

OK most entertainment at HQ revolved around the boozier or "Sandbaggers Inn" as some knew it (see below). After all at 15c a can of beer (5c on the Wednesday night before payday) it was a very cheap pass-time.

There were also movies in our outdoor theatre (see top right). Of course on those stifling tropical nights a cold beer was often called for whilst watching movies.



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The rules were that all cans served over the bar had to be opened but the barmen, our mates, often got "forgetful" and we would walk out with ammunition tins full of ice covered, unopened tinnies. It was amazing how quiet you could make the pssst sound on opening a can, just in case any senior ranking people nearby might hear you.



The Boozer

Top: The Beer Garden. Note that we could wear civilian clothes in the bar at night but it had to be long trousers for mosquito protection

Right: Painting the entry to the boozer, yours truly up the ladder. Actually we had done a bit of signwriting by painting “The Pisser” on the door but that was regarded as too unseemly and we were told to paint over it. To the right of the door was a morale thermometer, red paint indicating the level of morale in the unit. It was often shown as bone dry and in a few pages I will outline the reaction to our boss being injured. When troops get pissed off they get on the piss. When they get on the piss they often stuff up. So instead of addressing the underlying morale issues they were charged and guess what, they got more pissed off and got back on the piss and so the downward spiral went. I am not justifying that behaviour but it is pretty poor military leadership that doesn’t recognise it.



Parties

When the Navy supply ship HMAS Jeparit came into port our cooks would be despatched with boozer funds to buy meat and actual glass stubbies of beer that had not been standing in the heat for ages*. Those sailors had quite an enterprise going as we would not have been the only unit buying from them. At times the boozer also hired travelling bands to liven up the night.

Of course those and going home parties could get pretty wild. One night some of our guys brought in a stranded yank who had missed his flight back from Rec Leave in Vung Tau. “She’ll be right, we’ll look after you back at base ‘till the morning” they assured him. As guys were were dancing naked on tables I watched him, with gaping jaw dropped to his chest, slowly moving his head from side to side trying to fathom what the hell he had gotten into. He was totally dumbfounded by what was pretty normal to us. Also note the views of a Yank at Nui Dat in a later chapter.

* VB was about the only beer not affected by the heat in transit/storage, hence its popularity and mention in Redgum’s song. The boozer ended up giving away Courage beer for free but few would touch it as just a couple of cans would see you vomiting.



Parties contd



The beach parties were the best, where the Esky was a trailer full of ice, parked in the dune vegetation near the Badcoe Club (see later). The glass stubby and VB can in the above photo shows I am not telling fibs. Several Officers would join in on these occasions only to end up in the ice at the end of the proceedings. That was actually a very good sign that they had the diggers' respect.

At left is our Anzac Day two up game with me (standing, centre) as "spinner". The cooks had us ready for that mornings dawn parade with coffee very liberally dosed with rum. We scooped it up in the large, metal mugs that fitted onto our water bottles, it certainly kicked started the day

There was also the Vine Bar, a clearing below the scrub canopy on the side of our ridge, where some would retreat after the official bar closed. We were making so much noise there one night that the adjacent Unit alerted our officers and next thing there were blokes flying into the scrub every where, waiting for ages until the prying eyes of the Duty Officer disappeared. Just good military training really.

Sport

This ranged from a casual kick of the footy and ad hoc games of volleyball to organised Aussie Rules, Rugby Union and Water Polo comps

Volley ball was often against the Yanks eg at their Signals base on VC Hill. Again they seemed to have a little difficulty with the need to break for a beer after each game, they thought it was meant to be serious (although we did play to win)



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Aussie Rules

The Aussie Rules comp was interesting as we played on soccer grounds with 14 man teams (minus the 4 flank positions). At a local Police Academy (?) ground the locals used to crowd the sidelines to watch this crazy spectacle. See Hospital story later regarding an injury I got.

Best games were against the RAAF as we then got invited to to their mess. The food etc was so far ahead of what we had, an advantage of being able to transport in your own I suspect.

