

**ROYAL AUSTRALIAN ARMY  
SERVICE CORPS**

**VIETNAM 1966-1967**

**HQ 1ST COY RAASC (DIV TPT)**

**1<sup>ST</sup> TPT PL RAASC**

**87<sup>TH</sup> TPT PL RAASC  
(TIPPER)**

**2ST SUP PL RAASC**

**DET 176<sup>TH</sup> AD COY  
RAASC**

**DET 1<sup>ST</sup> DIV POSTAL  
UNIT RAASC**

**DET 1<sup>ST</sup> DIV CASH  
OFFICE RAASC**

**DET 52<sup>ND</sup> SUP PL  
RAASC**

**DET DIV S&T WKPS  
RAEME**

**PAR ONERI**

# 1 TRANSPORT PLATOON RAASC VIETNAM 1966/67

*“YOU CALL WE HAUL”*



## GENERAL BACKGROUND

On the 9th March 1966 the Officer Commanding HQ 1 Company Royal Australia Army Service Corps, Major Duncan Glendenning called a parade in the Unit gymnasium to issue verbal orders that the Australian Defence Force was to be built up in South Vietnam (SVN). The Coy had been warned for Active Service.

1 Transport Platoon (1Tpt Pl) was to be formed from 1 & 2 Pls at Ingleburn. The selection for the Pl manning, down to the Pl Sgt was detailed. All personnel selected were warned of the security, thus began “OPERATION HARDIHOOD”.

The platoon Commander & platoon Sergeant had the task of selecting forming & training all members of the platoon.

MANNING DETAIL: Down to Section Commander.

Officer Commanding	Capt Frank Barton (Dec)
2 <sup>nd</sup> in Command	Lt Tony Maher (Dec)
Pl Transport Sergeant	Sgt Ron Butcher
Pl Admin Sergeant	Nil available
Transport Corporal	Cpl Alan Brebner (Dec)
Storeman Corporal	Cpl Ron Whitehill
Caterer Corporal	Cpl Ray Lang
Section Commanders	Cpl Peter Gaden
	Cpl Paddy Herron
	Cpl Rick Murray
	Cpl Bob Cochrane
	Cpl Jim Gibson

The manning was tedious at times, some problems associated with the soldiers were, medical, fitness & administration (to name a few), plus the Pl had just finished training the first two National Service Driver Courses at Ingleburn. 26 of these were to make up the 76 members of 1 Tpt Pl. The Corps could (after 4 months) only send us a Sgt or Cpl storeman to fill the Sgt admin slot.

## TASK VEHICLES

30 x 2 ½ Ton GS MK3 Cargo vehicles.

3 x spares.

## BUILD UP TO DEPARTURE

The following is an outline detail of our events prior to departure for SVN.

Date                      Occurrence / Event

2 Apr 66 54 Personnel from 1 Tpt Pl plus 12 Personnel from 176 AD Det depart to CANUNGRA for 3 weeks Jungle Warfare Training. The remaining members were left to prepare stores & vehicles for loading.

18 Apr 66 Stores & vehicle to HMAS SYDNEY for advance party.

21 Apr 66 67 personnel march through SYDNEY with 1 Task Force.

25 Apr 66 66 personnel return from CANUNGRA. On arrival they are briefed on overseas allowance.

	Officers	\$ 1-70 per day
	Other ranks	\$ 1-55 per day

27 Apr 66 Main body pre-embarkation leave.

5 May 66 Advance party departs by air to SVN.

6 May 66 Main body back from pre-em leave. Prepare & load vehicles onto HMAS SYDNEY.

25 May 66 Main body departs on HMAS SYDNEY.

6 Jun 66 Main body & vehicles arrive in SVN.

### 1 TRANSPORT PLATOON RAASC SOUTH VIETNAM

The platoon was to be located in the Task Force Area at Nui Dat. On 1 Jun 66 the decision was made that 1 Tpt Pl would remain under command of HQ 1 Coy & remain at Vung Tau until the Task Force was completely established. During this phase the Platoon was to be released to The Task Force for operations as & when required. After the Nui Dat Base camp was established the platoon was to move & establish an allocated area, near the soon to be built airstrip. This move failed to eventuate. It was decided 1 Tpt Pl would better serve the Task Force with daily maintenance convoys from Vung Tau & be called forward as & when required. Numerous times over our stay, the location of where 1 Tpt Pl as 2<sup>nd</sup> Line Transport should be located was discussed. The build up of the Nui Dat & Vung Tau Bases was very intense for the drivers. The vehicles were working long hours (sometimes 24 hour shifts) unloading resupply ships night & day, maintenance convoys, stock piling of rations, ammo, engineer stores, defence stores & be available for operations with the Task Force. The load carrying capacity of the 2 1/2 ton was exceeded daily. Some examples:

Engineer Stores	- 6 slings of timber	8 ton
Artillery ammo	- 8 pallets	8 ton
Defence stores	- star pickets	6 ton
Rations Aussie	- 8 pallets	8 ton

An ARMY Newspaper article, at the time by the Ops Officer HQ 1 Coy, then Capt David Ferguson, now Maj General Ferguson AM. CSC. (Retd). I quote; "In the first 5 months the vehicles of 1 Coy RAASC (inc 87 pl) travelled 330,000 miles, carried 13,000 tones of stores & equipment to the Task Force in over 4750 individual loads. *A very impressive effort.* The Motto of 1 Tpt Pl is indicative of its operations. **"YOU CALL WE HAUL"** The Platoon has worked in the fore assisting the most forward units in their operations & has been just as vulnerable to the enemy as the patrolling infantryman." Unquote.

