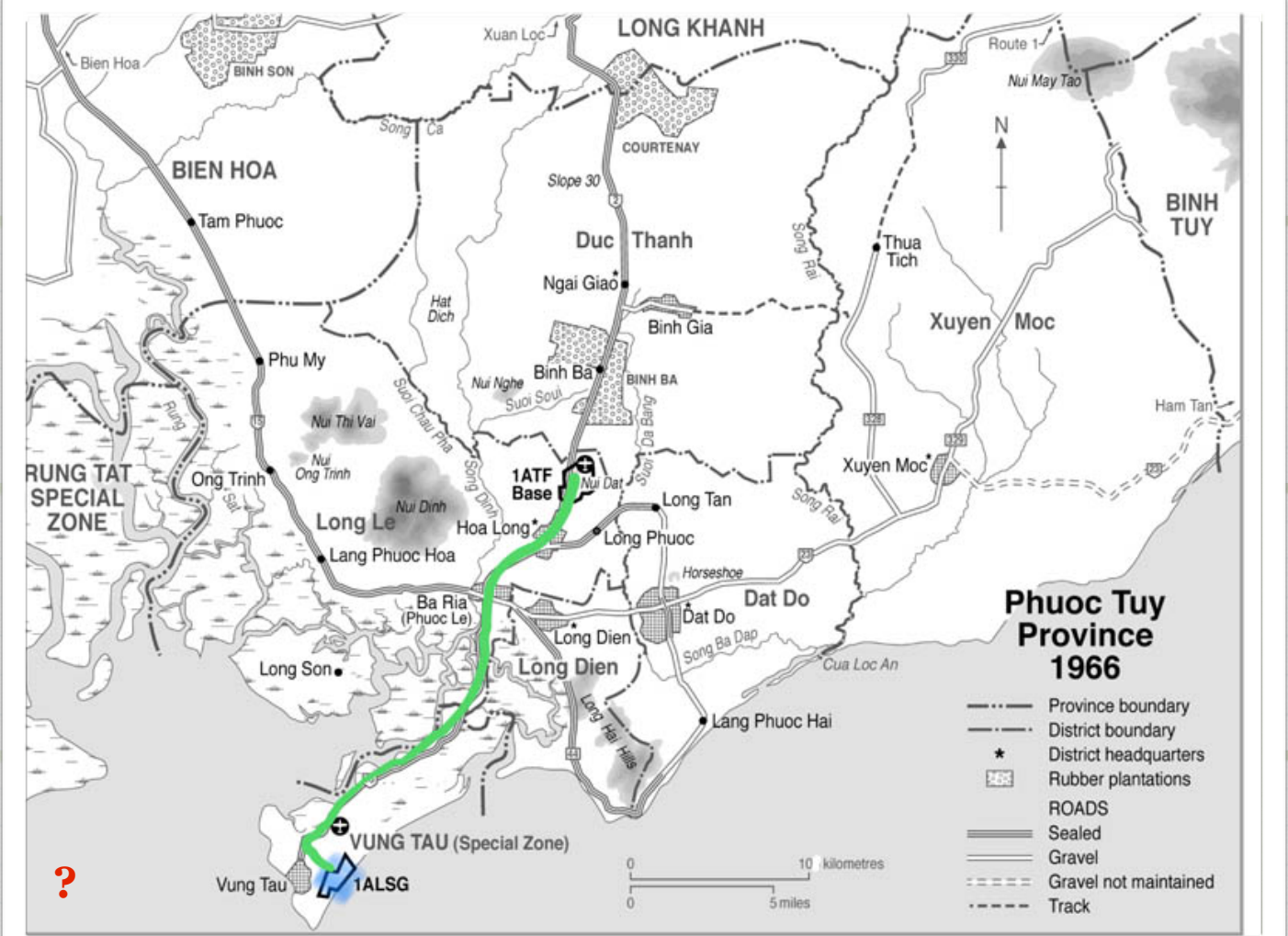


• CHAPTER 7 • FIRST TRIP TO THE “SHARP END”

The guys at Nui Dat joked that unlike us they lived at the Sharp End. As I had lots of mates there and also wanted to see if I could get transferred to 104 Sig Sqn, the Unit for which I had been trained, I eagerly grabbed my first opportunity to do a road trip up there. Everyone assured me that this was very safe, unlike the road to Saigon which was convoy only, so I was a bit alarmed when the Sergeant on board ordered “one up the spout” (ie load your rifles) as soon as we left the camp. Fortunately it turned out to be False Alarm No 6 (although It wasn’t me who imagined that one) as nothing happened. Well nothing actually dangerous as you will see in a few pages.



