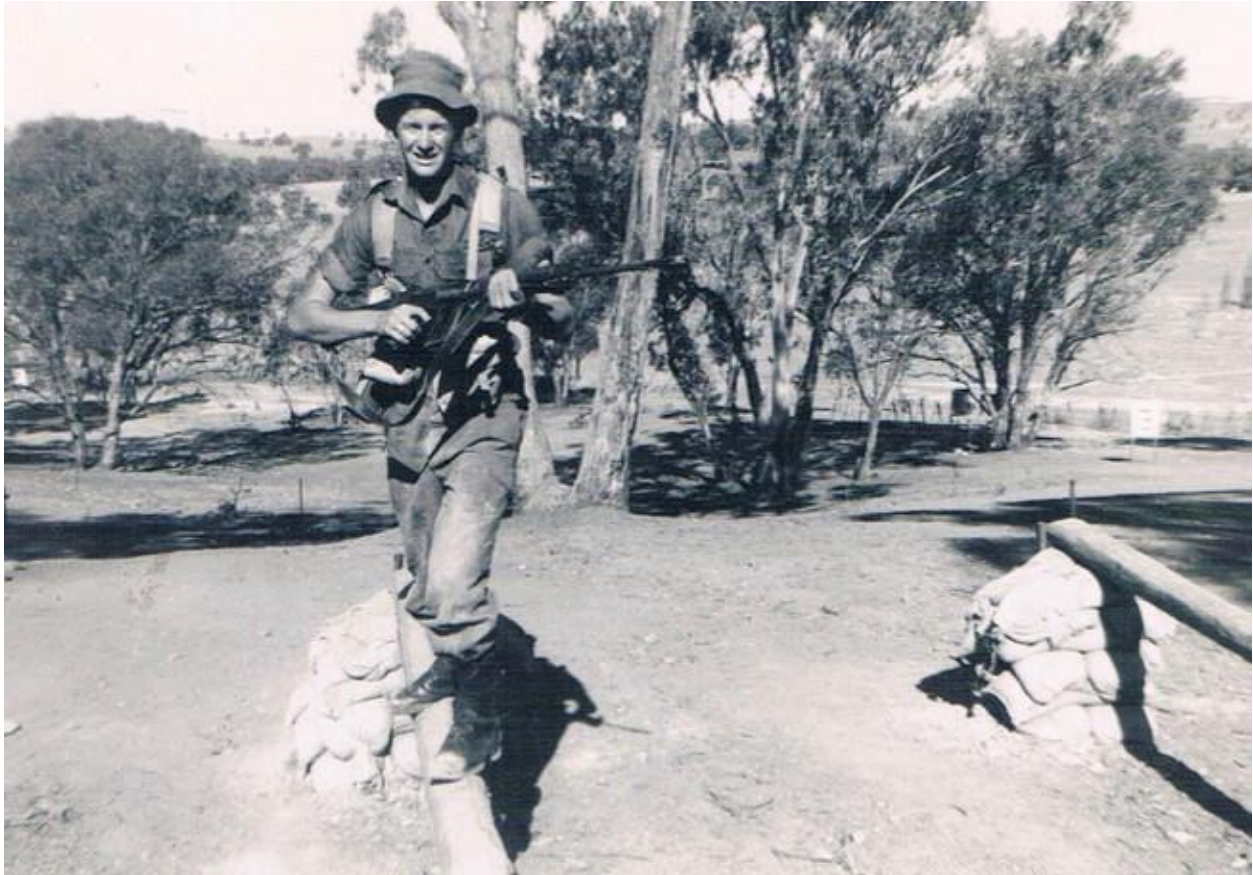
I noted that this was a bold move on Mr Tate's part, and not the words of a man with anything to fear.

(NOTE: There were no contrary views by any veteran in response.)

### **Mr Tate's Training (Recruit and Corps)**

I did learn that his recruit time at Kapooka was unremarkable in respect of black marks. He was well liked by fellow recruits, and was regarded as a good companion in the 'boozer' if not doing extra duty for one reason or another; prone to naivety, perhaps (there was a comment I heard that he was duped into an SP betting fraud by a platoon sergeant which cost him dearly); but was otherwise physically proficient in all aspects of training, and won an award of some sort; and successfully competed in an athletics carnival in a distance race for which he reportedly conscientiously trained in his own time for the honour of his platoon.

