

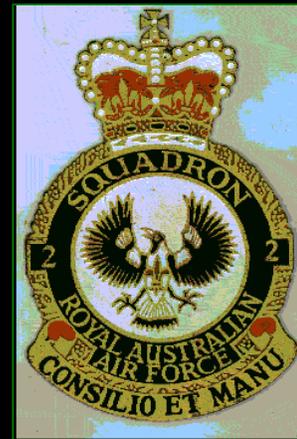


VIETNAM

*Air Field defence Guard,
2 Squadron RAAF /
35th Security Police Squadron*

SQUARK!

*by Lawrie Gay,
Cpl Air Field defence Guard,
2 Squadron RAAF*



What did you do in Nam Daddy? At about 1300 hours on August 25th 1968 I was given a slip of paper that was my patrol brief for that night's ambush at Phan Rang in Vietnam. Little did I realize my first contact with Charlie was only hours away. Let me tell you the story. You should get a bit of a laugh. After 32 years I still do, it was a comedy of errors.

I had arrived in country on October 8th, assigned to command a section of 11 Air Field Defence Guards (or ADGs as we were known) as part of No 2 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force. My troops had just finished their training. With two other similar Sections we made up the ADG Flight. I was a Corporal. Unlike most of our USAF counterparts we weren't cops (35th SPS) but highly trained and multi skilled light infantry. Only one thing was missing--experience!

Our task was to carry out patrols by day and night beyond the wire and to lay ambushes on likely lines of enemy approach and areas of high ground near the perimeter behind which Charlie could hide behind to fire his mortars without being seen. This story relates to the ambush of October 25th on Hill 48 on the western side of the base toward the base. We were only about 300 yards out between two towers named Golf 4 and 5 respectively. (GR739885).

In the 17 days we had been in country nothing much had happened, other than three or four rounds fired from quite a distance one day whilst we were carrying out a day recce patrol to get the lay of the ground. Nine night ambushes had also been uneventful, so that night before going out the fence I made a big decision. Up to this point I had carried an M16 and 200 rounds plus an M79 Grenade Launcher and a bandolier of 24 round of HE as was normal for a Section Commander. My decision was to leave the M79 behind that night--BAD DECISION!

Around 1830 hours we dismounted from our truck near the tower Golf 4 and made for a gap in the wire which was to be our point of departure ("Alpha"). We loaded our weapons, cocked them and set safeties to safe. Now I had to speak some "Martian" I had learned. Forgive me if I get the Ten's wrong, but it's a long time ago and we Aussies did not normally speak "Martian."

"Starlight Control this is Starlight 22." (For old 35th SPS guys who want to question this, it changed to Watchdog not long after.)

"Starlight Control, Go ahead" **SQUARK!** Every time "Control" finished transmitting, this bloody great **SQUARK!** come out of the radio that could be heard in Hanoi!!!

"Roger, Starlight 22 ' 10-7 (in service) Departing Alpha!"

"This is Starlight Control, that's 10-4"-- **SQUARK!**

Stuff this! I turned the radio off! I wasn't going to have that thing compromising my patrol! With the preliminaries done we headed off in single file towards our ambush site and, as was SOP, moved out past it to loop back into position just on dark. On arrival, I split the Section up into pairs with the primary axis on a vague track that ran in towards the base perimeter and then we settled in for the night.

At about 2100 I move around to where the machinegun group, under control of my 2i/c, were located to see how they were going. It was only 10 or 15 feet from my position so I left my M16 behind (WRONG!!!!) and just as I got there I sensed movement--it looked like a head go past over the tops of some bushes along the track. No, I was imagining it. No I wasn't! friggin'-it ' there goes another one! Thinking quick I grabbed the M60, but just as quick Rossy, my gunner grabbed it back and so began a game of "Gimme-Gimme" as each of us tried to take control of the gun. By the time I could explain what was happening the two VC were out of sight between us and the perimeter fence less than 300 yards away!

"Starlight control this is Starlight 22."

"Starlight control this is Starlight 22-over."

Oh crap--turn the radio on and try again. "Starlight control this is Starlight22 over."

