

*I settled in for a comfy, quiet night in the unsand-bagged tent as it was Tony's turn to sleep in the shelter. I later woke to two nearby explosions. "No that's just our mortars firing again, I'm not falling for another false alarm" I reassured myself and headed back to slumberland\*.*

*BOOM, BOOM a hail of shrapnel and debris hit the unprotected tent, "shit this is REAL". I dived onto the duckboard floor of the tent, stark naked, scrambling to get pants and boots on (bugger the socks). BOOM, BOOM, BOOM it continued, a constant hailstorm smashing into the tent, happening too fast to consciously feel fear but it was well and truly there. "BOOM whoooaah, whoooaah", moaning sounds filled the air after the explosions "Bloody hell, people are being hit". "No, no that's shrapnel flying over me" I realised. I was scared, very, very scared.*

*"It's gone quiet, its stopped, I've got to see if Tony's ok". As I stood up "tooong, tooong" sounds came from Dat Do village, just visible in the nightly gloom. "Bloody hell there's more coming. Can I make it to the bunker in time, I don't know, don't risk it". Grabbing a helmet I fell back to the floor, trying to pull my whole body under its metal shell. BOOM, BOOM, the horrific cacophony raged again. My life expectancy was seconds. "Rex you can only hope", I told myself, there was nothing I could do.*

*Strangely, immersed in that sanctuary of hope, I no longer worried about myself. As that terrifying hail of hell continued I only thought about others. "Will Mum and Dad get the telegram they have dreaded". "Is Tony ok". "Are the other guys here ok".*

*"It's stopped. Don't get up too soon just in case". Footsteps coming, then Tony was there to see if I was ok. That is mateship, we cared for each other.*



*\*Those first two blasts were actually ranging shots that landed beside the track down to the mess hall, they killed two rats*



*We were both ok. "If you check the communications I'll go to the nearby bunker (see pics) in case of a ground attack" I suggested. Still terrified I ducked into its shelter with two infantry soldiers from 6RAR one of whom started calling out "my arse is burning, my arse is burning". "Drop your pants and I'll check" I replied to this total stranger. By the light of a match, my nose just inches from those naked, bleeding buttocks, I declared "you've got shrapnel in your bum". Instantly his mate responded "I always said you take it up the arse didn't I?"\* Two of us, previously scared stiff, suddenly burst out laughing with the the victim moaning in pain, his trousers round his ankles\*\*.*



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*He actually said that he was blown out of his bed and one of the later photos explains what may have happened. A corporal had also been hit in the shoulder and the two were "dusted off" to hospital by chopper.*

*Still being pretty edgy I didn't stay in the bunker as you couldn't tell if anyone was coming from behind so I moved to the adjacent trench until we were sure nothing was going to happen.*