(In fact, I was 4th in a class of 44 for shooting from all positions!)



Private Don Tate on an endurance course, 1968

I discerned no ill-wind about him from any persons at either recruit or infantry training, save for a number of injuries he suffered along the way. These were the results of accidents and fighting (which he seemed to grow into during his army time) and which he was probably encouraged to pursue, or it might also have been a consequence of his family life as he describes so artfully in *The War Within*. These injuries and hospitalisations resulted in a protracted period at Corps training.

I read in some diatribe that Mr Tate was regarded as a ‘big mouth’ at Ingleburn, but I found no man with a negative word to offer about him in the course of my investigations. He was something of a ‘character’ from all accounts (in the most positive way) and exhibited those favourable traits within the units he fought, from all accounts, and which that remarkable English Marine, Mr James Riddle also seemed to see in the man in Vietnam.

(NOTE: James Riddle was a former English Marine who served with me in two units. He stated publicly in 2005:

“Don, I’ve read most of your website, and seen the photos of you, and I can read a whole mountain of pain in your eyes, mate. You are certainly changed. No-one should go through the sort of stuff you’ve suffered, and certainly not a person who was, as I recall, a bloody decent and laid back youth. Someone owes you a huge apology. The guy I knew was a young dreamy kid with a shy smile who kept us all laughing in the worst of times. I was very moved when you got

posted to 9 R.A.R. and came to say goodbye, and said, 'Thanks for looking after me Jim'. That was a REAL medal I won't forget. I so well recall the most cheerful bloke in Vietnam. Mate you were a life saving diamond. I honestly felt that you were the only sane thing there. I actually remember the very first time I saw you was when you stepped off the bus at (the jungle-training centre) Canungra. I had been first off with the files of all the rios, (yours was 1" thick with pre-military events, and all the others were 2 pages!) and presented these to the officer and sergeant as I stepped off the bus. They had me stand beside them as they called for the name of each man who stepped off the bus, and checked him off. Near the last there was this tall, gangly, fair-haired kid, who grinned unmilitary-like at the officer, stepped down two steps, and seemed to disappear in front of us, very fast and smooth, and went completely under the bus. The officer and the sergeant and me just stood there in shock and awe. Then an arm came out from under the step, and quickly, with practiced skill, the whole six foot, gangling kid sort of stood up, and brushed at his uniform for a second, all the time grinning in an unmilitary way. He said, "G' day, Private Tate". Then I saw the sergeant, in a stunned manner, tick his list, and shamble off up the path to the reception building shaking his head. I had started a long and amazing friendship with one of the world's most complex survivors. We shipped out and joined the 4th RAR, then 2nd D&E. Then they found we were too embarrassingly good, so they disbanded us and we went to 9RAR and destruction. I have so many recalls of you my old pal that I could and would, love to write a book about them. BUT would you feel insulted? That would not be the intention 'cos I thought you were absolutely indispensable to any outfit I served in. As a matter of fact you were well loved by every one, wherever you went. You actually WERE a legend in the Australian forces. No word of exaggeration- I had people coming from other units into the lines at 4 RAR, asking to see you...")

Apparently, Mr Tate did enjoy the night life of Sydney as many other young men did who hadn't been exposed to such things before and were about to go to war, and liked the ladies of the night, as he records with some unsettling honesty in his memoir.

As I understand, he was never lacking feminine company on leave. He and a Pte Peter Douglas were like-minded in those pursuits, and were joined by a Pte Richard Strapps and Pte Henry Stanczyk- all of whom were either subsequently killed or wounded at a later time in Vietnam. (I suspect the character of 'Doug Peterson' as he is called in *The War Within* to actually be Pte Peter Douglas, but only Mr Tate can confirm that.)





Pte Don Tate (centre, with the tie) at the Pink Pussycat, Kings Cross, 1968 along with Pte Peter Douglas (at left) Pte Henry Stanczyk (far right) and Pte Rick Strapps (at back)

He was as adept at picking up women I am told (though not always of top quality) as he was at speaking Vietnamese which he learned in South Australia during Corps Training.

