

ON THE PERIMETER OF FIRE SUPPORT BASE BRIDGET
and
WHICH WAY CLAYMORE MINES?

By Jim Kanowski

My story begins when I was coming back from doing the garbo run one morning (most of you who did a stint in Nui Dat would remember P & E's) when Capt, Jack Fenton in conspiratorial tone called me into his office and said he had an interesting task for me. To cut a short story even shorter, Jack explains to me that after discussion with a number of unidentified people who knew about such things, it was his belief that as well as our primary work in the HF band we should be monitoring VC voice communications within the VHF band. I didn't have any argument with this, so Jack says. "Good, here's the plan: We are going to insert you and Jim Mclean into a bunker on the perimeter at Fire Support Base (FSB) Bridget." I thought to myself, this sounds good; I'll get a chance to have a bit of a look at the country outside the Task Force area and meet a few blokes along the way. I assumed we would probably have a platoon or so of grunts to look after us. I shared my enthusiasm about this with Jack who just smiled and said to be ready to move tomorrow morning.

Next morning we jumped into one of the Troop vehicles - Jack, Jim and I, and I think Baldy' Howell. When we arrived at FSB Bridget it would be an understatement to say that I was a little disappointed with the accommodation after the relative luxury we were used to back at 547.

We received a 5 minute briefing from the Battery Commander about our responsibilities with regard to perimeter defences and that was about the last contact we had with our hosts. Not long after that Jack and "Baldy' gave us a typical "Op Sig brief'. Record everything and we'll get Ralph Schwerr to read the tapes back when you get back. With that they were off.

Jim and I set about sorting out our gear which consisted of rations and water for about three days, a VHF receiver and a tape recorder and our bedding. Our bunker consisted of two sleeping pits and an area that could be used for our monitoring purposes. I don't think our mission could have been seen as a great success in terms of being of benefit to the war effort, anyhow it is only incidental to my story which, as I indicated earlier involves the soldierly prowess of the pre-modernist Op Sig. After we had settled in and Jim set about monitoring the radio waves, I took time out to study what we were told was our responsibility with regard to perimeter defence. One of the first things that caught my eye were two claymore mines that were set up in the perimeter wire. As soon as I identified them, which is probably a surprise to some readers, it occurred to me that during my Battle Efficiency training I was told something that was critical when locating claymore mines. The unfortunate thing was that I had forgotten what it was. It was about now that I thought that the Platoon of grunts might be useful. No problem I thought, Jim would know because he was a Lance Corporal and therefore vastly more experienced in these things than I was. I said "Jim, what do you know about claymore mines?" He said something like "I think they are about the same colour as a Landrover". I quickly came to the conclusion that I was on my own with this one. I took the

approach that the best way to solve this problem was to forget about it. Unfortunately, throughout the first day and a half the question of what we should be doing with regard to these bloody claymores kept nagging at me. The fact was that we had little else to do with our time which involved turning the dial until we heard some Vietnamese voice traffic and hitting the record button. I decided that it would be absolutely unthinkable to ask advice from the Artillery guys. Firstly, it would unnecessarily undermine their confidence in us as the first line of defence, and secondly I didn't want us to look like a bigger pair of dickheads than we probably were.

I think it was sometime late on the second day that I leapt out of my farter and said "Jim, I've got it, I've solved my problem". I think Jim. Who had long since stopped thinking about claymores said something like "which problem are we talking about here?" possibly suggesting that maybe I had more than one. Ignoring his lack of enthusiasm, I explained that one of the fundamental principles of siting a claymore was that it must be in a position that can be kept under constant surveillance. The reason for this is that those tricky little VC folk had a habit of sneaking up during the night and turning them around so that they faced back in our direction. Those of you who are familiar with the claymore mine would be aware that it is curved in shape and it would be quite obvious if it were turned around.

Mightily pleased with myself, I went back to bed and slept comfortable in the knowledge that I was in complete control of our forward defences. On the fourth morning I was having my third cold breakfast and waiting for Jack and Baldy who were due to pick us up and drop off our replacements, it occurred to me that whilst 1 had finally remembered the principle alluded to above, there remained one flaw in my memory. I realised that whilst I could observe the mines easily from the front of our bunker, I had no bloody idea which way they were supposed to face. I decided that after my burst of exuberance the day before coupled with Jim's obvious lack of knowledge about things military, further consultation with him would be a total waste of time. I was debating with myself as to whether I would share my flawed knowledge of claymore mines with our replacements when the vehicle turned up and Vince MacQuillan and Leon Douglas jumped out. I figured I'd be wasting my breath discussing ordnance with these blokes so we did a quick handover and departed.

I never did discuss the siting of claymores with Vince and Leon, or again with Jim for that matter. Just never seemed to crop up in conversation - probably a tad too military for a bunch of "old" Op Sigs like us. That reminds me of another story. Maybe another time.