

Report on 2RAR Missing After Action Reports South Vietnam May 1967 to May 1968

Introduction

This report has been produced for the 2RAR Association and outlines the steps taken to determine the whereabouts of the After Action Reports (AAR) for 2RAR's time in South Vietnam (SVN) in 1967-68. As of this time, October 2015, they remain missing. The compilation of this Report should assist the Association in making a judgement as to whether or not the search should continue and if so how to proceed and perhaps the qualifications and experience needed of any appointment of a person to do the investigation in the future.

Background

It was when I was endeavouring to compile the story of the eight Killed In Action (KIA) with D Company (D Coy) in early 2011 that I found that the AAR's were the most accurate descriptions of how each was killed. I visited the Australian War Memorial (AWM) in order to obtain copies of the AAR's for the operations on which the fatalities occurred. The AWM staff directed me to their website for this information.

The Search

Once home the websites were searched for the AAR's. Only the AARs for three Operations were on the website. The AWM was revisited and with the help of Peter Langford, who was much more familiar than I with the AWM website, it was again searched. Still no better result.

The next plan tried was to apply for all of the AARs via email. The unit, names and dates of the Operations were applied for. Well over 400 AWM file numbers and names were supplied but no further AARs required were found so the application was halted while a re-think occurred.

However the Task Force (TF) AAR for Operation (Op) Coburg was obtained but it addresses coy level actions and precludes the details that the PI deal with, i.e. the death of individuals.

Confirmation Of Their Production

Other enquiries proceeded with David Smith (*Note 1*) who confirmed that they were all written and 'Pip' Newman had copies which enabled him to complete The ANZAC Battalion 1967-68 in Brisbane about the time the Bn returned from SVN. As 'Pip' had passed on, a search for his wife was initiated as she had retired from politics. It was thought that copies of the AARs may have been retained in the Newman household, unfortunately she was ill and no contact was made with her.

Other Avenues

I had a fairly lengthy conversation with Barry Corse (*Note 2*) at our Annual General Meeting (AGM) in 2013. Barry has some firm views of what may have happened to our AARs, but did not/could not provide proof sufficient to be acceptable, say in a court of law. Although his conclusions need to be borne in mind while ever the search continues.

I attended a conference at the AWM on SVN in 2013. Here I met Stuart Bennington (*Note 3*) who was then filling the post as curator. I explained our dilemma and accepted his offer to help and multiple emails were exchanged and copies were supplied to the 2RAR Association.

During this period I found in the bibliography in Paul Ham's book on Vietnam a statement that he had examined all AARs from all Battalions (Bns), for all tours and the reference quoted an AWM file number. I emailed this information to the curator while also examining the two A4 pages on that file which was on the AWM website. The reply from the AWM refuted Ham's claim.

Positive Proof – They're Missing

Up until this exchange I had been concentrating on the AWM file numbers, but in this exchange the curator mentioned an 'end note' number from the Official History, On the Offensive. So the endnotes for the 2RAR entries in the applicable chapters in On the Offensive were checked. For those few AAR's we had, they were referred to in the endnotes. For the missing AARs the endnotes referred to pages in Pip Newman's (*Note 4*) book The ANZAC Battalion.

Now On the Offensive was published in 2003 and Charlesworth (*Note 5*) was interviewed by the author, Ashley Ekins in the mid 90's. Newman was a Member of Parliament (MP) in the Federal Parliament then and I estimate that the writing of On the Offensive would have commenced about 1990 give or take a year or two in either direction. So I assume that the Commanding Officer (CO) would have been asked by the author 'where are your AARs?' and this was put to the curator. The reply, as with some of the other replies, was not satisfactory.

In all of my dealings with the AWM I was/am mindful that in the future other representatives of our Battalion will need to approach the AWM for information so I am bound not to alienate the staff of the AWM during any enquires I may make least my approach upsets the AWM staff so as to deny co-operation at some future date.

A Direct Approach

During the Battalion's reunion in Adelaide in 2014 I again had a long discussion with Barry Corse about the progress or lack of in the search for the missing AARs. Barry on his own initiative contacted the Chief of Army (C of A) about the matter. Within Army, the Army History Unit (AHU) was involved, as was the AWM when the C of A communicated with Brendon Nelson (*Note 6*). As a result we obtained copies of a number of file cards from Army. They identify and show that Army had some of our missing AARs in their possession at some time. There is no date or signatures on the file cards nor can I be certain that we have copies of all of the cards, as they are not numbered. More recent enquiries with AHU have not shed any more light on where our AARs might be. AHU claimed that all of those files which included our AARs went to the AWM probably sometime during the decade after we pulled out of SVN.