The fight with a fellow platoon member he records in *The War Within* at Ingleburn happened as he wrote it, though minor aspects were apparently changed, which may be a writer's poetic licence at work. I was told that his opponent was a Pte Slattery, though this wasn't confirmed by any other, and from what I heard, Mr Tate did somewhat better in the makeshift ring that evening than he let us believe in the account in his book. (In fact, I found it interesting that in most respects, Mr Tate would have us believe he was less a man in most respects than he truly was. At all times, he appears to understate his abilities, his achievements and successes in life, save for a paragraph or two at the end of the main body of the memoir, and I am at a loss to understand why he would do so, other than for literary or thematic purposes. But that's entirely another issue which I will not embrace here.)

### **His Vietnam Service**

I can say I checked every document he provided in that major batch of documents he provided, and cross-checked them against other military records (he probably doesn't even know of) and in each case, I can verify that those records he provided are exact copies of originals, all of which substantiate his claims to have been part of four units during his service in Vietnam.

In relation to that aspect, I must say that an on-looker might make the observation that for a soldier to serve in four units in almost eight months in a war zone suggests either a man prone to

disciplinary problems or questions about his competency. But neither is the case here. He was simply a victim of circumstance in that by going to Vietnam as a reinforcement, it was to be his lot as a soldier that those units left country without him, or be disbanded (as the Second D&E Platoon definitely was) or finally, to be wounded, as he certainly was while serving with the 9RAR.

None of these were things he had any control over.

I should say that it is an extraordinary indictment against the military that such a disservice was done to any man, and I am aware that Mr Tate's was not an isolated instance in this regard. So many other men who served as reinforcements in that war, have also been similarly disadvantaged, perhaps though, not to the extent Mr Tate has been. This has cost them dearly by comparison with men who served in just one unit.

I agree with George Mansford in this regard, when George wrote some time ago now, that Mr Tate's experiences as described in *The War Within* allowed today's new army to take stock of them, and re-think the rationale behind some of them. (I refer to the use of reinforcements, length of tours, treatment of wounded men, and de-briefing.)

For addressing these things from the point of view of the lowest denominator, the ADF owes Mr Tate a resounding vote of thanks, and today's young soldiers should be well aware of what changes have been wrought in their own service following the revelations of how his service was impacted.

In relation to his actual war service across those three fighting units (not including the Reinforcement Unit) Mr Tate did indeed serve as a rifleman with all. I note that there is no record of any indiscretions whatsoever against his name whilst in those units.



Don Tate, probably serving with the 9th Battalion in this photo

I spoke to several men he served with who had only kind words to say about him, and who have been appalled at some of the comments made against him by men from those units who *didn't* serve alongside him.

I further noted that should Mr Tate not have been an efficient infantryman, there were opportunities for him to be taken from the field at any time. This never happened. Mr Tate, recently, made the very good point that Major Pratt may well have done so when he arrived in HQ Company and Major Pratt was requiring a clerk and other non-combatants, but didn't choose Mr Tate for any of those roles. Nor was he sent from the field in 9RAR, where Mr Lewis (the very well respected OC of 'C' Company) did not suffer fools gladly, and sent incompetents packing very quickly.

Mr Tate stayed in the field as a rifleman until the day he was wounded.

In relation to Mr Tate' confusion about which platoon he actually served with in the 4th RAR, I can report that he began with 7 Sect of 12 Platoon, then, with the departure of Lt Ross Sillar, his section was moved to 10 Platoon under Lt Henderson, becoming 2 Section. The Private soldier, having joined as a reinforcement, could be forgiven for not knowing (or forgetting) this administrative adjustment. Nor would it have been important to him at the time.



Pte Don Tate on tarmac, South Vietnam, with 10 Platoon, D Company 4RAR, February 1969

I compared those combat matters Mr Tate describes so very well in *The War Within* and note that his experiences in the 4th RAR are validated not only by the 4RAR Narratives, but by accounts in Mr Brian Avery's fine book, *In the Anzac Spirit*. In fact, a picture of Mr Tate actually appears in that book. He is the thin soldier in the 'tail-end charlie' position as his section sweeps the Soui Cau River looking for weapons (p.164.)

Another minor point — Mt Tate has reportedly earned the ire of sections of the 9th RAR for referring to that battalion as the 'death battalion' in *The War Within*. They feel he has tarnished their reputation by that choice of words.

