

Initially I was assigned to the Technical Maintenance workshops, servicing and repairing various items of equipment. Straight away another Technician and I were given the unenviable task of repairing the notoriously unreliable Emu Switchboard, working round the clock shifts (but at least we got a mention in Dennis' book Pronto and the Unit Diary). That WW2 model switchboard, which I believe was a "gift" from the Americans, handled around 6000 calls per day so its reliability was paramount. We spent hours cramped behind it doing fiddly rewires, definitely not my forte.*

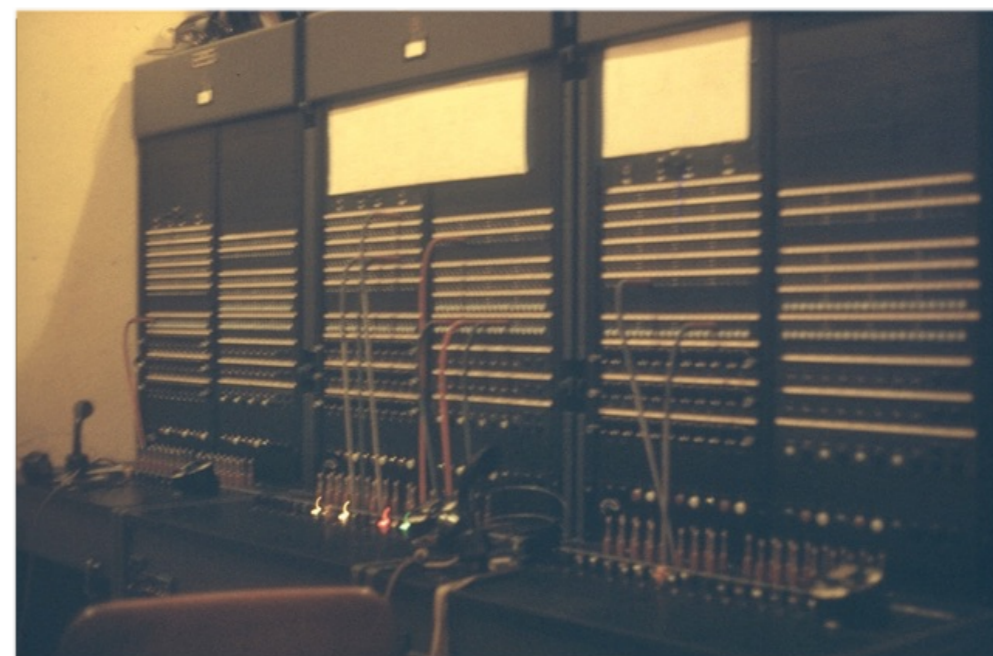


AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P05317.003

*** Extract from Pronto Chapter 8**

At the other end of the reliability spectrum was the famous EMU switchboard, which will undoubtedly be one of the Corps' legends. The March 1970 squadron report stated in exasperation "this board carried the hallmark 'moisture fungus proofed Nov 44'. The board is older than most of its operators; it appears increasingly to resent their attention and the attention of the technicians who minister to its ailments." Later the EMU was reported to be seeking repatriation benefits for wounds received from its operators, and the operators were said to be claiming compensation for utter exasperation. On a serious note, switchboard equipment just did not meet the needs of the Army in Vietnam. The TC-10 EMU switchboard at Vung Tau was eventually replaced in February 1971 with an AN/MTC-1.



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P05317.008

EXTRACTS FROM THE UNIT WAR DIARY

re EMU Switchboard

VUNG TAU

Switchboard TC-10

12. Two technicians were employed fully during the month on urgent repair and maintenance., Only a few minor faults remain but it appears likely that the routine maintenance of the switchboard and frame will always require the full time services of two technicians.