That and future trips to “the Dat” where I was later posted, gave a great insight into Vietnam itself as indicated by the following photos .



Some houses in Vung Tau. I was told the ones top right were Vietnamese Army married quarters. The building mid right is clad in Aluminium sheets labelled for beer cans. That was not an uncommon sight and, whilst innovative, one wonders how that material was obtained as some of the labels were for American beers.

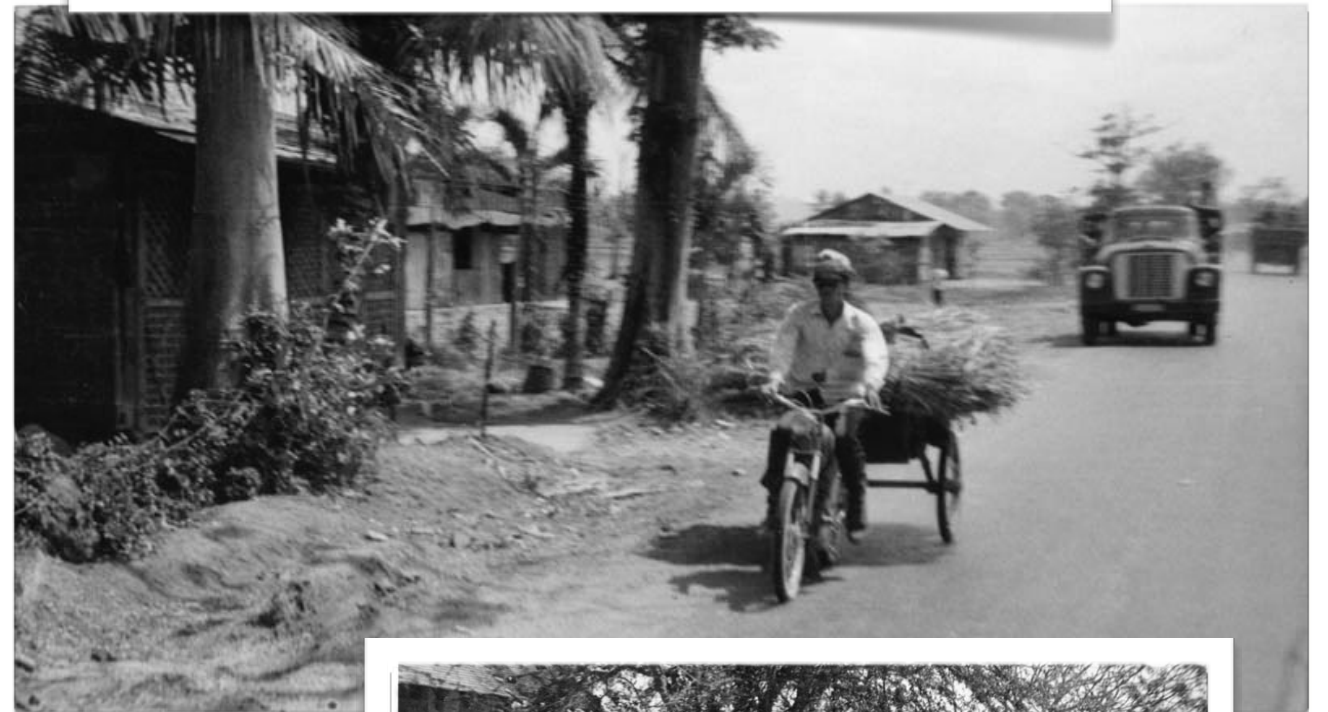
The drying fish (bottom right) remind me of a fish processing centre (making fish sauce?) just north of Vung Tau. The aroma was pretty powerful and it was said that many hungover diggers, returning to Nui Dat from a break in Vung Tau, left their breakfast on the side of the road there.