What is lost on those who think that way, is the fact that the 9th RAR was called that during its tour, by all ranks, and across all Corps. It was a matter of statistics. Common knowledge. To be offended by Mr Tate's word choice in that respect, is decidedly precious.

From all I have heard, until the day he was wounded with 7 Platoon 'C' Company of the 9th RAR, running to provide support for fellow soldiers already down in an enemy bunker system, as attested to by his platoon commander, Mr Bruce Osborn) Mr Tate served as an infantryman in Vietnam in exemplarily fashion.

Not every infantryman who served in Vietnam can be judged by the same measure.

Note: My actions on the night of July 19 1969 are recorded in the national historian's final volume on the Vietnam War — *Fighting to the Finish* (Ekins, Allen&Unwin) — on p.295:

At 3.30 p.m., in a brief contact with two Viet Cong near a creek, 7 Platoon, C Company, killed one of the enemy. They then began following blood trails. For two hours, soldiers struggled up a muddy hill through thick jungle and under a building monsoonal downpour. Daylight was fading and many soldiers were weary. There were few signs of the enemy until suddenly the platoon was ambushed. Within seconds, the leading section was cut down by heavy fire from machine-guns, RPGs and small arms. Forward scout Private Ray Kermode was wounded along with several other soldiers. The lead section and platoon headquarters found themselves pinned down by a platoon-sized enemy force in a large bunker system. Private Don Tate, in the following section, believed the enemy had been waiting for them. They were 'a determined, well-drilled outfit', he later wrote, and the Australians had 'walked directly into the classic, buffalo-horn shaped bunker complex'. Soldiers were 'caught in a killing field from which there should be no escape'.<sup>121</sup>

Tate's section was ordered forward to provide covering fire. He and two other soldiers took an M60 machine-gun to the top of a slope and then assaulted forward into a storm of enemy fire. He recalled that he ran, firing his automatic rifle wildly, and hurled a grenade just before an enemy bullet smashed into his hip, flinging him to the ground. Several other soldiers were also wounded. Disregarding the heavy enemy fire, Lance Corporal Andy Ochiltree tried several times to rush forward to assist Private Kermode, but was wounded twice himself. Stretcher bearer Private Noel Gibson then crawled to the badly wounded Kermode, whose pack was caught in jungle vines. As Gibson tried to assist and free him, another burst of enemy fire killed the forward scout. Gibson continued to risk his own life, going forward repeatedly to drag a number of wounded men back to safety. Corporal Peter Bunn also assisted in carrying out the wounded, rescuing Private Tate.<sup>122</sup>

An extract from 'Fighting to the Finish' by the national historian, Ashley Ekins

### **The Second D&E Platoon Matter**

In relation to the Second D&E Platoon matter (my use of 'Second' probably being more accurate than Mr Tate's use of '2nd', despite the same reference used by Majors Pratt and Parkin) I make the following observations:

Until 2005 (when Mr Tate first brought this matter into the veteran arena) there had not been any mention of such a platoon. It was common knowledge within senior levels of the army in Vietnam that a 'D&E Platoon' existed, but it rarely featured in discussions at any level that I was privy to.

Various other platoons were most certainly manufactured from time to time during the decade of the war (only within HQ Company) and all led by responsible officers, and these may have been colloquially referred to as 'second' D&E Platoons- but never promulgated as such.

I believe detailed research would reveal that Lt Terry Stannus led the very first of these 'Second D&E Platoons'. It was also a widely accepted notion by many officers that these platoons generally were made up of men discarded by battalions for whatever reason, and I'll not throw oil on that fire here. The fact that Mr Cosgrove led a sedentary D&E Platoon for the great majority of his tour of duty (despite receiving the Military Cross with the 9th RAR) still has many veterans shaking their heads.)

But again, I won't delve into that particular issue.

But what differentiated those platoons from Mr Tate's 2nd D&E Platoon' was the absence of an officer once Lt Barry Parkin left for R&R, a point he has made quite assertively. On this point, I can only agree with Mr Tate, and others, that the reasons for this need clarification. There was much skulduggery in the Vietnam war by senior officers (as there was, undoubtedly in all wars) and I noted the comments by Mr Ted Colmer in that regard, but it is not my desire to cause further conflict or harm reputations by going into that matter here.