One of our opposition players was a National Serviceman who played for Geelong. On those small grounds it was just a matter of them getting the ball to him from the centre bounce and it was immediately through the goals



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The Badcoe Club



The Badcoe Club (named after Peter Badcoe, VC) was a beach side recreation and accommodation facility, particularly for troops from Nui Dat. Its bar and pool were especially welcome and had a non military, non wartime feel about it. As can be seen on the next page there were also entertainers from time to time.

Entertainers

Many entertainers, some quite famous, visited from Australia and they have actually been awarded the Logistics Support Medal for their contribution.

I had Johnny O'Keefe, a Rock and Roll king at the time, within a couple of meters of me one night, emotionally responding to the crowd's requests to pump out his signature song *Shout*.

Another night a female singer (Lorrae Desmond ?) had us all rocking away when a few guys asked her to sing The Animals' *Boom Boom*. "No, no" came her instant, adamant reply. She explained she hadn't been able to fathom the uproarious crowd reaction when she had sung it at Nui Dat but later learned that "boom, boom" was a local term for intercourse. There was no way she was going to sing that again.



Johnny O'Keefe - *Shout*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ht8WDs8H7wM>

The Animals - *Boom Boom*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nM1B9G_Z-VI

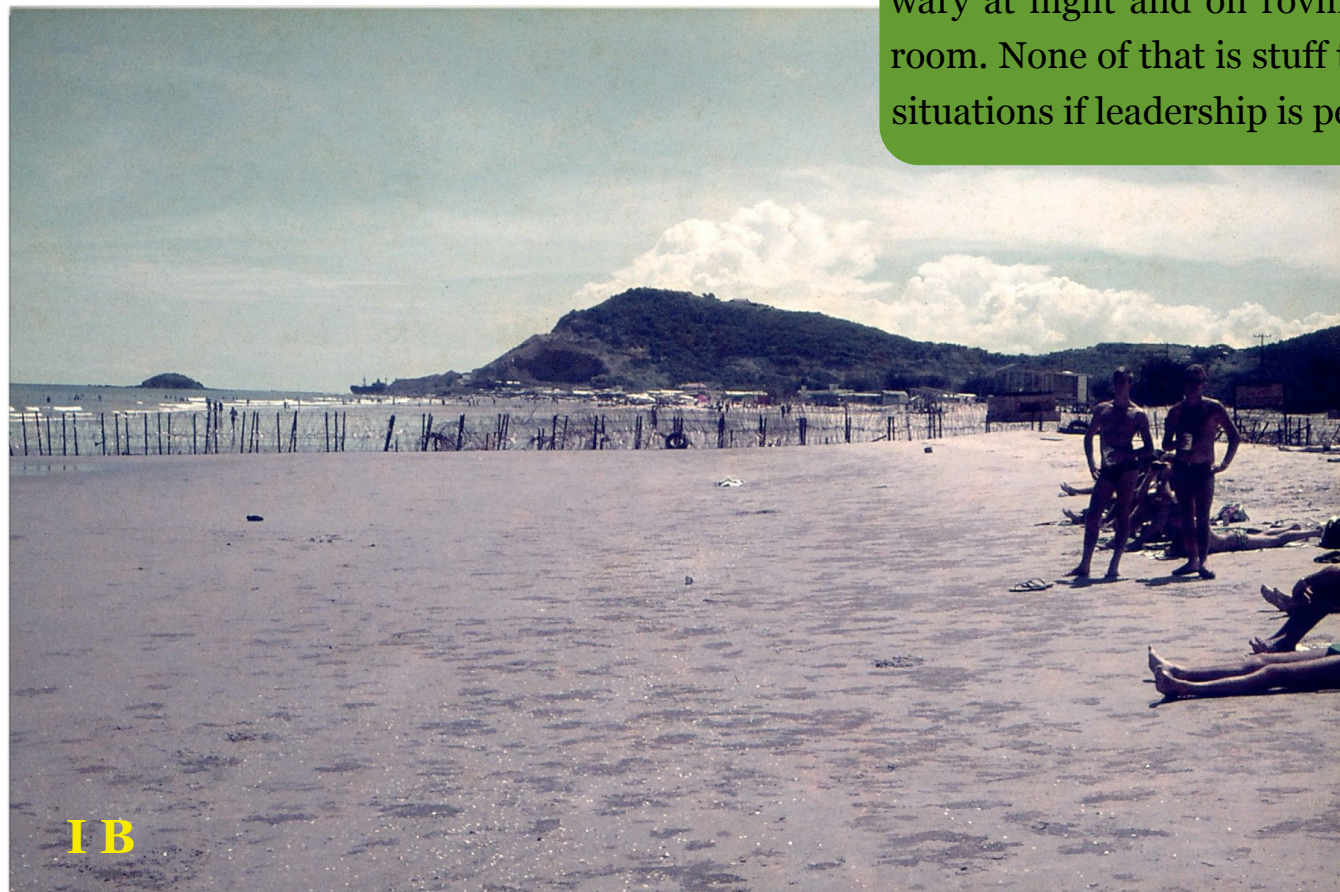
The Beach



