

Sand, sand, sand and heat were my first impressions next morning. I discovered that we were atop a large dune at the north west corner of the huge 1ALSG garrison on the ocean side of the Vung Tau peninsula. To the west was VC Hill and the massive aerials of an American Signals base. Below it, nestled on the mouth of the Saigon River, was Vung Tau township itself.*

It wasn't long before someone facetiously pointed out that "no one has 365 and a wakey". Confused, I soon found out that this referred to the fact that as new arrivals our "tour of duty" would be for another 365 days and then the day we would wake up to go home. Actually in my case it was more like 395 days as somehow I drew a short straw and stayed there for 13 months. Of course many of those keen to rub this in were "short", ie they only had a short time left. Some may have even been on the "switch off pills" given over the last few days to eradicate any residual Malaria in our systems.

*It also soon appeared that the main goal was to actually get out of there, confirmed by the adoption of the Animal's song **We've Gotta Get Out Of This Place** as a local anthem. It was often sung on boozy occasions hoping of course that it wasn't the "last thing we ever do" or that we would not be "dead before (our) time is due".*

Oh and I was finally given a rifle. Being brand new, covered in grease and "cryovaced" in plastic it took hours to get it ready. Thus although I became entitled to the Vietnam Medal after 24 hours in Vietnam I did not have a weapon in that time. It also took 2 years before that medal was finally given to me. See what I mean about farces?

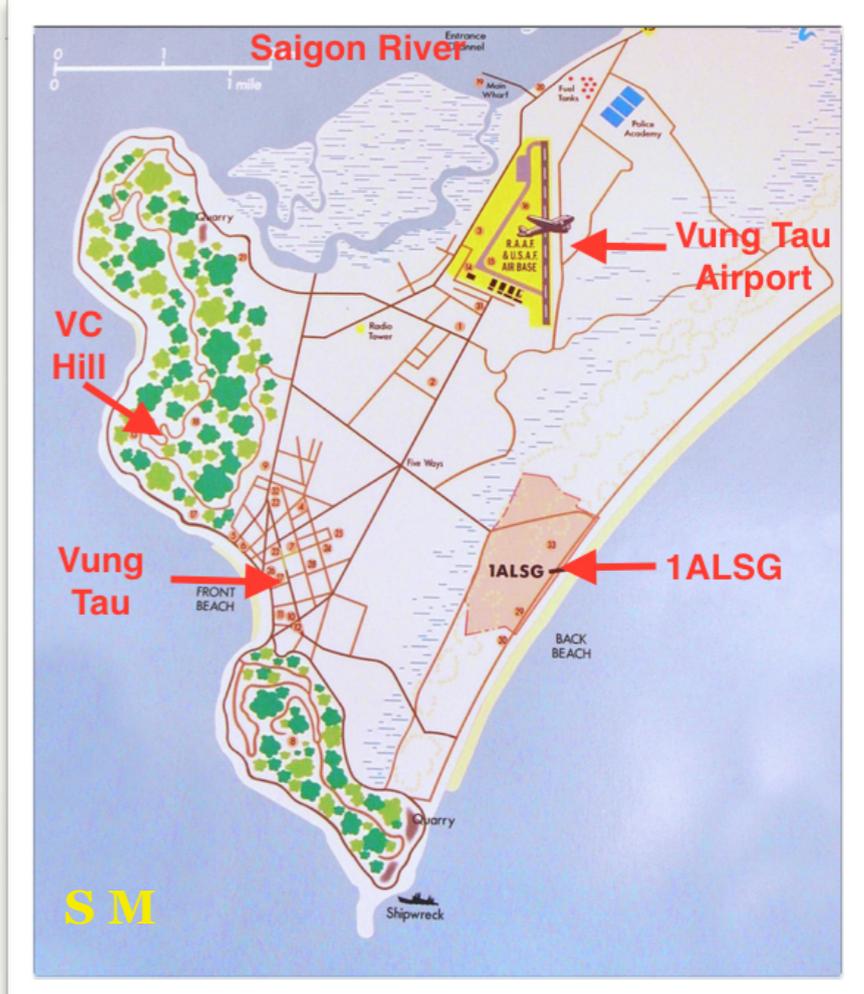


Vietnam Medal 2nd from left. The star on the far right, was awarded by the Vietnamese Govt after 6 months