That said, I do believe George Pratt's reputation is such that if blame for all those 'contentions' (as they have been referred to) must be laid at someone's feet, it must be sheeted home to him and him alone. George Pratt did have a predilection for grand warfare, as long as it didn't actually mean his own life being on the line, and it may well be the case that the Second D&E Platoon was his private way of waging war.

I read Mr Tate's account of the Thua Tich matter, and the official comments made by Mr Mike Kelly MP, and I can see no fault in Mr Tate's account as recorded in *The War Within*. If no records of the platoon existed, no first-hand reports, no anecdotal evidence, no media accounts, no whispers in corridors, no other man ever having raised the issue prior to Mr Tate doing so, and then, having it ratified by the Army History Unit, then surely one can only conclude that Mr Tate remains the only reliable witness to those events.

Why have Mr Pearson, Mr Arrowsmith, Mr Woolan and others remained mute during the years this debate?



Don Tate with Brigadier C. Pearson DSO, MC in 2009

I do not know the answer, but I feel a sense of shame that they haven't, and left this man hung out to dry, so to speak. I can offer only this: Mr Pearson is aged and frail, and believes his record will outshine any denunciations by the likes of a Mr Tate and co; Mr Arrowsmith is also ailing, and an inveterate traveller who may, or may not be aware of what has been said and written; while Mr Woolan, awarded a MC in interesting circumstances, may well simply be coasting on that accolade and care less what any detractor may say.

I did find Mr Pearson's personal letter to Mr Tate (which was on display at his author talk) intriguing and curious, especially his reference to the platoon as being 'assault troopers'. I am aware, as was Mr David Chinn, and others, that Mr Pearson did not always have a great rapport with SAS. Mr Pearson's dissatisfaction with the performance of SAS at times, is generally well known by former senior officers of the day. He was of the opinion that, at times, they were not quite up to the task, and wasn't averse to withdrawing them from the field for short periods so as to improve their game.

I am led to believe that the Australian War Memorial has evidence of this, but have never released it.

**Note:** The national historian had this to say about the operations of SAS:

## Searching for local forces

As the task force focused on pacification operations in the populous south-east of Phuoc Tuy, Brigadier Pearson also maintained pressure on the local enemy forces. Month-long, battalion-sized, reconnaissance-in-force operations were mounted into enemy base areas from close to the Nui Dat base to as far away as the borders of Phuoc Tuy.

Pearson also introduced measures to bring his limited combat strength to bear against the Viet Cong. He felt SAS troops were 'misemployed completely in Vietnam'. Their primary role, in his view, was to carry out reconnaissance and gather intelligence on enemy forces to assist in planning task force operations. Although SAS patrols were undoubtedly effective in ambush operations, he considered this a secondary role and an uneconomical use of SAS skills and task force resources. Too frequently, on contact with the enemy, SAS patrols called for rapid extractions, diverting helicopters and manpower from other tasks: for one period, Pearson said, 'I had to ban them making contact'.<sup>118</sup> As a more 'cost effective' approach, he turned to the infantry of the task force Defence and Employment (D&E) Platoon.<sup>119</sup> A battalion rotation in mid May resulted in an influx of 4RAR troops to the task force Headquarters Company, where they were 'held over' pending re-posting to 9RAR and other units. This expanded the numbers available to Pearson in the D&E Platoon. He decided to employ them as 'assault troopers' in conjunction with tanks and APCs, supported by mortars and artillery forward observers. These 'mobile strike forces' achieved impressive results in night ambushes, recalled former task force senior operations officer Colonel David Chinn.<sup>120</sup>

The formation of the Second D&E Platoon in May/June of 1969 marries up with one of those times Mr Pearson was dissatisfied with the SAS' performance. In fact, any the records make it clear that SAS insertions halved during the period the Second D&E Platoon operated.

Of course, Mr Pearson is not about to admit this publicly.

I can also verify that the Public Relations lot were most perturbed by film footage taken after Thua Tich, and Lt Col Lance Logan was instrumental in watering the matter down, on direct order from above, given the political unrest of the day.

