

'No mean task' keeping communications up and running

Cpl Denis Hare
before the
Vietnam War.



ELEMENTS of 104 Sig Sqn were one of the first units into FSB Coral. They packed their gear into the position after being landed about 1500m away, according to then Cpl Denis Hare.

"This was no mean task as the equipment included an RT-524 radio, the receiver/transmitter of the vehicular-borne AN/VRC-12 series VHF equipment, 150 amp hour batteries, a 300-watt charger, RC-292 antenna, AN/GRA-39 remote control unit and an AN/PRC-25 radio," Mr Hare said.

"It was an effort that proved well worthwhile because early on the morning of May 13, the base came under attack from enemy mortar, rocket and small-arms fire, causing casualties to men and equipment, including the RC-292 antenna."

Mr Hare said temporary repairs enabled the radio station to remain operational and it was the means by which Spooky, the DC3 aircraft equipped with illumination and six miniguns, and helicopter gunships were called in to support the units under attack.

The main body of 1 Australian Task Force arrived later that day, bringing the strength of the signals group to 51.

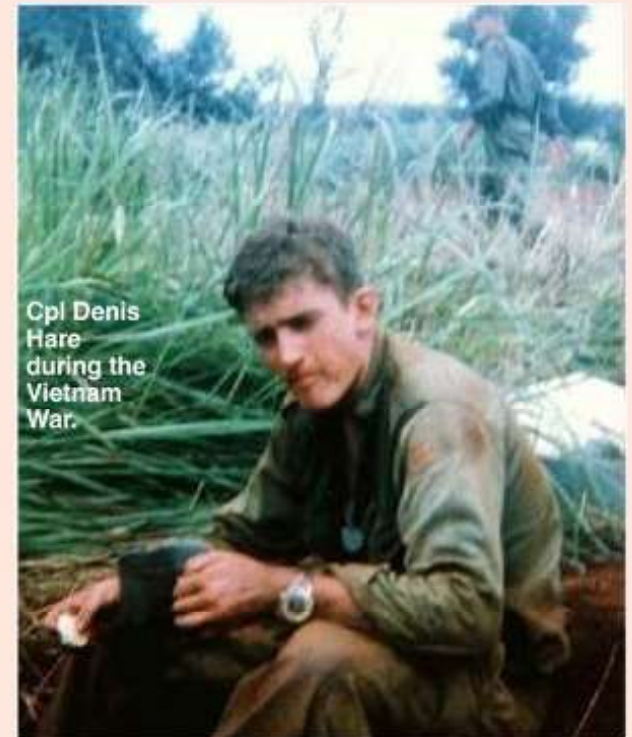
"Next day an unexpected rain storm flooded the radio bunker, swamping most of the equipment, but after draining the water out all the equipment operated satisfactorily," Mr Hare said. "The signal centre was also flooded, but not so badly."

At 2.40am on May 16, an NVA regimental attack was launched against FSB Coral. Mr Hare said it started with 50 minutes of mortar and rocket barrage, which included the signals area, and was followed by ground attacks. One enemy party came within 50m of the signals perimeter, which was directly protecting the task force CP.

"The enemy finally broke contact at 6.45am," he said.

National serviceman Sig Alex Young was killed and two signalmen wounded. Subsequently, new bunkers were constructed, radio relay vehicles lowered and bunkered and strong defences developed.

As a result of lessons from the Battle of Coral, 104 Sig Sqn was issued its own armoured command vehicle and all future deployments had the communication centre and switchboard equipment mounted in the vehicle.



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