

Chapter Six

Terendak, then Homeward Bound

The soldiers were delivered ashore in assault landing craft to the Terendak LCT hard on Saturday 31 July 1965, much to the delight of the assembled wives and children of both 2 Troop and the Battalion. Lefty Maddison was transferred directly from the ship to Terendak Hospital. Meanwhile, the troop vehicles made the return voyage on the LSL (Landing Ship Logistic) *Sir Lancelot* to Singapore and thence by road to Terendak, arriving several days after the main body. *Sir Lancelot*, of 6 390 gross tons, was built in 1964 for the UK Ministry of Transport. In 1970 it was transferred to the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. Along with five sister ships, *Sir Lancelot* served in the 1982 Falklands Conflict. She was damaged by a 1 000-pound enemy bomb which although failing to explode, resulted in fire damage. The ship continued in service until 1989, when she was sold and refitted as a floating casino at Capetown, South Africa.

During the deployment in Sarawak there were several more additions to troop numbers. Bruce and Judy Parsons became proud parents of a son, Jeffrey, born at Terendak Hospital, while June Hanrahan travelled to Penang and gave birth to daughter Kim, surrounded by family and friends, but with Terry still in Bau. Anais Marie Richardson arrived on 3 July to joyous first-time parents, Yvonne and Alan.

The Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr Lee Kwan Yew, announced on 9 August that Singapore was seceding from the Federation of Malaysia, and would become a separate republic, with himself as President.

Ray Logan and fiancée, Ahlan, were married at St. John's OPD Church, Terendak, on 16 August. Harry Atkinson took the role of best man.

On Friday 20 August, 11 Sqn held a dinner dance in the ORs mess to celebrate the return of 2 Troop from Borneo. The dress was 'Planters with ties for men' (long trousers and long-sleeved white shirts). The Flamingoes provided dance music including the waltz, quickstep, foxtrot, Latin American and Gay Gordons. There was also a Twist competition and novelty dances, including the Limbo.

Meanwhile Park Troop and the 2 Troop planties recently returned from Sarawak, were hard at work constructing a helipad and helicopter test area just below the 11 Sqn barracks. While it was largely a plant operation, sappers from the squadron poured the concrete test bays and tie-down points.



A landing craft from HMS Albion delivers members of 2 Troop to the landing hard at Terendak where wives and family are eagerly waiting.



Spr Ray Logan and his new bride, Ahlan, with bridesmaid and best man, Spr Harry Atkinson, outside St. John's church, Terendak, shortly after the wedding ceremony.



Spr Dave Wood accompanied by Spr Ian Tibbles on a Fowler light dozer beginning preliminary work on the helicopter test area adjacent to the 11 Sqn area.

Also during August, Acker Bilk (a former Royal Engineer) and his band visited Terendak, and all the lovers of trad jazz attended the concert and had a great time. 2 Troop, with the exception of seven members who were staying behind to join the incoming group, were in wind-down mode. The Pads were busily having their personal belongings packed for transport to Australia by sea, and the aluminium trunks (soldier's box) of the single members were packed and addressed to their respective destinations.

Most of the troop attended the Farewell Parade for 3 RAR, held on 9 September, and the Battalion certainly marched out in style.

Lennon, Crosby, Parsons and Wicks travelled once more to Singapore to participate in another parachute qualifying course. This time they travelled in a RAF Beverley Transport to Kuantan on the east coast for practice jumps in stick formations of 15-20 troops at a time.

Brian Cribbs, a confirmed bachelor, quaintly asked his Troop Commander for permission to marry. He amazed everyone in deciding to get married given his committed single life and at such a late stage in the tour of duty in Malaya. Naturally, the whole troop was invited to witness the happy occasion and to enjoy a sumptuous 12-course feast while wishing Brian and his bride much happiness.