"Starlight Control, go ahead." **SQUARK!**

"Roger, this is Starlight 22--be advised there are two or more persons moving towards the fence between my Bravo and Golf 4. I am unable to react for fear of impacting on base."

"That's 10-4. All units--Golf, Hotel, Echo--be advised Starlight 22 advises movement in your area. **SQUARK!**

An hour or so went by then Alan Atherton, who had the Starlight Scope [Photo right: AN/PVS2-A starlight scope], crept up to me and said he could see people moving some distance out. He said they kept coming and going and it looked like they were stacking something. The moon was up by now, not very bright but light enough for him to clear a bit of dirt and draw a picture. "It looks something like this," he said. "Oh CRAP"!! It was a frigging mortar!!



Here another excellent lesson is learned. The Starlight scope is not mounted on a rifle, is it? The only mount we had for the "scope" was for an M16, and I had it. With some difficulty he relocated the target when we got back to his position and he then set about indicating it to me. Sure enough, about 150 yards off I could just make out the tube and the angle of the tripod and four of five figures milling around and a shadowy heap of what no doubt were the bombs. Okay. A quick brief to the machine gun team--When Al fires, watch his tracers then Rapid Fire. Pass it on to the scouts. "Al ' I am going to pop a slap flare--as soon as it fires, let it rip."

"Starlight Control this is Starlight 22--have movement to my front and request illumination on my command."

"Starlight Control, that's 10-4 out to you. Python, this is Starlight Control, you copy?" -- **SQUARK!**

"This is Python, 10-4."

After priming a couple of slap flares, my plan was to whack the base of a flare on a big rock in front of me so I could fire my M16 right-handed as the flare took off. Wrong again! Don't do that, if you are in command-command--you have troops for fighting, besides. So, everything is ready???? WHACK ' WHOOSH goes the pop flare parallel to the ground, instead of up into the air, where it hits a tree 200 yards away behind the target and it ignites and BLINDS everyone. Beside me, the M60 is very quiet having fired one only round and disintegrated. I hastily put up another slap flare then requested Python to open up with his 81mm Mortar. The troops are banging away trying to follow Al's tracer and he has lost track of the



target between Starlight Scope and his L2A1 AR (same sort of principle as a BAR but based on our FN rifles).

Next, we hear the thunk as Python drops his first round followed by the "pop" as the nose of the illumination round is ejected prior to the flare deploying on it chute, the fizz as the flare ignites, and then DAYLIGHT (Well, pretty good anyway).

WHOOOP ' whoop ' whoop ' whoop ' whoop!!! Something about 100 yards by 100 yards is falling out of the sky and is going to--thump! And the sequence starts all over as the second flare does it's thing. By the time the third flare is well lit it is obvious that these terrifying sounds and thumps are the tail and nosecone coming to ground, after the flare is ejected and pose quite a hazard.

Having been an Artilleryman prior to joining the Aussie Air Force, I knew the characteristics of smoke and illumination rounds so I asked Python to extend the time of flight by 1 second which would now have the debris landing in the vicinity of where Charlie had headed--*heh-heh*.

There being no return fire and no visible targets I ordered a cease fire, then asked Python to reduce his rate of fire as he seemed to be getting rounds off as quick as he could drop them. I just wanted one round as each proceeding one went out to check the situation out. Starlight Control must have been reading my mail and came out with this classic: "Starlight 22, this is Starlight Control, 10-37." **SQUARK!**

' *Jeeezuz!!!* I knew about 10 of these Tens--if that--then he throws this thing at me after all the previous excitement! "WHAT THE friggin' IS A '10-37' ??!!!" Every single sound in the entire world ceased for five minutes, then you could hear laughter in the background as he keyed his mic and replied, "Starlight 22--this is Starlight Control--What is the status at the scene?"

Typical cop! *Oh crap--where do I start to answer this guy?* Doesn't he know I've been in a war here? "This is Starlight 22 ' we have been in contact with a mortar team, but lost it--my M60 is packed up and we are getting rained on with mortar tail fins '."



"10-4 'WHOOOP ' whoop ' whoop ' whoop ' whoop!!!"

... **SQUARK!!**

To all my Brothers, "Take Care",
Lawrie Gay,
Cpl Air Field defence Guard, 2 Squadron RAAF

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