Adjacent to the Badcoe Club was a “surf” beach (see bottom left) where you could swim or ride boards. However one of my mates stepped on a stone fish or something one day and ended up in hospital. It was also a bit of a trap if we visited whilst working night shifts as the salt would make one thirst for a Badcoe beverage and we weren’t always sober when we rolled up for work at night.

Strategically the beach was also a vulnerable part of the base’s perimeter and it was lined with bunkers (top left). Local fishing boats had to stay a certain distance offshore and it was not unusual to hear an M60 machine gun sending plumes of bullet spray ahead of a boat suddenly doing a rapid turn out to sea.

Fundraising in Australia led to the purchase of “Jimmy” (bottom right) which we used for skiing off the beach. However one day the Major commanding our Unit was seriously injured when accidentally hit by its props. As mentioned he was not well liked and you could actually hear the cheering going through our lines as news spread that he was going to be sent home. He did return some months later and the word was that he thought it had been deliberate. Allegedly he was very wary at night and on roving picquet duties we were known to deliberately tromp loudly past his room. None of that is stuff to be proud of but it does illustrate how deep things can sink in wartime situations if leadership is perceived to be poor.



Cape St Jacques



South of our beach, at the tip of the peninsula was Cape St Jacques. Along the way was the American Beachcomber (?) Club. Technically we weren't supposed to go down there but with all our training it was a cinch to slip under the gate (above) and make the short trek. One day we continued further down and rounded the Cape.





A few views along the way. Note the old French forts (top right) similar to those on VC Hill