One avenue that has yet to be examined is New Zealand (NZ). At least one NZ publication admits that the NZ Companies (Coys), which were part of the ANZAC Bn, did send some of their AAR's to their parent Bn in Malaysia. This may have included a copy of Bn AAR's and not just that AAR written by the Kiwi Company Commander (Coy Comd). These may have found their way back to the NZs (AWM equivalent) and may be in that filing system. We have received extracts of the personal service records of those NZ KIA with the ANZAC Bns so an approach to them may yield some results. I have made no such approach.

In between the times I spoke with Barry I found out that some of AHU staff were involved in an investigation about Wrightways who were contracted to do research on behalf of AHU for Department of Veterans Affairs. I informed our Association that I would prefer not to approach AHU about our AARs while this matter was still under consideration. Recently I have been informed by Peter Langford that the matter has now been resolved and as it was found that

there was no case to answer everything has reverted to as it was. Since then I have approached AHU but nothing new can be reported.

At our last AGM (2104) I was approached by an ex senior NCO from 2/4 Bn who informed me that when the two Bns were linked in Townsville in the 70's that the amount of documentation, i.e. files etc. that required secure storage exceeded the means of storing classified information and large quantities were destroyed as secure storage containers were not available. I submit that the destroyed documentation could have included copies of our AARs, however the file cards show that Army Office (AO) had some of those listed as missing in their possession before they were sent to the AWM.

Some Speculation

Is it possible that those missing AARs are at the AWM? Yes, it is a possibility. Although I've not seen the storage facility I am given to understand that the shelves of un-opened and unregistered file containers in storage are some hundreds of metres long. So if a set of AARs was placed in the wrongly labeled box not yet opened, recorded and checked, we won't know, and it may be sometime before it can be confirmed one way or the other.

Is there a lesson that we can take from this sorry episode? Yes there is and 7RAR has already done it. The CO of their second tour in SVN (Ron Grey) compiled complete sets of their 2nd tour AARs and distributed them to selected officers serving in the Bn then. I have examined a set of 7RAR's AARs from their 2nd tour in the library of one of those officers about five years ago.

The RAR's Bibliography is not yet complete, for example, many of the RAR Bns Museums include collections of publications and documentation. Although documented for inventory and stocktake purposes the contents are not known generally to the RAR and other military research personnel. So that potential source has yet to be checked.

Some documentation belonging to Pip Newman was deposited at the AWM when he passed away and my understanding is that it has been examined for our missing AARs but to no avail. At this stage I am unaware of any approach to Campbell Newman to determine if he retains a copy of them in his library.

I am not dismissive of Barry Corse's deduction or conclusions, they may be valid, but I don't have sufficient proof or know how to go about proving it, i.e. that they (the AARs) were deliberately removed by persons unknown (but suspected) and destroyed or at best hidden elsewhere.

Some Luck – So Far

Thankfully I am not aware that any of our soldiers have had their claims on Department of Veteran's Affairs (DVA) rejected due to lack of supporting evidence, i.e. our missing AARs. This cannot be due to ignorance because several issues of Ringo have informed members of the Association of this matter. However, we must remain alert as this circumstance will remain active whilst ever soldiers of this era and possibly some of their NOK (Next of Kin) walk this earth.

The project I started which led me to find that some of our AARs were missing can no longer wait. So reluctantly I must put any further search for them aside until that project proceeds to a conclusion.

Deductions re Missing AAR's

I think there are two possible probabilities –

1. Accidentally or deliberately misplaced?
2. Deliberately removed and possibly destroyed?

Consideration

What did the upper echelons of our Bn know of the above and when? What did the AWM know of the above and when?

The CO was interviewed by the author of the Official History about half way through its production i.e. mid-nineties. A copy of this interview should be in the AWM and/or author's files and as such the AWM is not obliged to show it to us. However an examination of it/them should give us an indication of whether or not the CO was insisting that the AWM find the missing files, or, if he already knew they were missing the conversation was more likely to be about using Pip's book as a reference. The AWM was asked when did they find out our AARs were missing (it would have been before the COs interview in the mid 90's) and what was the result of their (i.e. the AWM) investigation. The answer received from the AWM was unsatisfactory.