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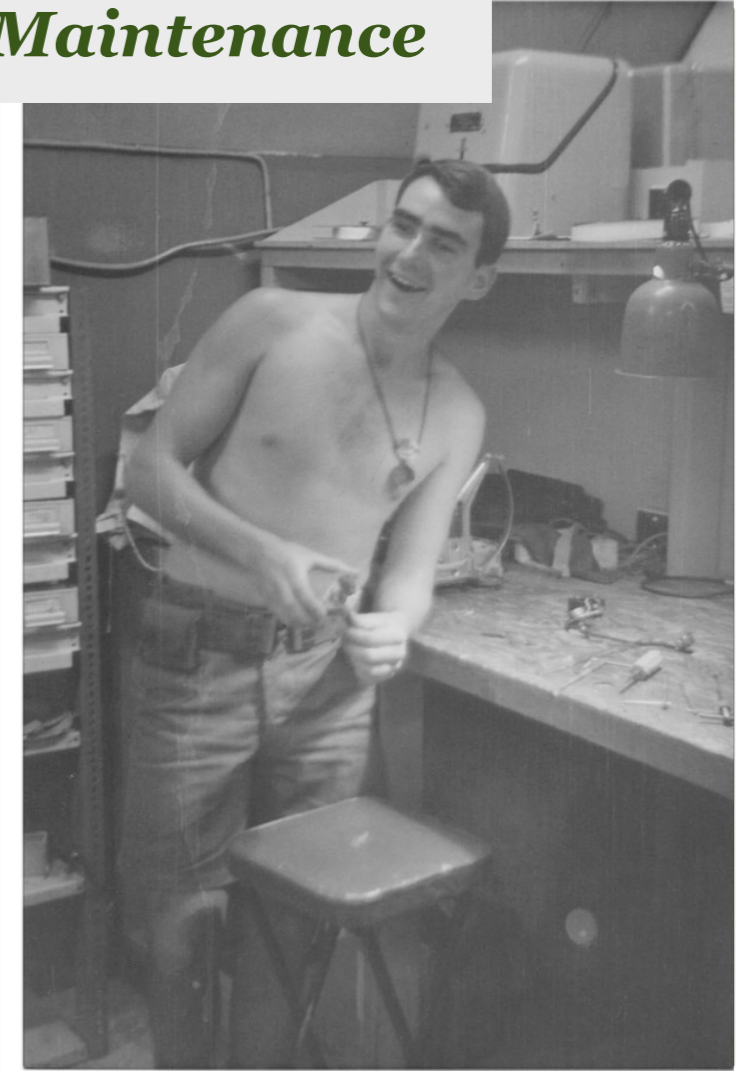
Switch Board TC10

33. Thirty two separate faults were repaired during the month. The wiring looms have deteriorated to the point that opening the equipment to repair a minor fault usually generates a number of additional faults.

Tech Maintenance

Clockwise from top

1. & 2. Tony and Peter repairing equipment
3. repairing a teleprinter, basically a typewriter which could create an electronic message
4. a visit from General Hay, our commander in Vietnam at the time. I was repairing one of our HF Radios which were having troubles due to mismatches with aerials and he asked me what I was doing and why. With my boss hovering over my shoulder I tried to give him a half answer but he was immediately on to me and drew out the whole truth. I suspect there were further questions raised afterwards



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COM/69/0405/VN



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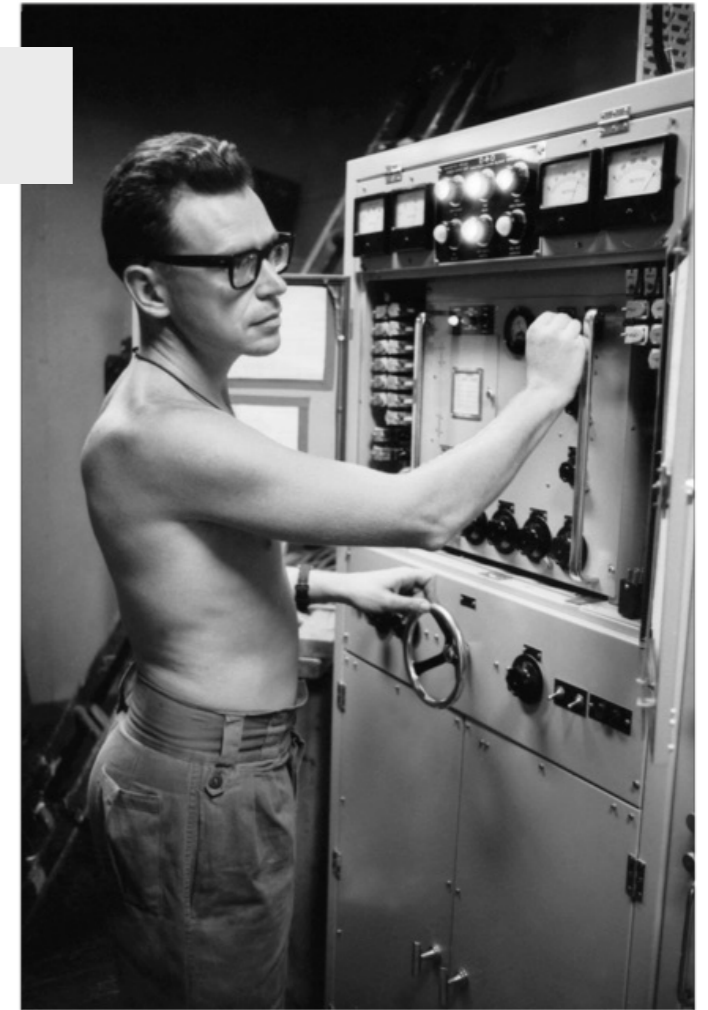
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Systems Control