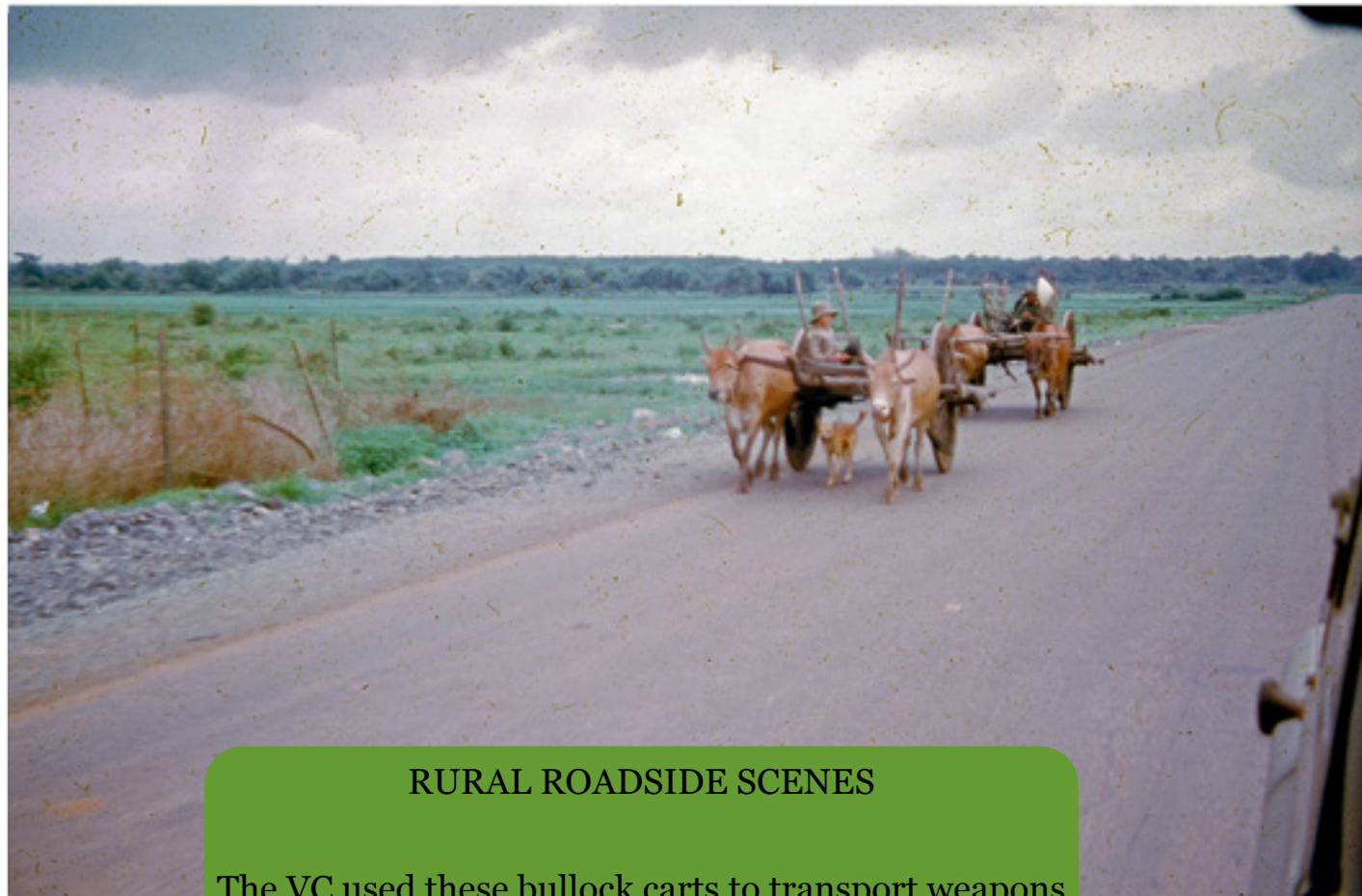
The image bottom left gives an overall impression of the countryside north of Vung Tau





RURAL VILLAGE SCENES





RURAL ROADSIDE SCENES

The VC used these bullock carts to transport weapons
etc and they were often stopped and searched
Rice paddies below





Traffic incident, crowds & congestion





YES THERE WAS A WAR ON

Pontoon bridge on the highway following VC
destruction of the original



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P09432.008





YES THERE WAS A WAR ON

Picture theatre in Baria after a major fire fight during the Tet offensive





YES THERE WAS A WAR ON

From top left, Vietnamese tanks; Aussie APCs (Armoured Personnel Carriers) - is that Normie Rowe* on board? - and the ubiquitous Iroquois Helicopter (its sound and the M60 machine gun remain icons of the Vietnam War for me).

* Normie, a conscripted, young Rock Star served in APCs. Here he is singing "Shaking All Over"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPfI9qmpGRA>





From top left

1. Market place the Aust Civil Affairs Team constructed near Baria. Once as we passed this market a Vietnamese woman was squatting on our side of a gravel heap to pee. Whilst not an unusual sight that bare, ample backside had a mate and I simultaneously singing "I see the Bad Moon Rising" - Credence Clearwater Revival <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BmEGm-mraE>
2. A "White Mouse" (Vietnamese Policeman) at a main intersection in Baria. We had just passed here once when a gunshot had us reeling round, rifles up to see a White Mouse with his pistol levelled at a Lambretta driver who hadn't stopped at his call. The next shot wasn't going to be a warning, the driver halted (False Alarm No 7)
3. Nearing Nui Dat. That is SAS Hill in the background where I would later be based





