

*We were often reminded that we were soldiers first and technicians second, particularly in Deployment Troop which was the Unit's ready reaction force at the Vung Tau headquarters.*

*Every few months we got the task of using up old ammunition so the Unit would get fresh supplies. One time our rifles would not automatically reload after firing and we realised we had a batch of dud rounds with no powder in them. A couple of days earlier I was using a round to empty a rifle magazine when the projectile slipped back into the casing and no powder spilled out. I didn't give it much thought until we were at the range, imagine if the infantry had got that batch.*

*Another time we were given a huge bundle of 7.62 mm ammo to get rid of and I personally put 300 rounds through my rifle. I was firing one handed as it got too hot to hold the fore grip. Obviously all that was very good for the businesses supplying the munitions as with my earlier story about the artillery barrage at Nui Dat which must have cost a fortune.*

*As the ready reaction force our Troop Commander liked to keep us on the ball and one night we were told to assemble, with webbing and helmets on, for a training exercise. The scenario was that we would exit the*

*perimeter wire shown in the attached photo and engage an enemy force thought to be in the scrub beyond the sand blow (a bit ironic given an earlier experience described next page).*

*My helmet was covered with netting so I decorated camouflaged it with a heap of foliage and fell into line. "Fisher what the hell is that" questioned our Lieutenant. "What do you mean? It's camouflage, I thought we were supposed to take these things seriously so I decided to cam up" I replied indignantly. "Get rid of it, you bastard" came his reply. By the way we crossed the barbed wire by laying down metal planks and actually did quite a good job of the exercise.*

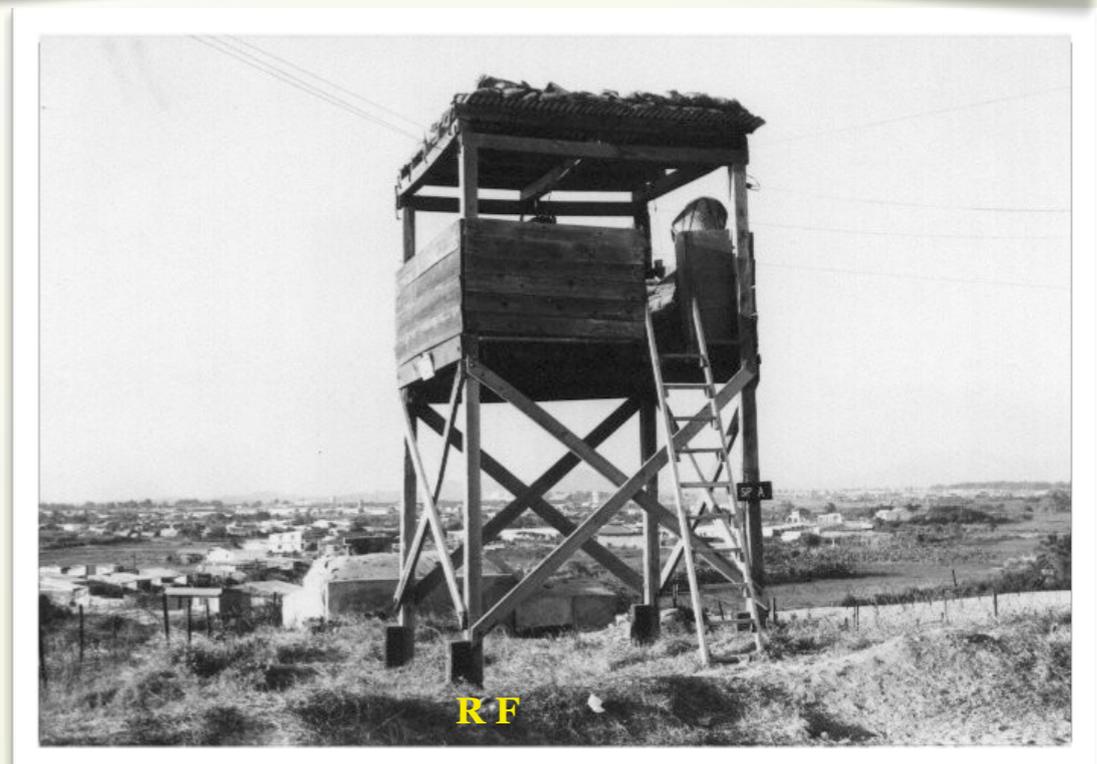


Now you may have gathered that I had a propensity for predicting dire situations. Shortly after arriving at Vung Tau I questioned an Officer about us having to rove the perimeter wire on nightly picquet duties where we were lit up by the camp lights whilst anyone waiting for us was in the dark. I was assured that “she’ll be right nothing, will happen” (obviously some one had done a risk assessment). I also asked about using trip flares to alert us of any insurgents and was told that had been tried but the monkeys had regularly set them off.

Then one night two of us were coming from top to bottom along the road shown in the photo top right when the Duty Sergeant came out of the orderly room (the building with the white fence midway up the road) and stopped us to chat. I think he was a bit bored as that was very unusual and I had never heard of it before or after. Anyway the three of us were standing there unaware that there was a VC in the scrub waiting for us to reach the corner at the bottom of that picture. Whoever was in front out of the two of us was imminently doomed when we reached that corner.

Fortunately the VC, who wasn’t a very good sniper, got impatient and decided to take a long range shot at us. There was a vicious crack just above my head as a supersonic bullet barely missed me, followed by the sound of the rifle. I raged and ran towards the wire, throwing myself onto the ground, scanning, my heart beating so hard that it felt like it was bouncing me up and down. Alternatively I could have taken a couple of steps into a safe building but the the aggressive Canungra training had kicked in, fuelled by absolute blood lust, I wanted him.

Someone called out that the shot had come from beyond the watchtower (bottom right) and we raced down there. On the way another Sergeant stopped me to ask what had happened and I heard next day that he told people that I was shaking. It was rage, things had just got very personal, but I was very, very scared as well. Feeling particularly vulnerable I clambered up the Tower steps then someone shone the spotlight across the sand blow. There was movement at the edge of the scrub. A mate and I threw our rifles to our shoulders then realised it was a monkey. Laughter then quelled the rage and fear.



Okay my prediction wasn't a false alarm that time but the near murder of a poor "Viet Cong" monkey was the result of one (No 10). The attached photo shows the scrubline beyond the Watchtower where the VC had been.

Now predicting things is one thing but I never intended that I would be one of the actors in that scenario. Surely out of all the blokes there someone else could have stepped up and left me nice and safe. Actually though this illustrates just how lucky I was at times, if that Sergeant had not stopped us I may not be writing this story.

Any way Hendrix's *All Along the Watchtower* seems very apt at this stage (link at right). Note that the line "there must be some kind of way out of here", picks up on the "get out of here" theme I mentioned earlier. I may well have contemplated that question later.

The M60 machine gun shown in this watchtower photo is, as mentioned earlier, an icon of the Vietnam War, it really could bark authority.

We occasionally patrolled that sand dune area for security purposes and because locals sometimes stole star pickets from our barbed wire perimeters. They copped a couple of warning shots one time when our guys spotted them during an alert. I was a scout on one of those patrols when we came into an opening with termite nests scattered throughout the surrounding shrubs. It was exactly like a set up we were lead into at Canungra where they suddenly exclaimed "you're all dead, those are disguised explosive devices in the trees". My heart came into my mouth but again it was a situation where you just told yourself "no, she's right, press on". That was False Alarm No 11.



**Jimmy Hendrix - *All Along the Watchtower***

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLV4\\_xaYnY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLV4_xaYnY)