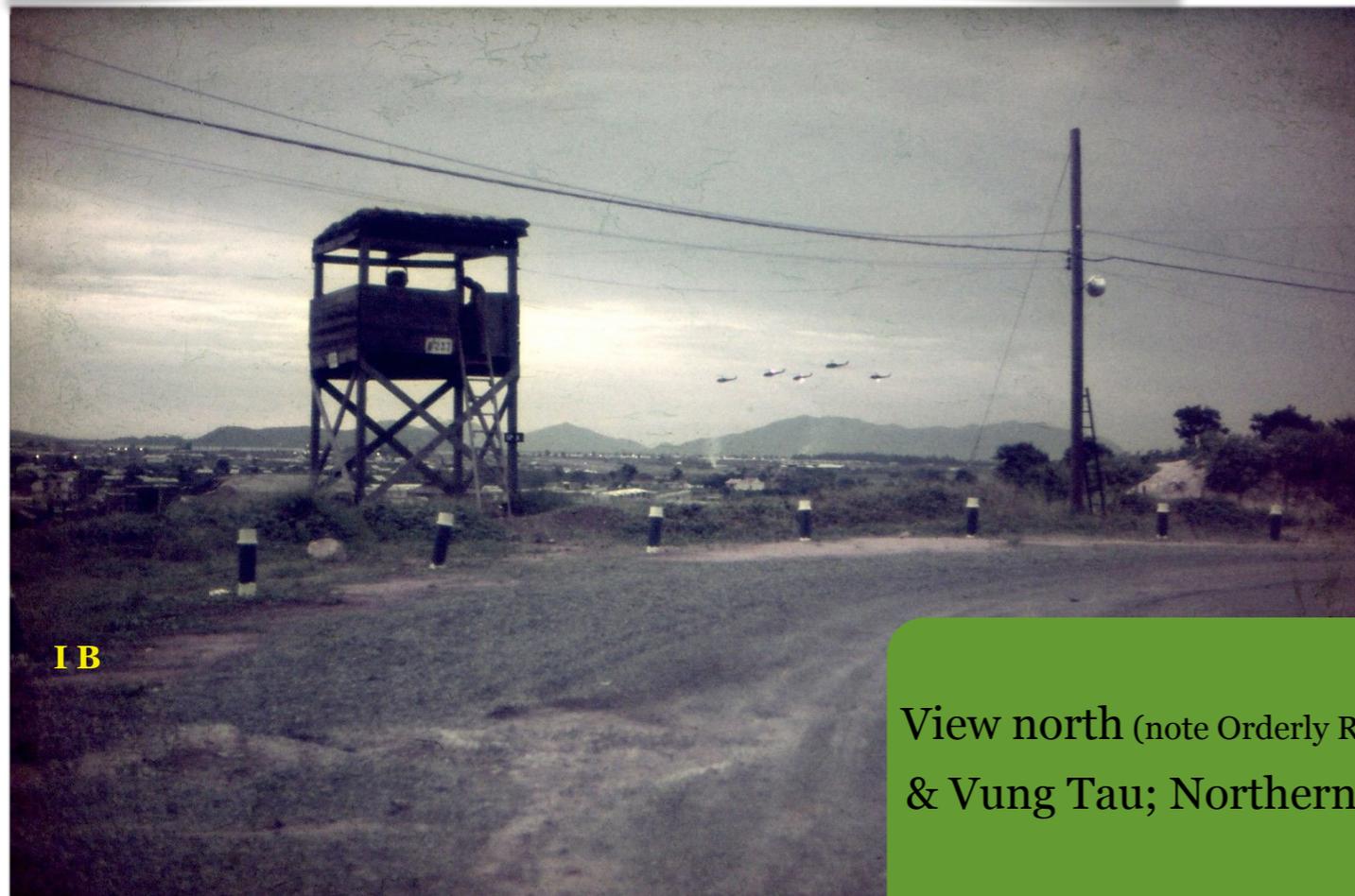
We've Gotta Get Out Of This Place

<https://youtu.be/LUpBSvN1a50>

** 1st Australian Logistics Support Group providing support including a hospital to 1ATF (1st Aust Task Force) further north at Nui Dat*



