



THE WOUNDING OF TREVOR LYNCH - MY MEMORIES

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RAAMC
5RAR 1st Tour



I was "called up" for National Service in the First Intake - 1 July 1965. After Basic, Medical Corps, and Jungle Training, I served with two other units before being posted to 5RAR - just days before the last of the Battalion left for Vietnam.

As the junior company medic of 5RAR, I served with a number of companies but did not know many Battalion members well. At the time of the incident referred to, I was attached to BHQ, serving both Support and Admin Companies. I did not know Trevor personally.

On the morning of 17 October 1966, 5RAR began a clearing operation of the Nui Thi Vai mountain complex. BHQ was following A Company from Highway 15 in a fairly straight line towards the mountain. I was situated near the end of the BHQ group. At the base of the mountain, at least one mine was set off by A Company. BHQ then split off from A Company and set off up the hill following a steep track.

There were many huge boulders on each side of the track, with thick undergrowth and tall trees. Shortly afterwards we were halted by rifle fire from higher up the track, where we remained for a long time. During this halt, a mortar bomb mine was found close to where we stopped. There was spasmodic rifle fire, and I heard that we had taken some casualties from snipers in caves. A small chopper came in underneath overhanging trees and took them away (the pilot was later decorated for this). We then continued on up the hill until we arrived at a pagoda about sundown, and set up a defensive perimeter for the night.

Either the next morning or the day after that, the Assault Pioneers and myself (there may have been others) set off down the hill to assault the cave system (probably better described as a hillside covered by huge boulders on top of each other) with flame throwers which had been choppered in. The assault was under the command of Lt John Macalony. We descended the steep track, and as we neared the caves I was detailed with three others to take up position on the left slope above and adjacent to the caves to provide covering fire into the cave mouths. As we moved into position between huge boulders, I located a cache of boxes behind one enormous rock (it later turned out to be over 100 pounds of Chinese TNT).

Trevor Lynch and another soldier (whose name I cannot recall) had been detailed to make the actual assault with the back pack flame throwers. We did not see their initial approach, but suddenly there was the almighty crack of a mine detonation, followed by loud screaming. With clearance from the section leader I was with, I made my way back to the track and down then out to where the wounded lay.

To say I was scared stiff would be a gross understatement. The two men lay immediately in front of the caves which had numerous entrances with little cover. I recall feeling very lonely and totally exposed.

My memory from this time is somewhat doubtful. I must have examined both soldiers in accordance with my medical training, and decided that the other man, although wounded in the back and legs, could wait.

I turned my attention to Trevor, who was screaming in a demented fashion and writhing on the ground. He had sustained multiple wounds; in fact his was the most mutilated human body I had ever seen and ever want to. I had great difficulty deciding where to start as he had dozens of bleeding wounds, some of them very serious, broken limbs and many facial injuries. The front of his body was a mass of puncture wounds. I remember as I started applying wound dressings that

I had to tie Trevor's hands together to stop him dislodging dressings and doing himself more damage. I recall that I was crying at one point due to the frustration I felt in trying stop blood loss from so many wounds at once. I doubt if Trevor was aware at that time of anything, and his wild screaming continued unabated, but I do recall that Capt Tony White, the 5RAR RMO, joined me at some stage prior to Trevor being moved.

From this point I cannot recall what happened for some time that day, as I was probably in shock myself. I do not know how many wounds I treated, nor from where or when he was casevaced, and whether I treated the other soldier at all or what his specific injuries were. I cannot recall whether I (or Doc White) inserted a drip into Trevor's arm to bolster his blood supply, but am sure this would have been done.

My memory continues for later that afternoon, and I remember my role in the cave assault and clearance. The layout of the cave mouths, the track, and that part of the mountain, remain clear to me today. It may have been that evening, but probably some days later I was advised Trevor was still alive, was blinded, and was still riddled with shrapnel. I recall being very surprised as I firmly believed he would die from his many wounds.

After I returned to Australia with 5RAR, I underwent nose surgery in July 1967 for an injury sustained while with D Company during our stay at the "Horseshoe". While in the Repat Hospital in Adelaide, I happened to be placed in the same large ward as Trevor was then in. Although he was partly deaf, I managed to communicate daily with him for the few days I was incapacitated there. When he couldn't understand, I spelt the word to him by writing it on his hand with my finger, letter by letter. He could not remember anything about the incident which caused his injuries, and wanted to learn what had happened. I was able "Little by Little" (the RAAMC Motto) to describe to him what I recalled of that ghastly day.

After my discharge, I lost touch with Trevor, mainly through interstate transfers in my career, but memories of him and that traumatic occasion remained with me, and became a frequent nightmare as PTSD slowly affected my life. It has definitely been the most frightening day of my life.

I did not see Trevor again until nearly 30 years later - 7 April 1997 at a hospice in Adelaide. I had been contacted the previous day by another Vet (who was not ex-5RAR) who had been caring for Trevor, and whom I did not know. He had somehow found out about the experience Trevor and I had shared, and told me that Trevor had cancer, and was near death. During my visit to him, Trevor was unable to speak, and was obviously close to death. His Vet carer, who was present with us, assured me that Trevor realised who I was, and that he seemed glad to have re-established contact again.

Trevor died on 8 April 1997, at the age of 51, after miraculously surviving shocking injuries from one of man's worst weapons of war - the antipersonnel mine

Although it was very traumatic personally seeing Trevor again the day before he died, I am very glad I did. I attended his funeral the next day and said goodbye (with a small group of people) to a very brave individual, who appeared to have made the best that he could out of his short tragic life.

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Trevor Michael Lynch
23 May 1945 - 8 April 1997