Luxury houses and a cold beer around the corner

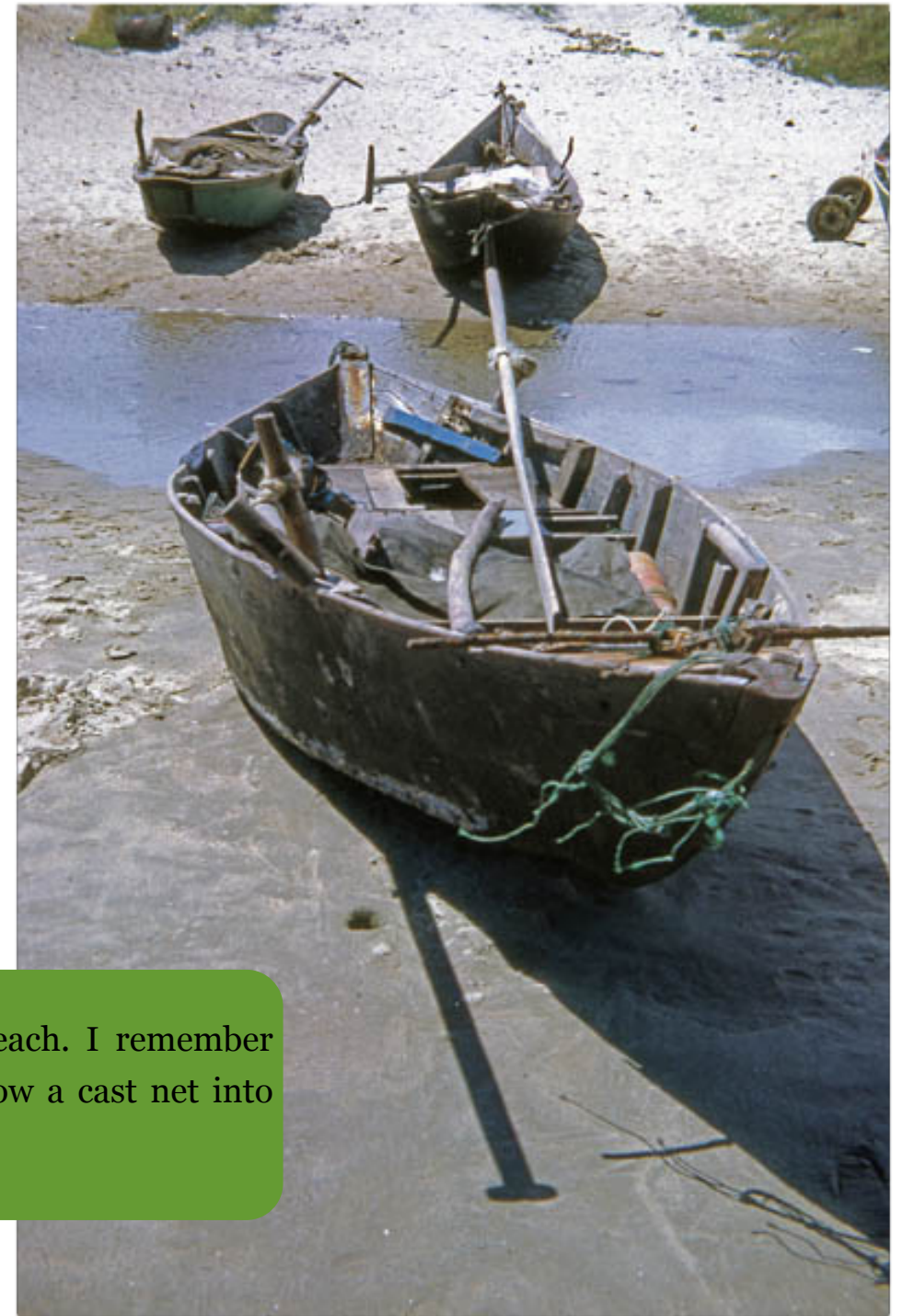




Looking back north towards 1ALSG

That strip looks like the Gold Coast today (see below)