The Pl had a section detached to Nui Dat to maintain the daily tasks in & around the Task Force Area. On 17 Aug 66 the Base was mortared. Several of the bombs landed in the RAASC Detachment Area, resulting in the wounding of one of our members from the Postal Det. The supply section had a forklift damaged ( direct hit on rear tyre) 1 Pl had 3 vehicles damaged (radiators, fuel tanks, tyres & sides).

During the Battle of Long Tan our vehicles were loaded with ammunition. The convoy was standing by at Vung Tau, all members of the Pl were standing by checking weapons, ammo & gear ready for the resupply run to Nui Dat. The Sit Reps coming indicated 6 RAR were in trouble, they had lost a high number, many were wounded & at least 18 were captured. With true "Aussie

Spirit” everyone involved was keyed up ready to go, ***we had mates in trouble***. This would have been a night convoy. Fortunately for the PI the resupply was changed to air. The ammunition was transported to the airport to be loaded onto American Chinook helicopters.

History now tells it, the Viet Cong Battalion D445, operating in the Phuoc Tuy area was allocated the task to cut off, by ambush, any resupply or reinforcement convoy to the Nui Dat Base. (as stated by the Commander of D445 during interviews in the making of “Long Tan The True Story” by SBS).

After the Battle of Long Tan the American Air force sprayed (along with the rest of us) the rubber trees with Agent Orange. Within 3 days the foliage had all but disappeared.

Other incidents happened during operations, on daily maintenance convoys & resupply to gun positions. Holes in doors, booby trapped areas when dropping off artillery guns & ammo at fire support bases. The platoon was credited with capturing 2 Viet Cong suspects. For obvious reasons I will not go into detail on these or others.

The PI was involved in 18 operations during their tour, either inserting or extracting the infantry or artillery to fire support bases. Two insertions were at night, the drivers & vehicles remained in the harbour areas until the B52s’ had dropped their payload. The PI moved out at first light back to Vung Tau. During the early stages all roads north of the bridges were designated as RED. It was common to have APC escort from the bridges to Nui Dat. Occasionally the timbered area (before it was cleared) on the left before Hoa Long would be cleared by APCs before the convoys proceeded.

In the early days during the “wet” and due to the lack of formed roads in the Task Force Area, the drivers had difficulty manoeuvring vehicles between the rubber trees, quite often resulting with the vehicles being wedged between or slipping against trees (originally the trees were not to be damaged).

The PI had a standing call sign to the APC recovery vehicle for assistance where possible. The shear pin in the winch was of little use (even after case hardening) when trying to drag the weight of both vehicle & load.

Contrary to all belief the platoon operated several Distribution Points within the Task Force Area during the wet to save road damage.

During the tour the PI maintained a 75% availability with their vehicles. To achieve this result under conditions at best could be described as primitive, under an arduous work load reflected the dedication of all members of the PI. The assistance from 1 Coy Operation staff, where possible allocating tasking early, allowed the PI to organise servicing & maintenance between, (where possible) allocation of loads & tasks. It would be an injustice if reference was not made to the Det S&T Wksps, their dedication to the repairs, maintenance, emergency repairs & night requests by 1 Tpt PI to ensure a maximum availability (where possible) were met without question. It was a credit to all members of the Det. The Det 176 AD assisted with shotguns for the maintenance convoys as & when requested.

## **CONCLUSION**

1 Tpt PI was the first 2<sup>nd</sup> Line Tpt PI deployed to SVN as a complete unit, with personnel, vehicles & equipment. Along with 87 Tipper, were the only PIs to bring their name home after their tour. The PI was replaced by 2 Tpt PI RAASC who took over the vehicles & equipment. The main body departed Vung Tau on 24 Apr 67 by Hercules to Darwin. Departed Darwin at 0030 hrs 25 Apr 67 arriving in Sydney at 0630 hrs (ANZAC DAY). The rear party arrived home on 12 May 67. The last member to leave SVN was Pte Lance Jackson, he arrived home on 29 May 67.

I was proud & honoured to be selected as the first Tpt Sgt of the first second line Tpt PI to be deployed to SVN. To assist with formulating policies, procedures & standing operating procedures that were used & for units to adopt & amend as required.

In 1992 a reunion was held in Sydney (25 years home), 46 of the original members with wives or partners attended. It was decided the members would hold a reunion every 3 years on ANZAC DAY thereafter. We have on average 44 members, with wives/ partners attend at different locations throughout Australia. Unfortunately we have lost 15 members from different causes. 1 Tpt PI SVN can proudly say they were,  
“EQUAL TO THE TASK”

PAR ONERI

Ron Butcher.