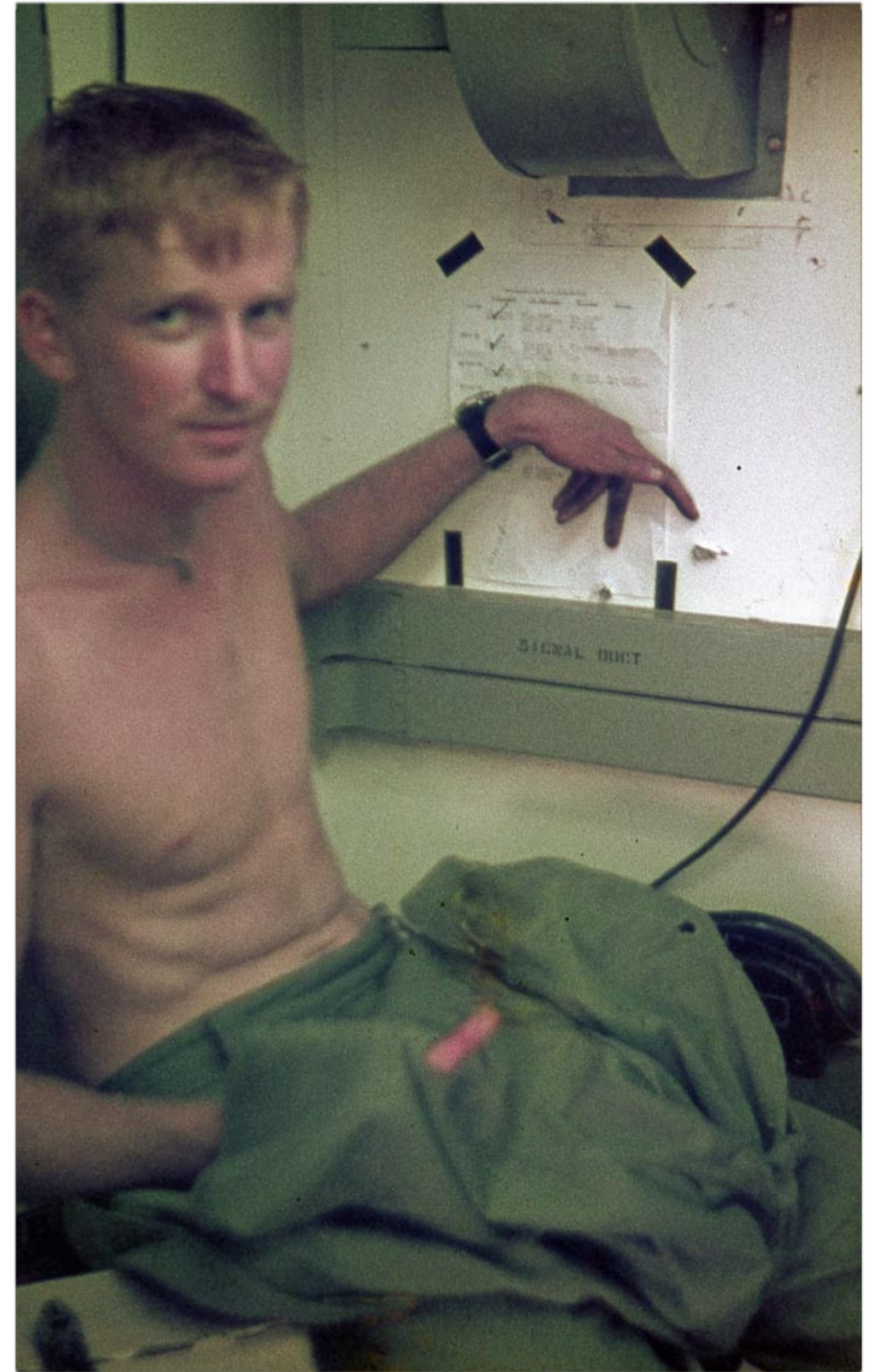
*\*Whilst today that statement is far from politically correct it was very common at the time and is mentioned because of its context in the situation, particularly the use of humour to superficially defuse fear.*

*\*\* I met him some time later and he told me that they hadn't extracted the shrapnel as it was so close to major nerves that he might have been paralysed by an operation.*



*Rejoining Tony back at the shelter we found shrapnel embedded in one of the internal side walls. A bomb had landed just a meter outside the rear wall, deadly shrapnel blasting across the interior of the shelter. Those lethal chunks had either flown just above Tony's head if he was still lying down, or just past his back if he had stood up by then. Next morning we found that two bombs had also landed about five meters from my unprotected head. Fortunately the shrapnel from those bombs had blasted upwards not flat. If their trajectory had been flat Tony's and my parents would definitely have got that dreaded telegram\*.*

Tony pointing to shrapnel embedded in the side wall of the shelter. His finger is poking through one of the holes in his shirt which had been hanging there. So lucky.



\*Parents could be advised by telegram if their son/daughter was wounded (WIA) or killed in action (KIA)





The tail fin pictured left is from the mortar bomb that landed so close to Tony.

It also appears that a couple of bombs may have hit the soft, canvas roofs of the Infantry tents then slid down to explode near the top of the sand bags of the adjacent tent (above). That's probably how my new, bare bottomed mate got blasted out of his bed.