Farewell to Malaysia

It was now 2 Troop's turn to march out and they were bade farewell at a Squadron Parade on 30 September 1965, with Lieutenant Colonel E Westbrook RE, the Deputy Commander, 28 Commonwealth Infantry Brigade, taking

the salute. During the farewell parade, Major Stevens presented Capt Hodges with a handsome shield with crossed chromed gollock and Malay parang. This plaque, along with the one presented to 2 Troop by the State of Sarawak, is on display in the Australian Army Museum of Military Engineering at the School of Military Engineering. The troop marched off proudly, showing it was not only the Regiments that could put on a display. The 11 Sqn flag was lowered by L/Cpl Tom Abberfield, who was given this duty as he was not greatly adept at parade drill. With the order to 'March Off', this Tom did – straight to his barracks instead of the Orderly Room. Custodian of the Flag for 28 years, Tom presented it to the troop at its first reunion in Alice Springs in 1993. (After Tom's death his sister, Barbara Dore, gave the 11 Sqn flag to Doug Maddison and Bill Jones for use at future reunions.)

The final party was held in the 2 Troop clubhouse and all members were presented with a Selengor pewter tankard suitably inscribed with their personal details and history of the deployment. Barry Lennon presented a plaque to Maj John Stevens as a memento of the Troop's service with 11 Sqn. (The plaque with the map of Australia was made from timber from each State by 20 Field Park Sqn in Sydney, which was commanded by Maj Warren Lennon, Barry's brother.)

Everyone was keen to return to Australia but, while there were occasional instances of animosity between the Brit and Australian sappers, the troop had made many good friends in the Squadron and it was sad to bid them farewell. The SSM, WO Tom Thornton, in particular, was well liked and respected by everyone. Fred



L/Cpl Brian Cribbs and bride with Cpl Stan Limb and Cpl Simon Wilson, September 1965.



2 Troop's farewell parade. Lt Col E Westbrook RE, Deputy Commander, 28 Commonwealth Brigade, inspects the Troop with Troop OC Capt Alan Hodges, 30 September 1965.



Presenting Arms to the Inspecting Officer after the march past.



The troops march past in style, with the salute taken by Lt Col E Westbrook RE.



The farewell parade over, its time to relax with a few 'coldies' at the troop club house. From here it is 'Destination: Australia'.



2 Troop singlies, together with Babu, enjoy a farewell drink with the Hodges before the Troop's return to Australia.

Gray, the Orderly Room Corporal for the first 12 months, and plant fitter L/Cpl Geoff Gillespie would also be remembered as close friends.

Everyone, apart from the Troop Commander, and the six others who were staying on with the replacement troop, said farewell to Terendak on 5 October 1965, and boarded a Qantas 707 in Singapore for the flight home. Although Lefty Maddison had only been in Malaya for under a year, he returned with the troop on its return to Australia to attend a medical board as a result of his injuries in Sarawak.

It was necessary for the plane to fly around the top end of the island of Sumatra to avoid Indonesian airspace, then on to the first touchdown on Australian soil for two years – a cold, windy and wet Perth. With the Sandgroppers disembarked, it was on to Sydney, arriving at some ungodly hour of the morning. A few hours sleep at the personnel depot at Watsons Bay (or motels for the families), then those travelling interstate caught their various flights to take some much anticipated leave.

With the dispersal of the members to their various new postings, the 2 Troop of 1963-65 was no longer an entity, although the name continued with its successor. Some of the troop went to existing engineer squadrons, while others became the nucleus of the fledgling 18 Field Sqn to be based at Wacol (later moved to Lavarack Barracks, Townsville). Many went on to serve one or more tours in South Vietnam, while those who were posted to 21 Const Sqn were in Borneo again before Christmas, this time in Sabah, relieving 24 Const Sqn. However, no matter what the posting, those Sappers who spent 1963-1965 in Malaya,

Thailand and Sarawak always thought of themselves, first and foremost, as **2 Field Troop Royal Australian Engineers**.

Those troop members with eligible service were awarded the British General Service Medal with bars, 'Malay Peninsula' and 'Borneo'. Subsequently, the Australian Active Service Medal 1945-1975 was awarded with clasp 'Malaysia' and the Australian Service Medal 1945-1975 with clasps 'Thailand' and 'SE Asia'. The General Service Medal has especially been worn proudly because of its special significance as a tangible reminder of our close working relationship with our British colleagues in 11 Indep Field Sqn RE. (Further details on medal entitlements are contained in the section on Service Medals at the end of the book.)



Plaque presented to 2 Troop on its departure by 11 Indep Field Sqn



With 11 Sqn at Present Arms, 2 Troop leaves the parade ground for the last time.