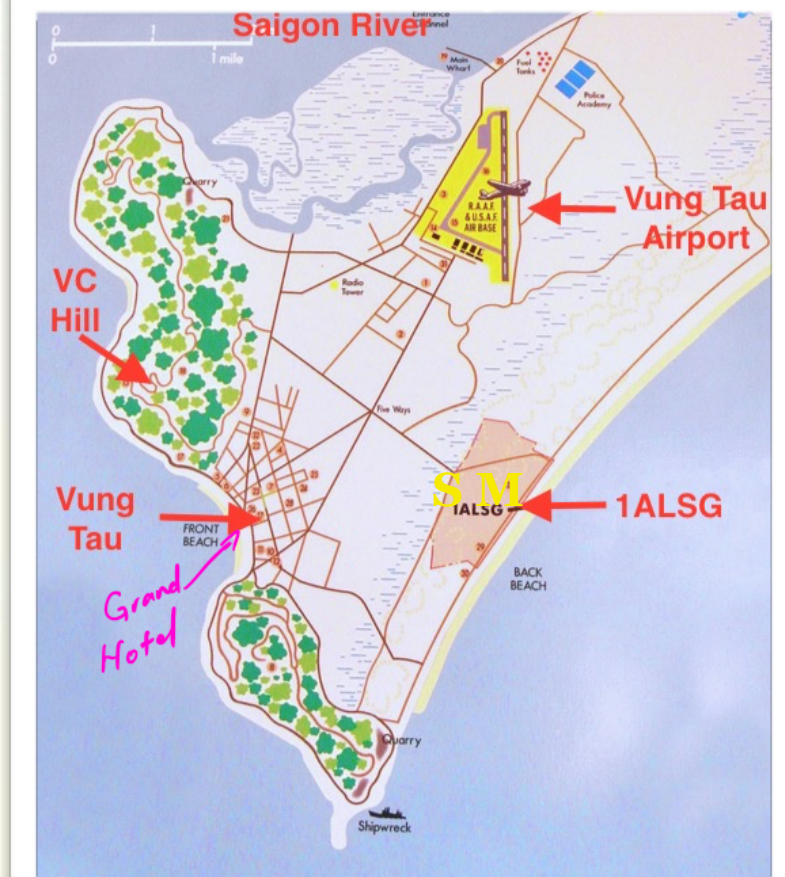


Fishing boats and food sellers along the beach. I remember being fascinated whilst watching a man throw a cast net into the surf to catch fish that I couldn't even see.