Map of Vung Tau Peninsula and aerial views of 1 ALSG

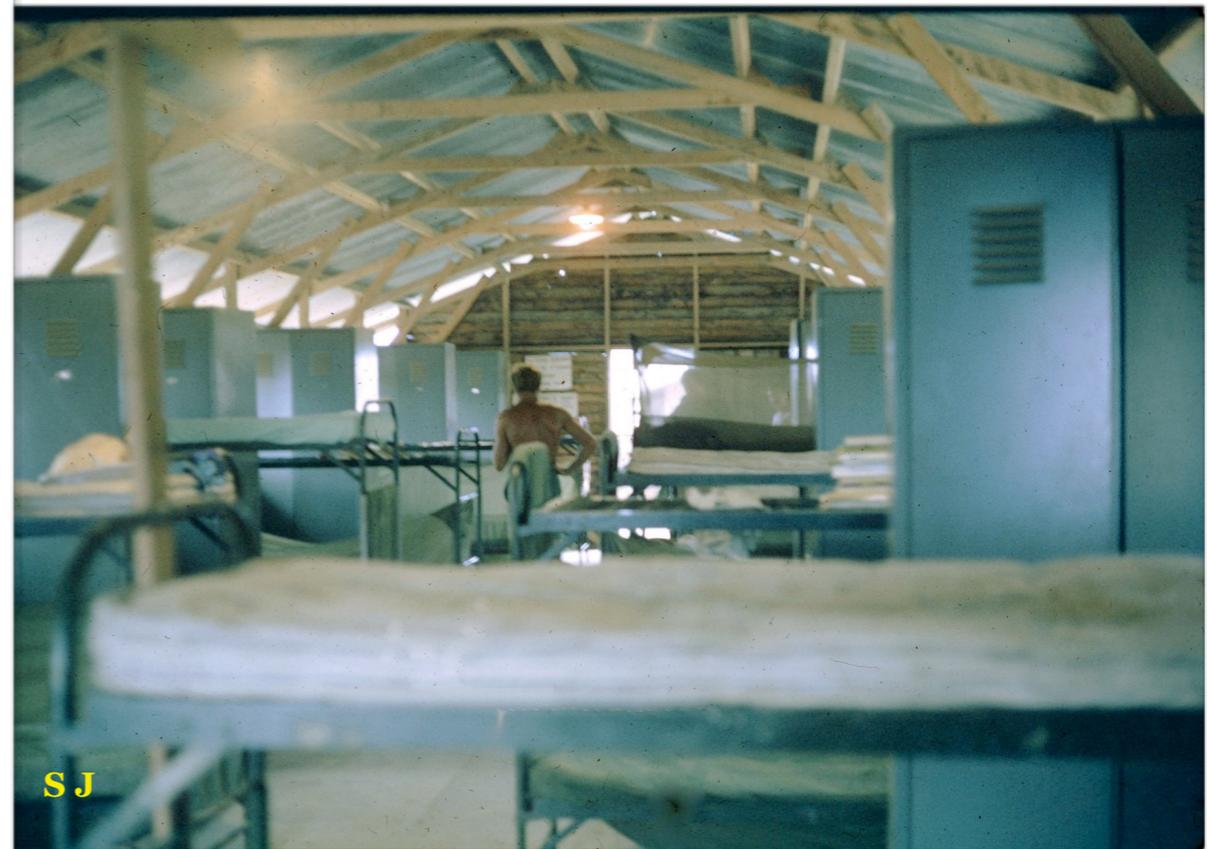


Clockwise from top left
View north (note Orderly Room on right); South to Cape St Jacques; West to VC Hill & Vung Tau; Northern perimeter (note the watchtower and Long Hai Hills in background)



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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Exterior and interior views of our huts, see what I mean about sand in pic above.

Actually the sand was quite a blessing in the wet season as the torrential rain would sink in rather than become mud. You could almost set your watch by the afternoon downpours and when VC Hill (see previous page) disappeared behind a black cloud you would run for shelter or become drenched within seconds.

Whilst sleeping during the days on shift work we would often be sprayed with anti-mosquito insecticides (probably DDT) by Vietnamese contractors using misting machines outside the shutter windows. It was also common to be sprayed by American aircraft whilst working outside.





Morning ablutions at the wash basins outside the shower block. The water was so highly chlorinated that we would often shower outside in the downpours (I won't include the photos of that)

Top right are the toilet blocks with "pisserphones" behind the corrugated iron sheets (see next page). The toilet seats were like upturned cans with a lid and no screening in between. Magazines were readily passed around. Those seats, mounted on a concrete slab, are obvious in pic bottom right taken after a storm blew the walls away. One of my crazy mates actually went out in the middle of that gale and sat down on the newly exposed thrones.

For hygiene reasons (and to stop the blowflies buzzing up past your loins) the toilets were regularly burned out using diesel with a dash of petrol to get it ignited. Sometimes the guys "accidentally" got the mix wrong, adding way too much petrol. One enormous explosion lifted the whole slab (right) and cracked it. The officers' toilet had also been lifted backwards leaving a gap to step across on entry. It was nothing to see flames licking a couple of feet above the seats so you usually checked the temperature before sitting down





Our job for Good Friday was to redo the “Pisserphones” as too many blokes couldn’t aim well enough to pee down the not so narrow pipe in the pic above (that’s yours truly labouring away). We had to lift and open the underlying drum and cover it with mesh to provide a bigger target.

Sure enough, first night, one bloke (who did like a beer) stumbled out, misjudged and sank one leg completely into the drum.