The fire had been deadly accurate but how did they know where the targets were. Whilst our aerial would have been an obvious aiming mark those highly skilled mortar men seemed to know the adjacent layout. Did one of the ARVN troops who was training there plot everything out (which was not uncommon I believe)? Also by firing from inside the village we could not fire back but how come the nearby ARVN troops did not capture them, had the ARVN families been threatened if they did?

A sense of betrayal did prevail at the time but if some of our troops had gathered the same intelligence we would think they were heroes. War can be a nasty business.





### A REDESIGN

Tony and I decided it was time for some new arrangements as we had obviously been left very exposed (and a bit let down?) by the set up we had been given. Two sand bagged sleeping pits were constructed close to the shelter door so we could still hear any alarms, phone calls etc without having to be inside. A tent/awning was placed over the top for weather protection.

I labelled my pit "Fisher's Kennel" and hung up a picture that I drew of a dog racing for his kennel, tail between his legs, a few bombs raining down behind him.

During a later exercise to test communication options that location's call sign was "Fisher's Kennel".



Extract from Pronto Chapter 8

Members of Deployment Troop were always a keen bunch ready to move with their AN/MRC-69 shelters to fire support bases and other field locations. A few members had a close shave at Horseshoe Hill near Nui Dat in early 1970 when a mortar bomb missed their shelter by a few feet, perforating it with extra ventilation holes.

That incident has had a few mentions. An extract from *Pronto* above, the *Unit War Diary* below, and a 6RAR perspective as outlined in the book *We Too Were Anzacs*. Note that one account says 12 mortars the other 13 but it seemed like a lot more than that. Note too that the account at right confirms that the rounds were fired from within Dat Do.

We and those 6RAR guys were very, very lucky

Although I never told Mum and Dad what happened my Father read about it in the Adelaide papers (see the RTA chapter next). Another twist in this tale is that whilst he was so, so lucky that night Tony died a few years later from a disease he may well have contracted in Vietnam. I still find that hard to reconcile.

Whilst I am not into Country Music I did come across Dianne Lindsay's song *Living in the Shadow of The Horseshoe* which really does hit the mark (unfortunately).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6cn3lxaw5s>

CHAPTER 15  
OPERATION NAPIER  
10 January - 27 February 1970

Before launching the Battalion's next major operation, Napier, the companies were deployed in the usual lower level operations in areas of concern to the Task Force. A Coy, temporarily commanded by Capt Fairhead, had taken over responsibility for the Horseshoe on 28 December 1969, and its first operational tasks were to continue protecting the land clearing team and patrol into the Long Green. During its stay at the Horseshoe, A Coy suffered some casualties when 13 mortar bombs were fired at the position from within Dat Do. At the same time as the mortaring, an enemy force attacked an ARVN post within Dat Do, suffering a number of casualties in doing so. The mortaring may have been a diversion to deter A Coy from reacting to the attack on the ARVN post. Two A Coy soldiers, Lcpl JW McLennan and Pte J Johnson, were lightly wounded by mortar fragments. One former member attached to A Coy recalled the mortaring: *Soldiers occupying the Horseshoe slept in four-man tents but if the position came under any form of attack, they were supposed to occupy their weapon pits. On this occasion, Cpl Vic Zhukov heard the rounds landing but remained in his tent as his sand-bagged tent was too far from his bunker. His decision to remain paid off. The next morning, he found that one of the rounds had exploded at the entrance to his bunker. Pyrotechnic ammunition held inside the bunker was still spitting and fizzing. Anyone inside would have been injured or more likely killed.*



Mortar crater outside Cpl Vic Zhukov's bunker.

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| PHUOC TUY | 4 Jan 70 | AN/MRC-69 and crew from Deployment Troop loc at Horse Shoe feature (YS494623). Site received 12 x 82mm incoming enemy mortar rounds. NO personnel cas from sgn but equipment suffered superficial damage (approx 20 small shrapnel perforations) |
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