

MEMORIES - TALES OF THE 'BEAR'

My recollections of the 'Bear' in Vietnam could fill a book.

The tale I'm about to tell took place after the 'Bear' requested a transfer from Pioneer Platoon to 12 Platoon, D Company. I believe it was his first patrol with the platoon and the Bear was in his element as the forward scout for the leading section, exactly where he wanted to be, up the front ready to earn his bravery medal to take home to Newcastle and show the family. The one minor problem with this was he wasn't quite the eagle eye of Davey Crockett or others of this ilk, as the section was moving along beside a creek, lo and behold the VC lay in wait in the creek bed, opening fire just before the Bear became level with them. The VC must have had the same eye problem that the Bear had, as they hit no one!. The Section Commander, quickly calculated what had occurred and organised his section to take control of the area, he ordered three of his section to the other side of the creek with himself and the Bear in the creek, the remaining members to stay on this side of the creek, when in position the section was to advance in line, keeping level with those in the creek. The section advanced in line until the section commander came across a fallen tree across the creek, he quickly realised that he would have to dive under the obstacle, to be able to continue his clearing of the area, having made this decision he turned to hand signal the Bear to close up to him allowing him to give whispered instructions of what was about to occur. His first instructions were that he would dive under the obstacle while the Bear covered him then he would cover for the Bear when it was his turn. The section commander passed his weapon to Bear, dived under the fallen tree, on gaining clearance of the obstacle turned to regain possession of his weapon from the Bear, then saw something he had missed completely prior to this, the Bear had been carrying his weapon under the water since beginning the sweep of the area, the Bear handed his rifle to the section commander with a grin. I'm afraid the section commander at the time could not let the Bear know that this did not meet with his standard of backup required by members of his section, but on return to base camp the Bear was told in no uncertain terms what was required.

To make matters worse for the "Bear" his section chased the unlucky VC directly into the path of another section who claimed the kill for themselves without any credit to Bears assistance.