I also remember peeing there alone in the middle of the night feeling very vulnerable (it wasn’t a gun I had in my hand) remembering that a tiger and cub had been seen inside the camp a few hours earlier. (False Alarm No 5)

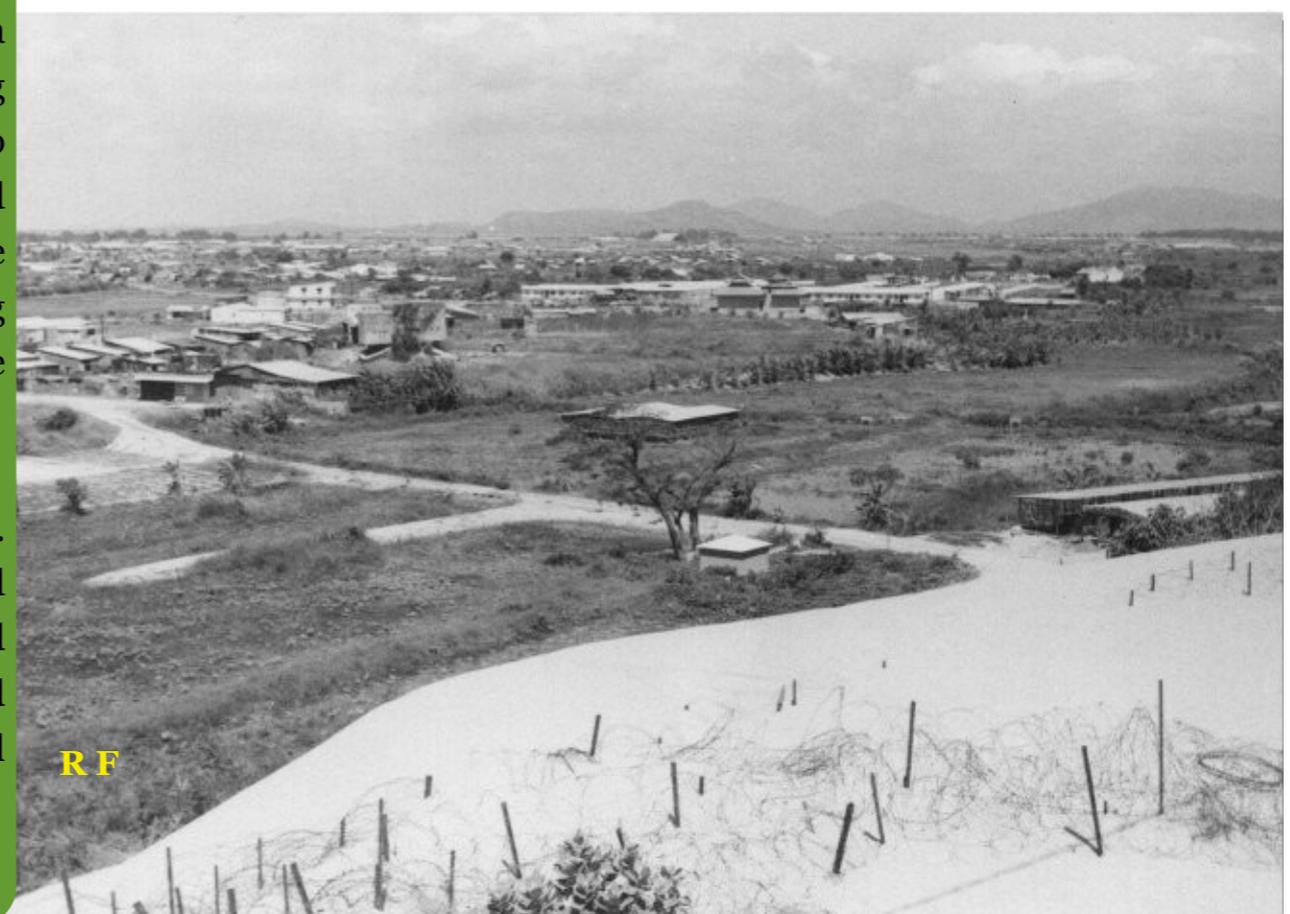




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The main aerial field was in the sand blow off our northern boundary with thick, shrubby scrub beyond it. Just after one of these aerals was erected we heard a sudden roar from the RAAF's weekly "Silver Bird" Hercules aircraft lifting skywards on its approach to the Vung Tau airstrip. It mustn't have been alerted to the new obstacle on the flight path. Witnesses said that whilst the aircraft lurched up the pilot then coolly resumed his approach and landed safely. RAAF crews were highly skilled and gutsy and you could always tell if it was an Aussie plane landing "crablike" in the persistent crosswinds as they were so much smoother than the Yanks.

The bunker top right was at the steep western edge of the sand blow (below right). We were in there one day during an alert when suddenly a monkey's head popped up on the other side of the blow and then one just below us. They looked around before their big boss came up between them. Assessing the situation he mustered his whole mob, including babies, into the scrub beyond. If that was us on a patrol we would have approached it in a very similar way.



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