The verification of that by â 'Septemus Prime' (a curious choice of pseudonym) last year, was most enlightening. Incidentally, those 16mm images of what well be termed 'atrocities' DO still exist, but as with other evidence it holds, the Australian War Memorial ensures they will not see the light of day on Mr Steve Gower's watch. The sanitisation of our military history continues. I must add that after reading hundreds of emails over the years by Mr Colmer, who was also present at Thua Tich, and who publicly made declarations of 'atrocities' being committed at that place (but never having ever mentioned it publicly himself until raised by Mr Tate) I must say I found his condemnation of Mr Tate quite sickening. On the one hand, Mr Colmer noted that the make-up of sections within the platoon were always in a state of flux, never containing the same



men from day to day, yet conveniently manages to remove Mr Tate from the action at Thua Tich, citing documentation never produced.

(Nor did Mr Colmer prove his own presence, save for a photo taken the next morning in which he appears remarkably relaxed for a man who supposedly suffered great travail that night.)

I also viewed those photographs from the AWM Collection database and note that while Mr Tate doesn't appear in any, neither does Cpl James Riddle (or the great majority of the platoon present on that occasion.)

Does this prove they weren't there? Of course not. Perhaps they were on picquet duty, carrying out any number of administrative tasks, or disposing of bodies as Mr Tate (and others) allege, or any number of other security tasks, especially given the presence of so many significant officers on the ground after the ambush.

In any event, Mr Tate's version seems surprisingly accurate, and he has never resiled from the position he establishes in his memoir of his inability to recall every aspect of that traumatic night (common to many of us, incidentally, including the precious Mr Normie Rowe) while Mr Colmer's 'findings' must be regarded with extreme scepticism, given his own declaration as to the state of his mental health in an email he distributed across the veteran network in 2009, and agreed to by the Penrith Court in 2010.

Mr Colmer's reversal of opinion regarding those alleged atrocities did his credibility on any issue no good at all, and I will leave it at that.

As to Mr Tate's wounding and the nonsense of his not being recorded as being a member of the 9th RAR, nowhere is the RA Infantry more condemned than in this most basic administrative error.

How could a man's place in a battalion, and his role in an action which left him with such serious disabilities, be the subject of such serious ordnance careless or incompetence? What were those 9 RAR ordnance clerks doing? Then, why did it take the 9th RAR so long to correct both matters, almost forty years? And why wasn't he given the most profuse of apologies when they eventually did? (I find it hard to understand why the Battalion's CO, Alby Morison wouldn't have, if he was aware of, because that man's heart was full of concern for those he once commanded. A man apart.)

# "HEAVY" AUSTRALIAN VIET LOSS

**NUI DAT (AAP-Reuter). — Two platoons of Australian infantry suffered "heavy casualties" yesterday from mines believed to have been carried off by Viet Cong from minefields originally planted by Australian troops.**

[In Canberra last night Army headquarters said two Australians had been killed and "some soldiers" wounded.]

The two 33-man platoons were scythed down by flying shrapnel within three hours of each other and 1000 yards apart, eight miles from Nui Dat, 40 miles east of Saigon.

Australian officers said they believed Viet Cong had taken the mines from a minefield laid in Phuoc Tuy province two years ago.

The two platoons involved yesterday were from a company of the 6th RAR-NZ (Anzac).

Casualties were flown by helicopter to the Australian 1st Field Hospital at Vung Tau and A Company reinforced to bring them back up to strength.

**CANBERRA.** — A Queensland soldier was

traians — two from Queensland — were wounded last Saturday.

Killed was Pte. Raymond Charles Kermod, 21, single, of Manly, of the 9th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment.

The wounded are: Pte. Donald William Tate, 20, single of Inala, of the 9th Battalion, who has a gunshot wound. He is in the 1st Australian Field Hospital at Vung Tau. His condition is described as satisfactory.

Lance Corporal Raymond Richard Green, 22, single of Charters Towers, and Pte. Graham Lindsay Wakeling, 21, single, of North Melbourne have minor fragment wounds, and stayed on duty. They are members of the 6th Battalion R.A.R.

Pte. Alfred James Pasfield, 21, single, of Koo-nga, Western Australia, of the 6th Battalion is seriously ill in the 1st Australian Field Hospital with

## Kennedy face ch

**NEW YORK (AAP-Re)** Edward Kennedy yesterday of leaving the scene of an Mary Jo Kopechne, 28,

Edgartown, Massachusetts, Police Chief Dominick J. Arena said he had reached the point of no return in seeking a formal charge.

