

“Old boys visit 20th Regiment”

At the invitation of Lt.Col. Wade Cooper, CO 20th Regiment RAA, 4 “old boys” were asked to speak to a professional development program. The day was organised by Maj. Russ Hamsey, with due consideration to the age of the attendees and Qld CONVID restrictions. The Regiment’s transport [personal thanks to the drivers] brought Keith Ayliffe & Eric Marques from the Sunshine Coast and Harry Lynas, Phil Sheedy, Ian Board and myself locally to Enoggera for the full but interesting day. We all arrived around lunchtime and because of the warm weather the talks and presentation were done in the shade of the Checkley Annex.

Personally, it was daunting, standing in front of all the officers and NCO’s, and for the first time publicly recalling events and experiences from 52 years ago. Russ commenced the presentations by introducing each speaker with a short bio. Keith spoke first about his service with particular focus on the Battle of FSB Coral & Balmoral. Next, I spoke about my Nasho’s service with the Det in Vietnam [big memory test!]. Ian followed by recounting his advancement through the ranks, from Gunner to Major and BC 131 Bty. He imparted much “real world” wisdom about service to the young attentive Locators.



Picture 1 & 2 Ian Board addressing Officer's & NCO's

Finally, Harry recounted his very challenging task of relocating 131 Bty. from their old decrepit lines at Holsworthy NSW to new lines at Enoggera Qld. He colourfully described the move by a very large long military convoy, directed by Military Police, and coming down a very steep twisty road via Cunningham’s Gap into Qld with some trucks overloaded!

From the feedback our talks were well received although somebody did ask Russ “had we coordinated our talks as each speaker highlighted similar lessons for leadership”. Russ explained we hadn’t but had independently described similar experiences. And on reflection the Det. Locator’s were well trained, multi skilled, adaptable and worked successfully independently, at LP’s, radars or on survey jobs. And nothing has changed, the Regiment successfully deployed small independent teams using UAV’s to support firefighters during the destructive bushfires earlier this year.

After the talks, with only the 131 Bty. members present, Keith, Phil and Eric, all UCG recipients, presented a series of framed documents & photos, telling the story of the Det. during Battle of FSB Coral & Balmoral and the subsequent awarding of the Unit Citation for Gallantry. All documents showing the unit’s history proud will be displayed in 131 Bty HQ.



Picture 3 Maj Fiona Bruce BC 131 Bty, accepting FSB Coral history from Phil Sheedy, Terry Erbs, Keith Ayliffe & Eric Marques

This has prompted the BSM 132 Bty. to ask LSTAA for similarly support, to help gathering and displaying that unit's history. Fortunately, Craig Cook former BSM 132 Bty, wrote a very detailed unit history up until 1987 but their recent history is yet to be written. It's been suggested we could frame a propeller of the Scan Eagle used in Afghanistan and donate to 132 Bty, to represent their service in recent conflicts.

With John Dellaca's permission, I reprinted his iconic photo of the Det. [mainly radar, LP and RAEME, no surveyors!], waiting to fly, on the morning of the 12th May 1968, from FSB

Anderson to FSB Coral.



Picture 4 Photo taken at FSB Anderson by Stan Briggs using John Dellaca's camera.

This framed photo will be displayed in the James Menz Club, which incidentally is bare of memorabilia as it's being repainted. However, the Club's coffee machine was still operating and I understand is a great source of income for the Club [typically the younger generation must have barista brewed coffee!]

After the presentation, the bar was opened and welcome drinks were enjoyed before we "oldies" retired to change for the Regimental dinner.

Again, we were picked and driven to dinner in the Area Officer's Club, arriving in time to enjoy a drink and chat with our host... everyone had a host, mine was WO2 Berger BSM 131 Bty. Because of the Pandemic and social distancing, it was 3 per table, which we appreciated, being able to have a conversation without contending with the usual noisy environment. The food was very good, drinks were plentiful and I enjoyed chatting to recently arrived members and old mates, and learnt that Phil Swinsburg is now Colonel

Commandant RAA Qld, and that the Pandemic has helped his drone delivery company!



Picture 5 Area Officer Mess, 20th Regiment RAA dinner with social spacing and 3 per table.

By 10.30 we “oldies” decided to take our leave and were driven home[[thanks again to the drivers] weary after a long but enjoyable day. Finally, from the “Oldies”, many thanks to Lt. Col. Wade Cooper and Maj. Russ Hamsey for your great organization and kind hospitality.