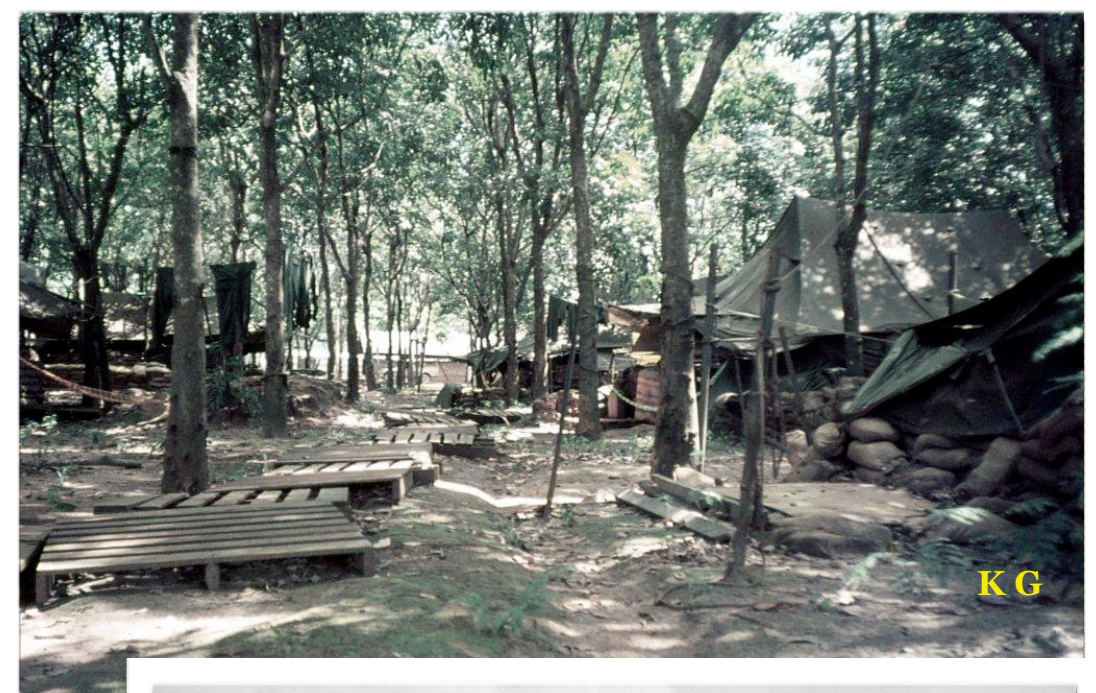
One Very Scary False Alarm (No 8)

Just as we arrived at Nui Dat (top left), still pretty nervy given the loaded rifles situation, we struck several Vietnamese working alongside the road. Canungra warnings again flashed into my head “will they heave a grenade or shoot as we pass them. No she’ll be right, no one else seemed worried, must be ok”. (There’s those two Rex voices talking)

Just as we passed, with my back to the Vietnamese an almighty BOOM had me spinning around. “Hang on I am still in one piece”. “What the hell was that?” I thought, somewhat confused as no one else seemed worried. Then I saw these massive American mobile guns, one of which had just fired over our head, right at that very coincidental moment.

With a “bit of time up” I got used to those guns at Nui Dat. Their blast was incredible and you could hear the massive projectile spiralling whoosh whoosh whoosh over your head. One night up there we were woken by a constant barrage of artillery and learnt next day that 740 rounds had been fired. Forty VC were found dead.





104 Sig Squadron was located amongst the rubber trees behind the chopper pad (in photo above). Their tent lines are shown above right. At middle right is a view of Nui Dat hill looking back across that pad.

At lower right are various “Huey” helicopters which were used in roles such as inserting/extracting troops (critical to the the SAS), “dustoffs” (ie casualty evacuation), fire support, transporting supplies and to blokes like me they were a “taxi service”. There was actually a cab rank sign at that pad. One day a squad of Kiwi SAS, with their camouflaged facespainted in scary Tiki designs, were waiting there for a chopper. Any VC would die of fright if one of those guys popped up in front of them.

Note the small checkpoint on the road coming into the base from mid right. A Task Force Brigadier imposed a clamp down on beer supplies and had MPs (Military Police) check the bags, packs etc of anyone coming into the base through there. Now the boxes used for transporting Cypher equipment, with Top Secret plastered all over them, could easily fit a couple of cartons of beer. Several trips were made to 110 Sigs to get (non existent) equipment in these boxes “repaired”. Of course we reluctantly refused to open the (now full) boxes on our return because of the “security restrictions” on such equipment. I still cannot believe I kept a poker face when we did that.

Another grog restricting (?) stunt was to call alerts just after 9pm which meant boozers were closed early. Didn't go down well

