

Roger Burke. 4720922

With thanks to Debra mason, daughter of our long time member Snow Mason, and the Virtual War Memorial for Roger's story. Additional photos are from the Sub-Branch's memorabilia and thanks to Christine and John Hancock for inserting.

Roger James Burke enlisted at the age of 20 on the 10th July 1969 at Keswick Barracks, South Australia, Service No 4720922. He spent two months in Recruit and Corps training at Keswick, before his unit flew to Puckapunyal., Victoria for further Recruit training. On completion they flew to Townsville, Queensland to join his Battalion, 1 Platoon, A Company, 2nd Royal Australian Regiment (later to become 2nd Royal Australian Regiment/New Zealand 2RAR/NZ ANZAC), rank Private.

On the 12th May 1970 the Battalion embarked from Lavarack Barracks, Townsville via Pan Am transport and arrived at Ten Son Nhut Airport, Saigon. They were based at Battalion Headquarters, Nui Dat, South Vietnam. The 2RAR officially relieved 6RAR. The 2RAR Battalion comprised three rifle companies and support companies, and was joined in Vietnam by W Company and V Company from RNZIR. On the 15th May the Battalion resumed the ANZAC title and became 2RAR/NZ (ANZAC).

2RAR joined 1ATF in pacification operations in Phuoc Tuy. 1ATF adopted the "Pacification Program" as its first priority in April 1969. Pacification involved seeking out and destroying the enemy in its



Roger on patrol

base areas, preventing enemy access to the civilian population and helping to create a secure climate for South Vietnamese social, political and military life to develop. This work was demanding, dangerous and monotonous for the troops.

1 platoon is one of the most highly decorated platoons within the conflict in Vietnam. On the 31st March 1971 while patrolling in the eastern half of Phuoc Tuy toward the Song Rai River to effect the water supply, then north, patrolling the steep banks of the Song Rai, 1 platoon, consisting of 19 soldiers, located a fresh track in heavy jungle leading from the Song Rai River to the high ground.

The well-worn path also revealed freshly cut timber and an enemy latrine. At 1415 hours in the afternoon heat in the Tan Ru area 1 platoon sighted 5VC on the edge of an enemy defensive position comprising 32 bunkers covering an area measuring nearly 400 x 200 metres with a large enemy strength, (about 2 companies of VC D445 Local Force Battalion). Following over 2 hours of intense fighting they requested artillery support, a fire support base called Beth was established not far from where the Song Rai River intersected with Route 23, the main road towards Xuyen Moc in the east. Armed helicopter and also gunship support commenced. The platoon were pinned down and suffered 7 casualties (2 of them serious) and were running short of ammunition. The platoon Commander requested that a Dustoff aircraft be stood by. He also reported the enemy was manoeuvring with a variety of weapons including small arms, AK 47, .30 cal MG, RPGs, satchel charges and grenades. At 1815 hours the dustoff was effected and the battle casualties were evacuated to the 1st Australian Field Hospital at Vung Tau.

The Battalion was relieved by 4RAR in May 1971. Roger departed Vietnam on HMAS Sydney, an aircraft carrier, on the 1st June 1971 disembarking in Townsville, Queensland. When the main body of

the Battalion disembarked at Townsville, they were welcomed by families and friends, and marched through the city before proceeding on disembarkment leave. After returning home from Vietnam in early June 1971, the anti-Vietnam War protestors were demonstrating, carrying placards saying baby killers, murderers and rapists, some of the many verbal, and sometimes physical abuse many Vietnam Veterans faced. They were made to feel so unwelcome in their own country while they had believed they were fighting for the freedom from communism for their government and the vast majority of Australians.

Roger was discharged on the 9th July 1971.



BURKE, Roger James



SA19776

Personal Details

Service History

Personal Stories

Service Number: 4720922

Enlisted: 10 July 1969, Keswick Barracks, South Australia

Last Rank: Private

Last Unit: 2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (2 RAR)

Born: *Not yet discovered*

Home Town: *Not yet discovered*

Schooling: Seacliff Primary, Mitchell Park Boys Technical

Occupation: Painter and Decorator

Memorials:



Anzac Day 2011