

Great book! - read it all weekend to the end

Notes on the book by a former Scheyville graduate

I was engrossed all weekend reading your book which I finished reading by 4 pm Sunday! You have done a great job! So, thank you for sharing your letters home and your endeavours in creating from those a very revealing little history of the all-important Australian Army platoon! A platoon eye view is very rare, and one with the detail you have supplied would be even morerare – or probably in your case, unique. Also, a big plus is that you were Scheyville and a Nasho, so as an outsider who is also a team player in the Army; you are not staying on and seeking promotion.

You have not said much in your book about your Army starting point – 22 weeks of gruelling training as an officer cadet at Scheyville (the Portsea course of 44 weeks modified and cut in half; and a 30% failure rate). Not many people know about Scheyville, which trained national servicemen (just civilians a few weeks before!) to be infantry platoon commanders and graduated approximately 52% of the junior army officers in the period 1965-73 (1871 – 1699 or 91% were national servicemen). Scheyville graduates served in all the army corps, not just in infantry. By comparison in the period 1965-73 OCS Portsea graduated 1287 (35%) and RMC Duntroon 465 (13%) of the Army's junior officers.

Overall Scheyville is therefore an important success story for the Army - and for Colonel Ian Geddes who created the course - which I don't think has been properly acknowledged by the regulars: we were often seen as "just nashos" who had to be "fitted in". How would the Australian army have managed in this crisis period if there had been no Scheyville? So, in miniature, your story illustrates the value of Scheyville OTU.

Also, good cross referencing when needed to other photos, to other pages; and accurately stating when a photo depicted a similar event e.g., guarding the truck convoys I think in early 1967. A picture can save 1000 words, so you have done a great job in your selection – I referred to them often while I was reading.

I like your Long Tan map diagrams of the battle. I admired Harry's forthright comment in his introductory page that the men who were not in the Long Tan battle got the medals! Everyone will be on your side and the Army emerges in this instance in a very bad light; and the senior recipients as lacking in character by not refusing the medals and arguing for the awards to be properly and fairly awarded. I am pleased that the Arty support got praise from you for their fire support at Long Tan – I thought that you PBI on the ground, with all the other contributions – artillery, ammo re-supply by chopper, APC at the end – all made for a good team effort – and as your book shows, team effort also in your platoon and in Delta Company. Overall, you have provided a good account of the often-tedious patrols and ambush settings that brought no result.

Interesting observations by you of the villagers and their apparent hostility during patrols and being forced into new areas and being fenced in with wire, and your concern at the time about the destruction of their banana crops, and of the Buddhist temple. I had reservations about the complexity of the Vietnam war in 1966 – because of this, I joined the Tasmanian University ALP branch in that election year! – (I was called up in ballot 1 of 1965 but deferred for 2 years). Our history shows that invaders or perceived invaders generally provoke a unifying tendency – Chinese invasion of Tibet; Afghanistan is a prominent example, also Iraq – and also the Russian invasion of Ukraine. SVN was not a simple case – as many fled here as boat people to escape the communists. My view is that communism does not have any redeeming features as it is about control from the top and propaganda to gloss over the corruption. Coercive societies destroy trust among people, rule by fear, and debase morality and attempt to destroy alternative moralities; and adherence to 'the end

justifies the means' (which it never does) enables those at the top to do anything they like, including squashing all alternative views.

Your concern about your troops shines through – always important. I have no recollection of this being part of the Scheyville course, but it is the true base for all leadership. (I remember Charles Bean 6 vols on 1914-1918 – he was appalled at the lack of care and concern of common soldiers by British generals, notably gung-ho Lt Gen Gough – from cavalry – who unfortunately commanded AIF troops from Pozieres to Ypres).

I read your sections on some mental exhaustion emerging in early 1967. I hope you are OK? and not suffering any long-term effects from your service? In general, I have an interest about how we as a society tackle all cases of PTSD – not only from troops who have survived the trauma of battle (I am also thinking of Iraq, Afghanistan, the peacekeepers who went to Ruanda; Timor, etc.), but also all other types of traumas in civilian life.

Anyway, thank you for putting your diaries/letters home into a worthwhile and informative history!