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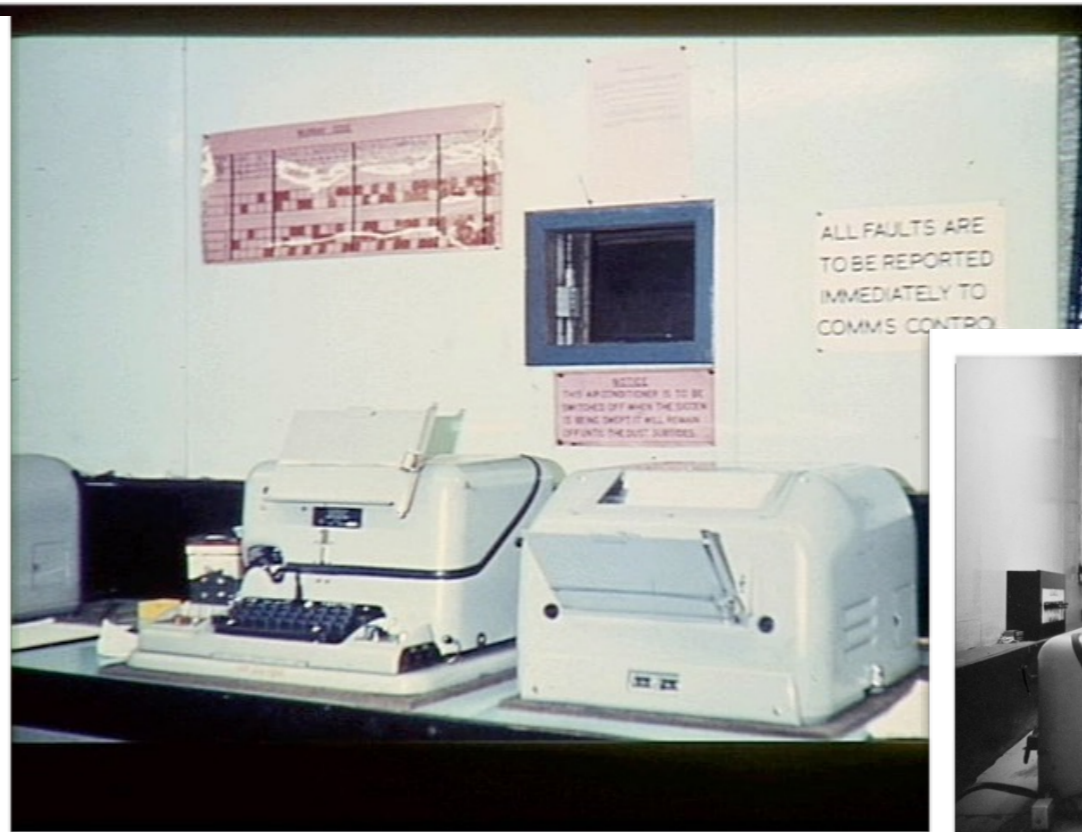
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COM/69/0409/VN

I later moved into Systems Control sitting at the desk top left and maintaining the major radio systems throughout Vietnam and back to Australia. I always found it rather incongruous that whilst as basic ranked soldiers we were expected to exercise initiative and competency, on our own, in the middle of the night if something went wrong, we could then be “compliantly” subjected to room inspections and the like. By the way the air conditioning ducts in that room, essential for the equipment but terrible for rusting rifles, did keep cans of beer cold (or so I was told)