"I have already filled in most of my application to secure this," Arena said, "I cannot change my mind."

Police chief Arena said he was firmly convinced there was no negligence involved but there was the fact that Senator Kennedy took about eight hours to report the accident.

### Plunge

Under Massachusetts State law, conviction could mean from two months to two years in prison, though most convictions on this charge result in suspended sentences or probation.

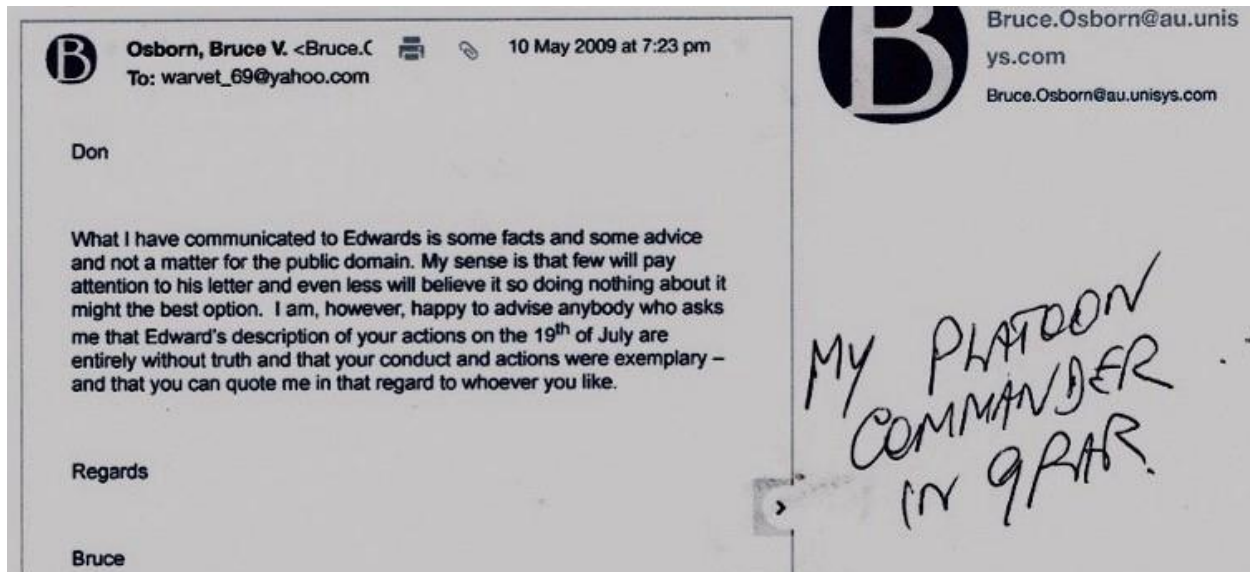
Miss Kopechne, of Berkeley Heights, New Jersey,

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The Courier-Mail (QLD) listing wounded men in its edition of 22nd July 1969

That said, Mr Micheal Mummery's written acknowledgement of Mr Tate's actions on the night of his wounding, supported by a curt, succinct statement by his platoon commander of the day,

Mr Bruce Osborne, and observations by Mr Andrew Ochiltree (who was awarded a MM for his gallantry on the same night) not only validated Mr Tate's personal account, but corrected the historical version.



Brigadier Bruce Osborne (Rtd) validates Don Tate's actions on the night he was wounded

Both men are to be applauded for standing up for Mr Tate in this matter.

I could go on. His hospitalisation. The malpractice. The neglect. But he has documented that well enough in *The War Within* for me to leave it be, though I say, I was greatly moved by his suffering. Just as I was equally moved at his gallivants while laid up, and his tenacity in overcoming not only the trauma, but the processes of rehabilitation.

I know there are those hell-bent on dragging him down for motives not clear to me, but he should be aware that there are those of us (more than he might think) who once were officers, and who believe the discharge of our responsibilities didn't end at war's end. And at polite gatherings of some of us, Mr Tate and his memoir oft enter the conversation.

Suffice to say, that of all men I have met, led, and fought alongside, it would have been my great honour to say I had Pte Don Tate in my platoon. Despite his 'failings' as a soldier (as he describes them in his memoir) I believe he has shown wonderful courage in standing up to his detractors in recent years, where lesser men might have buckled.

He is a most courageous man.