



## CHAPTER 1 - EARLY DAYS

### First Pronto

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1962 the first '**Pronto**' Captain Barry Tinkler arrived in South Vietnam.

He was a member of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV). This unit was eventually to become the most highly decorated unit in the Australian Army.

During the innumerable briefings that followed in Saigon and during that slow, painful DC3 flight to Da Nang and finally to Phu Bai, Captain Tinkler was not to know that he was to serve in the theatre for 14 months nor that he would be recommended for the first award of the campaign. He eventually received the award, a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, from the Governor General of Australia, Viscount De Lisle, in 1965.

His thoughts during that flight could not have included the many experiences he was eventually to have with the Civil Guard Training Centre at Hiep Thanh, located several kilometres from the headquarters of 1 ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) Division. He was not to know that he would be involved in activities from platoon size ambushes to eight company search and destroy operations. The training of officers for the 1 ARVN Division, the distribution of relief supplies to Montagnards in the remote north west of South Vietnam, particularly Khe Sanh, and signals advice to ARVN and ranger units in the Kontum and Pleiku areas.



Photo 1.1 (left) - AATTV Plaque.

Photo 1.2 (right) - AATTV Warrant Officer training ARVN soldiers in 1965.





It was Captain Tinkler's tour of duty which opened a new chapter in the history of the Corps. Four other officers and twelve warrant officers of RA Sigs also served with AATTV, with one, Warrant Office Class Two M.W.T. Gill, being killed in action on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1969. See Chapter 5, Part 4 for more details of RASigs members serving with AATTV.

### **Reorganisation**

By the end of 1962 and through 1963 it was becoming apparent that Australian combat troops were going to become involved in South Vietnam. The Director of Signals, Colonel R. P. Woollard, initiated an examination of RA Sigs field force organisations for their suitability against the concept of committing small combat forces as part of a larger international force assisting a country such as South Vietnam.

At that time the divisional signal regiment was designed for a division and nothing smaller - whilst communications zone signals establishments were based on "brick" troops using World War II equipment.

The study resulted in task force signal squadrons, a differently organised divisional signal regiment, and a functional structure for communications zone elements which could be tailored into squadrons and regiments for specific tasks.

At the same time as this reorganisation, the designations of signals units were changed to a block numbering system for regiments, squadrons and troops. This system had its disadvantages but had the major advantage of preserving the continuity of the name of each unit, instead of it changing as the supported unit changed.

This reorganisation and the numbering system caused much controversy within the Corps. Despite the emotion, a major reorganisation of field force signals units was completed before any squadrons were committed to South Vietnam.

It enabled the first signals squadrons to be prepared and dispatched to South Vietnam with far fewer administrative problems than would have arisen with the earlier establishments.

### **Re-equipment**

The prospect of a South Vietnam campaign also influenced Colonel Woollard's equipment decisions in 1963 and 1964. In addition, there was a growing conviction that future military involvement would be with American rather than British forces.

This led to orders being placed for standard US radios and packaged 'shelter'





equipment. At this time the highly successful AN/PRC-25 VHF manpack radios and AN/VRC-12 series VHF vehicular radios were ordered. Also ordered were the ill fated AN/TRC-75 medium power HF radios.



Photo 1.3 - AN/PRC-25 VHF Radio Set with two antennas and accessory bag.



Photo 1.4 - AN/PRC-25 VHF Radio Set - Front panel layout.





Photo 1.5 - RT-524 Transceiver (Part of AN/VRC-12 series).

This equipment were received in time for our units to be predominately equipped with them by the time they were deployed in South Vietnam.



Photo 1.6 (left) - AN/MRC-69 Radio Relay Shelter on training exercise in Victoria.



Photo 1.7 (right) - Inside of AN/MRC-69 Radio Relay Shelter showing AN/TRC-24 Radio Set.





## Training

When National Service was introduced and it was decided that National Servicemen could serve in South Vietnam, the School of Signals at Balcombe, Victoria was unable to cope with its training commitment. It had insufficient space and too few instructors.

A contract was let with the Marconi School of Wireless in Sydney to conduct part of the training for operators and technicians. The trainees were administered by a School of Signals Wing established at Ingleburn.

This was another controversial move. The issue was the lack of Corps indoctrination and a lower level of instruction. To an extent, all Marconi trainees completing their trade training at the School of Signals overcame this.