Kids are kids wherever you are

Vung Tau Township

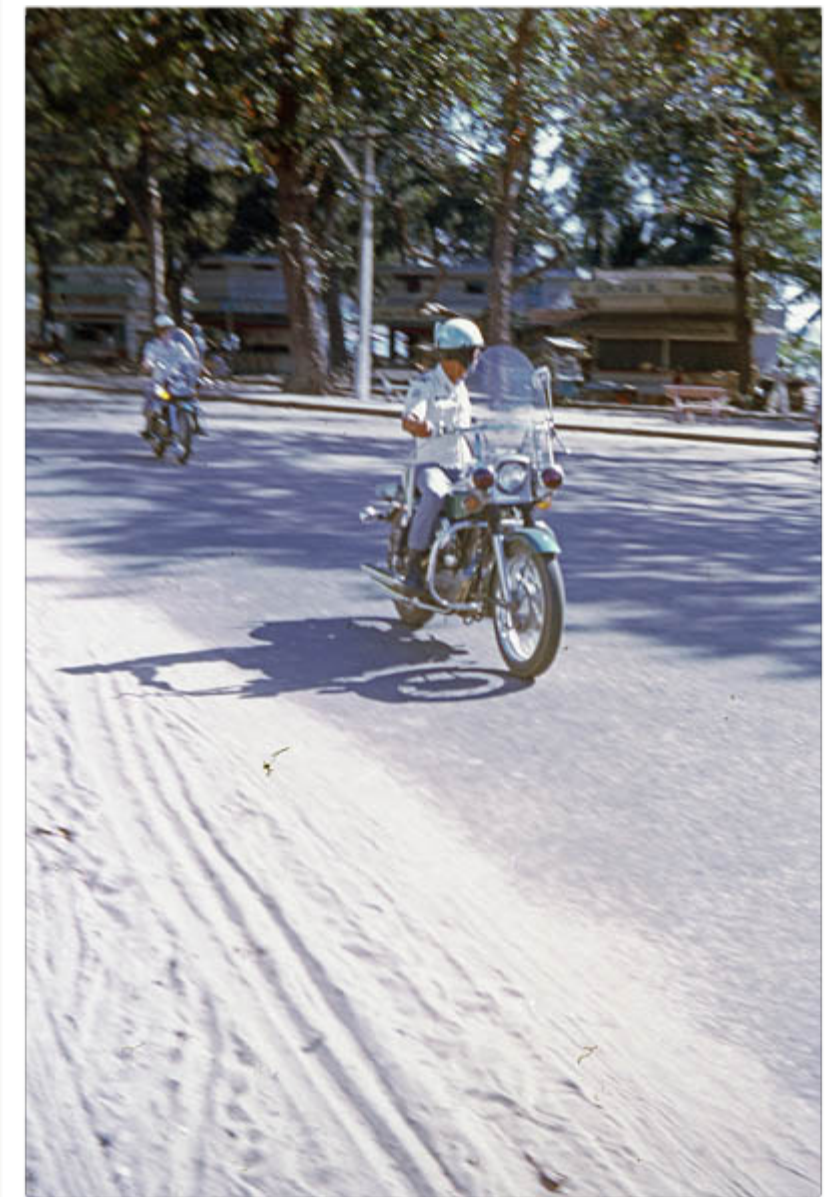


The Flags area in Vung Tau township where we caught transport back to base. Alternatively we would catch one of the white Lambretta “taxis” shown along the street



The beachside Grand Hotel (left), as mentioned in Redgum's song, was a fine waterhole, although it was reputed that several French Officers were murdered there in the past.

Vietnamese motorcycle cops out the front and a general view of the beach looking towards VC Hill





A huge Buddha statue that had been erected and cigarette smoking Monk

On the water



Water transport and fishing boats to the north of VC Hill (again we weren't supposed to be in that area either).

The bananas were likely going to the nearby market (see next page)





Markets



Contrasts



The young girl from the centre of town (above) seems to be eating well whilst her compatriot (above right) is gathering food scraps from bins. Those scraps were from the kitchens at 1ALSG, gathered by Vietnamese crews in very smelly trucks (having to ride “shotgun” on those trucks was something I dreaded). Again something I am not proud of but we actually referred to those trucks as “Meals on Wheels”.

As I have mentioned seeing such poverty had a profound effect on me and when I look at the picture bottom right of that same district today I wonder what that war was all about? My later chapter “Political Pawns ?” elaborates.



R&C, R&R



During our “Tour of Duty” we were given a few days R&C (Rest & Convalescence) at the above centre in Vung Tau. Also we got one R&R (Rest & Recreation) trip to our choice of various locations including Australia. I chose Hong Kong, a fantastic place.



One could walk down to the “Taxi Rank” at the chopper pads (eg above) and hitch a ride if available. I still remember my first chopper experience when I was sent to the Horseshoe. Settling in to the meagre little seat (no seatbelts) with my rifle and gear at my feet I listened expectantly as the rotors gained speed. As we started forward the aircraft took a steep, nose down attitude which my mind read as “we are going into the ground “ - nope that was just the way they worked. Settling down I started enjoying the view when the pilot banked into a turn, all you could see out one side was sky and out the other was the ground. “I’m going to fall out” I thought grabbing the seat. I noticed that my rifle hadn’t slid away and realised that centrifugal force was holding everything in. More false alarms (No 8)

One day a mate and I hitched a ride with an American chopper and ended up in bases at Phu Loi and Cu Chi, the site of a major VC tunnel system. Flying through open country the pilot often had us speeding just a few meters above the creekside trees. To me this made us highly vulnerable to any hidden Viet Cong but as the Pilot later explained at that speed and height anyone there would only get a fleeting glimpse of us and hopefully no time to aim and fire. That was False Alarm No 9. Later at Saigon airport about to catch a Caribou back home we noticed that our Troop Commander was getting onto the same plane. If caught we would have been in very deep strife as what we were doing was highly illegal. Anyway, as I wrote home, we did a very good James Bond impersonation and remained unnoticed mainly by being last to board and first off whilst he, as an Officer, got to sit up the front.

The “Huey” on the right was set up as a “Bushranger” gunship

A few years ago a friend asked if Led Zeppelin’s “*Whole Lotta Love*” ever reminded me of choppers. Yes, its beat does evoke the iconic thumping of the rotors, the drumming reminds me of machine guns, and there is a sense of dangerous expectation in some sequences - all unintentional I suspect but here is a link.

Chopper Rides



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQmmM_qwG4k