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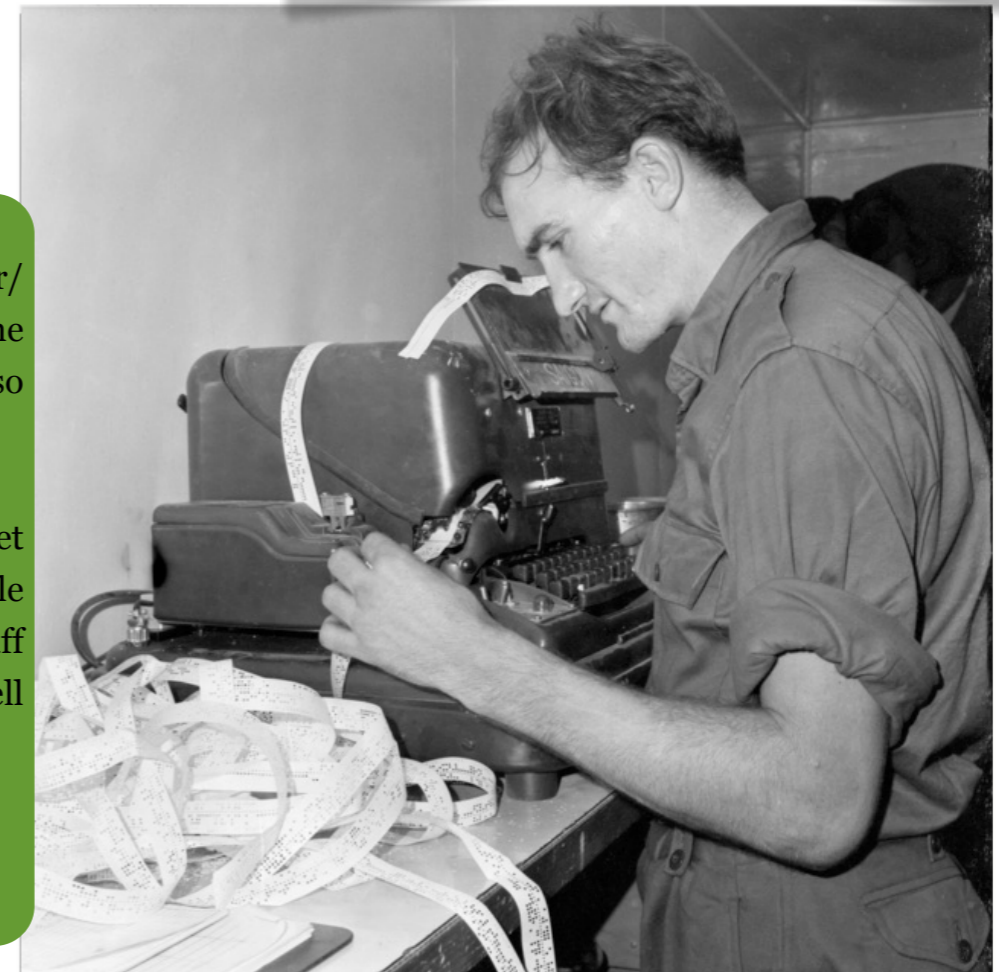
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COM/59/0756/VN

Next door was the Communications (Comms) Centre (top left) where Operators sent/received messages via teletype equipment (top centre). These machines produced a paper tape where each letter/symbol was represented by a pattern of holes and spaces across the tape (see bottom right). The equipment interpreted on-off electrical pulses going through those patterns. These messages were also encrypted by Cypher equipment ensuring that if the enemy intercepted them they couldn't be read.

In Systems Control we had the daily job of changing the cypher codes according to sealed, top secret instructions. A small plug in block on the radios had rows and columns of tiny holes and an array of little cords that had to be inserted into specific holes according to the instructions. As I mentioned fiddly stuff was not my, or some of my mates', forte so we didn't always get it right. Problem was that you couldn't tell which end had got it wrong so both had to check if it failed.

The Operator in the Centre Right photo is Dave Morgan who wrote the book I mentioned earlier



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ERR/68/0754/VN

A Day on the Harbour



We also helped out the Navy, on this trip checking a ships aerals. It meant precariously hanging on to masts, again not my cup of tea. In one of my letters I outlined how we did a last minute dash to replace a radio on, I think, HMAS Jeparit before it departed. Apparently I was madly setting up the radio in the back of a Landrover at 50mph through the town streets.

The ships above and top right carried generators to supply the military establishments around Vung Tau. We also had back up generators for the critical communications systems. The Hercules aircraft (above) is flying into the adjacent Vung Tau airport.





Further pics from around the harbour