There are many other questions, which arise from this line of thought/questioning that would keep several budding 'Sherlock's' occupied for some time, if they were so inclined.

T.E. Dinneen

Attachments:

1. Notes
2. 2RAR Operations 1967-68

***Attachment 1 to
Report on 2RAR Missing AARs
Operation in SVN 1967-68***

Notes to Report

- Note 1** David Smith was our Battalion 2IC but about halfway through the tour he went to TF HQ as GSO2 Ops. He returned to the Battalion just before it returned to Australia and came home early in order to organise the Battalions return.
- Note 2** Barry Corse was platoon commander in C Company and stayed on when the Battalion returned to Australia. Initially as LO to the TF Comd and later serving with and commanding US Forces.
- Note 3** Stuart Bennington was the Curator Official Records, Research Centre Australian War Memorial.
- Note 4** Kevin 'Pip' Newman was our Spt Coy Comd and hence the Ops Officer. He returned home early to complete the ANZAC Battalion 1967-68 book. He later commanded a Battalion of the RAR before entering politics and became the Defence Minister. He is now deceased. His wife Jocelyn was also a politician and was Minister for Veterans Affairs. Their son Campbell was Mayor of Brisbane before becoming Premier of Queensland.
- Note 5** 'Chic' Charlesworth was the CO of 2RAR for the Battalions' first tour of South Vietnam. He was promoted to Brigadier and served in Washington DC and is now deceased.
- Note 6** Brendan Nelson took over the Australian War Memorial from Steve Gower fairly recently so he may not be as familiar as his predecessor of the dramas that must have occurred during the production of the Official History.

***Attachment 2 to
Report on 2RAR Missing AARs
Operation in SVN 1967-68***

2 RAR Operations 1967-68

Barossa***	4 Jun 67	AWM103 R569/2/36
Darwin*	6-7 Jun 67	AWM103 R569/2/40
Geraldton*	15-21 Jun 67	AWM103 R569/2/41 AWM98 R723/1/12/4 Part 3
Paddington**	8-16 Jul 67	AWM103 R569/2/43 Parts 1& 2
Cairns*	25 Jul-1 Aug 67	AWM103 R569/2/46
Atherton***	16 Aug-3 Sep 67	AWM103 R569/2/49
Ainslie**	4-21 Sep 67	AWM103 R569/2/52
Kenmore**	29 Sep-11 Oct 67	AWM103 R569/2/53
Santa Fe**	26 Oct-18 Nov 67	AWM103 R569/2/54
Forrest**	23 Nov 67- 5 Jan 68	AWM98 R569/1/98 AWM102 <u>29</u>
Canungra***	3-4 Dec 67	AWM103 R569/2/59 AWM102 <u>29</u>
Lawley***	22-23 Dec 67	AWM103 R569/2/64 AWM102 <u>29</u>
Duntroon***	10-21 Jan 68	AWM98 R569/1/104

Coburg**	24 Jan-14 Feb 68	AWM103 R569/2/69 Copy of 1 ATF AAR held by Terry Dinneen
Oakleigh**	16-17 Feb 68	AWM103 R569/2/70
Clayton**	20-21 Feb 68	AWM103 R569/2/71
Pinnaroo**	27 Feb-23 Mar 68	AWM98 R569/1/1/64 AWM advise missing since 1999, record search by file number and key words turned up nothing either.
Ashgrove Tram***	25-26 Mar 68	AWM103 R569/2/76
Cooktown Orchid***	1-23 Apr 68	AWM103 R569/2/77 2 RAR Op Ords and AAR
Toan Thang**	25 Apr-10 May 68	AWM98 R569/1/124 Part 1 Mainly 1 ATF and 1 RAR Op Ords covering Apr-Jun 68, no AARs. AWM98 R569/1/124 Part 1B Mainly 1, 2 and 3 RAR Op Ords Apr 68, no AARs.
		AWM98 R569/1/124 Part 2 1 RAR AAR for Op Toan Thang 3 May-7 Jun 68 (CORAL) includes some Coy and Pl contact reports.

Prepared by Peter Langford.

NB: AWM file numbers 98, 102 and 103

Legend:

* = These are available

** = These were identified as being in Army Office (Canberra) at some stage

*** = No trace (in Army Office or Australian War Memorial)