

CHAPTER V: THE FIRST TOUR OF VIETNAM 1966-1967

6RAR ARRIVAL IN COUNTRY

VUNG TAU

Two days after its farewell in Brisbane, on 23 May, the 6RAR Advance Party had flown to Saigon and then moved to the 1RAR base at Bien Hoa to take over 1RAR's transport, equipment and some weapons e.g., GPMG M60 machine guns. Some 40 soldiers with residual in-country service were also posted to 6RAR. On 29 May the Advance Party moved to the proposed battalion base in the 1ALSG base at Vung Tau. By 9 June, the Battalion had deployed by air and had concentrated at Vung Tau whereupon the companies commenced a vigorous



From hutchies in June 1966 (top) to tents in August (above), it would take another six months before the camp was fully constructed. (Courtesy John Heslewood and Bill Roche)



Six months later D Company rows of tents with hip high sandbagging and sandbagged drainage trenches. (Courtesy of David Sabben and the 6RAR Association)

training programme. The training was held in and around Vung Tau and included company minor tactics, live firing practices for small arms, mortars and claymore and grenades. Each company also conducted a search and destroy operational exercise and training with helicopters included a battalion heliborne assault exercise.

On 6 June 1966, the Battalion conducted a parade to celebrate its first birthday less D Company which was still in transit and 4 Platoon B Company which had deployed to Nui Dat with the Task Force on 5 June to provide security for the APC Troop's base area. This was the first time a battalion of the Regiment had celebrated its first birthday when overseas in an operational theatre. The parade lasted for about half an hour starting at 5.45 pm, followed by a buffet served under tarpaulins and eaten among the sand hills.

NUI DAT

On 24 May, 5RAR had deployed to Nui Dat to secure the area for the deployment of the Task Force and on 14 June, 6RAR was airlifted to join it at Nui Dat. HQ 1ATF and the other 1ATF units were also established at Nui Dat. (See Chapter V End Note 1 for the layout of 1ATF).

To say that the men of 6RAR had a difficult time in the first few months would be an understatement. The Battalion together with 5RAR, was required to not only maintain the security of Nui Dat by a rigorous day and night Patrol Programme but to do so while working 12 hours a day in the exhausting weather conditions at the height of the wet season. There was an urgent need to prepare the Battalion's defences and accommodation – but for the first six weeks that meant individual shelters (hutchies) before tents arrived.

There was no infrastructure until the men built it, and unlike some other units, there was no engineering support. It was work from pre-dawn to dark. Men were under pressure to get the fighting pits dug, while the heavy rain hampered progress. Trenches dug during the day would fill with water overnight which could only be bailed out using drinking mugs and steel helmets before fire buckets arrived weeks later. The only implement most of the men had to dig with was their personal issue