



## ADDRESS TO 9RAR REUNION DINNER

By Brigadier John Essex-Clark. DSM (Retd)

### Salutation:

Amidst the joy of seeing so many old warriors happily reunited; I add my congratulations to the splendid efforts of **our 9 RAR Association** to keep the **glue** of our warrior and service bonds fresh and firm. I thank you for inviting Susan and me to be here with you tonight.

You men have all been Infantrymen, who served in the Royal Australian Regiment. You are therefore, **'the Salt of the Earth'**, ~ and thank heavens your charming ladies keep you in your shakers most the time. I was asked to say a few words about my recollections of my service with 9RAR. Well in a few words what I remember indelibly is the **magnificent team-work** and **the powerful and motivating strength of our battalion's morale**.

I won't regale you with stale stories about the incorrigible antics of Stan the Ram, alias John MacArthur, such as:

- \* When He bowled over the Northern Command RSM when **he** took a short-cut across Stan's enclosure to the parade ground during a Queens Birthday parade and caused the sombre and prickly GOC Northern Command to laugh for the first time in our presence; **or**
- \* When Stan tried to couple with a very adventurous and new OC of Headquarter Company in front of our diggers at morning tea; **or**
- \* When, hilariously, at an athletics meeting at Laing Park, our Ram decided that the goal posts were the rear legs of a very tall and long legged ewe; **or**
- \* When he angrily refused to enter the gates of 8RAR when we marched up to **'ram'** into that battalion during our linking.

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Nor will I mention any **names** of the superb men we had in our battalion; **except for two**. Not because I might leave out some notables. All our diggers were notables within their own groups. I mention no names because, as a Commanding Officer, one remembers easily the names only of the dramatically good, the best jock-strappers, and those poor unfortunate incorrigibles, who we could only get out of serious trouble because of our close friendship with Ray Whitrod the Commissioner of the Queensland Police Force.

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A battalion, on paper, is only a conglomerate of ranks and names, but the strength of our battalion as a potential fighting force were our **mighty diggers** who, from sparrow fart to next sparrow fart, **did well** the boring jobs **in barracks**: with interminable duties and parades. Or **excelled in the bush**,; digging in, camouflaging, patrolling by day and ambushing , or on sentry duties by night. All this with a cheeky grin, and a spicily put, smart comment.

In reality all those names in a battalion become just **'We' or 'Us'**. Whatever, in 9RAR post-Vietnam or 'post-Narm', the **glue** of the battalion was the **energy, vitality, and enthusiasm of our national servicemen**, plus those two names I **will** mention, in a later context, who both carried the huge pot in which that glue was prepared.

As a battalion we **were** criticized: Some of our superiors said that we were too **competitive** and too **flamboyant**, both of which I took as compliments because we were deliberately and positively competitive, internally and externally, in anything we challenged in sport, or in all aspects in our training for war.; and **'flamboyant'** meant that we displayed style, polish and panache, which we did.

As a deterrent to our nation's predators we had to show our challenging and competitive aggressiveness. As for being flamboyant well, we were proud of our past, our **present** and our **potential**, and if any got in the way of our pride and self-confidence - *bloody tough!*

Whatever: ~ Too aggressive, too flamboyant or otherwise, many of those visiting us, senior officers and others, including a United States Army general, said that they could **see and feel the presence of the confident and powerful spirit of our battalion**, this was great praise for us, and that was good enough for me.

**Yes**, we **did** cheat occasionally. During a major exercise at Shoalwater Bay we had a large sized US Army platoon from the US 2/27<sup>th</sup> Battalion 'The Wolfhounds', attached to us from Hawaii, on the Pacific Bond exchange programme, So, without informing the umpires who had been telling our enemy everything we planned to do and giving away our tactical surprise; we got the US platoon to attack the recently and clandestinely found enemy headquarters on the afternoon of the first Tuesday in November. We attacked it with the Americans howling their wolf cries during the last two furlongs of the Melbourne Cup And the Yanks had a ball screaming and firing their blank ammunition inside the enemy headquarters while the rest of 9RAR listened to the race. – now **that** caught them by surprise!

**Though** one doesn't reflect on these **personal matters too often**:

\* My two **happiest moments** were, **first**, when I **arrived** in the battalion. My only disappointment then was that we **would not be going to Vietnam**. I knew the warrior record of our battalion, **blooded in combat** in Vietnam, but I did not know the colour of our lanyard. So, when I arrived in the Officers' Mess and saw only the brown lanyards, I felt that I was in a crowd of Psychology Corps officers with their plum lanyards! That was ominous? Then I was told that the battalion colour, was flabbily titled 'beech brown'; my first edict was that our colour would be referred to by us, not as the limp 'beech-brown', but **in order to reflect our battalion's fine war record in Vietnam**, as '**dried blood**', I also then enjoyed the short-lived challenge of being immediately '**tested**' by my confident young company commanders and some of the cheekier subalterns.

\* My **second, happy moment**, was after our first testing exercise at Shoalwater Bay when my spirit surged with the most satisfying realisation that we could **take our battalion anywhere** and, with a bit of **commonsense** and **cunning tactics**, we could **defeat any enemy** in conventional, or counter revolutionary warfare.

\* **We were a bloody good fighting team.**

\* My most **startling and funny moment** was, late one evening, or perhaps early morning? It was the dishevelled and smelly apparition of one of my best young corporals, knocking on my back door and standing forlornly asking for **sanctuary** from the police who were chasing him after a stoush in Brisbane. He had escaped from them by driving into a nearby stranger's driveway and hiding in chicken coops, then hopping back yard fences, harassed by angrily snapping and barking dogs, and closely followed by police, until he reached my home in Enoggera Barracks, which now, appropriately, is the barracks chapel. So there he was, panting, clothes torn, ankles bleeding from dog fangs, and ponging like a *bag of 'Dynamic Lifter' soaked in Fourex*. Laughing, I hustled him inside, and told the police that I'd handle the problem, and got the orderly officer to get a medic, give him a shower and put him in the guardroom for the night. That corporal went on to high rank, married, and 30 stellar years later was on General Peter's Staff at Army Headquarters in Canberra.

\* **What did I learn as CO? What did our battalion teach me?** As I had served in Vietnam only with 1RAR on their first tour in 1965-1966, I had not previously served with **National Servicemen**, and did not know what to expect. I soon **learnt in spades**, that they were **second to none** in **skills, personal discipline, energy**, or soldierly bearing; and **unit pride**. They also deservedly provided most of our new NCOs ! They also made us a mirror image of our Nation. The nation we all served.

\* I also **learnt again** that irrespective of the combat efficiency or preparedness of a battalion for war, that the **real soul** and **deep morale** of a battalion lies **through** a mutual, two way trust and integrity between every one

of us; from the often maligned hygiene orderly up to me as the CO. Every single one of us was an essential part of the team and each should be proud and well recognised for what they each do.

And **that team** gave me the **easiest job** in the battalion, all I had to do was make sure that we were ready to fight and win with the greatest number of casualties to our enemy and the least to ourselves.

\* My **proudest moment** was when National service ended and I found that most of our National Servicemen chose to stay and complete their National Service with **us**. We were the only battalion that kept well over **90 percent** of our National servicemen.

\* My **saddest moment** was after our final battalion Memorial Service, when the battalion, our colours, and our incorrigible ram marched past me on their way to join 8 RAR. It was also my last day serving in an RAR Battalion. The last day I would be in **my natural element** as an **Infantry soldier**. The last day I would justify my sole reason for being a soldier.

Nevertheless, I still maintain my 'Duty First' ties with the Regiment by being a member of a number of RAR associations, but more particularly as the Honorary Secretary and board member of the RAR Foundation that directly supports the Regiment, but only few of you here, will know about the Foundation. It is a charitable and patriotic institution that supports all the men serving in battalions of the Regiment, and their families, it was started by our first CO, Alby Morrison, but this is neither the place nor the time to tell you about it.

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I said I would mention only **two names: two names** that stirred and mixed the pot of glue that all our diggers, particularly our national servicemen, so liberally used to bind us together, those two are now both sadly in that great Hall at Valhalla where we 'grunts' must **all** congregate one day. They were our two magnificent '**Jocks**':

**RSM Jock Gordon**; and **RSM Jock Allen**, both were great personal friends, magnificent Infantry stalwarts, and exemplars of our Regimental motto: '**Duty First**'.

I could bore you with many other extraordinary, humorous or memorable moments of my experiences within our battalion; but you don't meet your old mates too often, so all I wish to say, as I end this address is: '**enjoy your evening**', and I won't waste any more of your too short time together by waffling on.

**EXCEPT!** As one final bonding gesture. Will all of us who served together at Enoggera, please stand, and let's give a big '**NINER**' for all those 'nar'mers' who preceded us 'post-nar'mers, and recognise them for setting us up as a fighting and 'combat-blooded' battalion:

'six, seven, eight :

**"NINER!"**

**BLESS YOU ALL – FOR WHAT YOU WERE AND WHAT YOU ARE;**

**AND, WONDERFUL LADIES, PLEASE LOOK AFTER YOUR MEN.**

**THEY ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH**

**I wish 'God speed' to you all.**