

**My memory of 2nd Lieutenant David Patterson. 8 Platoon Commander,  
Charlie Company 3RAR Vietnam 1971**

**Stacey Kruck- Everyman's**



Stacey Kruck with son Martyn Kruck (LPC 4<sup>th</sup> June 2021)

I had served the men of 7RAR for eleven months as a Representative of Everyman's Welfare Service a (Christian Philanthropic Organization), and I was beginning to feel very tired and looking forward to going home, yet feeling guilty leaving an unfinished task supporting those still serving who were laying their lives on the line.

3RAR arrived and took over from 7RAR and I slipped seamlessly into my new Battalion - 3RAR - having accumulated quite some experience by that time. Each Battalion has its own personality, and I thoroughly enjoyed my time in 3RAR and achieved a lot in my final month in Vietnam. I was readily accepted and totally involved but it also brought some confronting and sad experiences whose impact has not diminished over time.

One day I packed my gear and assembled a good selection of drinks, biscuits, sweets and many other goodies not normally available to the men out bush to boost a soldier's morale. I was flown to 3RAR's newly established Fire Support Base named 'Beth', their first in enemy territory.

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That afternoon I met David Patterson for the first time who expressed his appreciation for what I was doing for the soldiers out bush. As we sat there on the dusty ground having a cuppa, I asked him — so what's your story? He told me about family, school, Army Cadets, becoming a schoolteacher, and how he came to sign on in the Army etc. It was a down to earth talk but the thing I remember most was his declaration of love for his lovely wife and little girl back home. That was deep and sincere. He was determined to give his best as a leader and expressed the hope of a safe return to carry out his plans with his family. It was a time I regard as a D&M - deep and meaningful. He seemed a man of integrity, strength with humility and confidence in, and concern for his men.

Our talk concluded naturally and standing up he remarked, "well mate, I would love to continue this conversation sometime, but I had better go and rally the men as we are going out on ambush tonight." We shook hands and said, "See you later mate" just as the 'chopper' arrived to take me and my supplies back to Nui Dat.

Next morning, Sunday, I drove my Land Rover and Trailer down to Vung Tau, to where the Australian Logistics Base was located. I did this every second Sunday and would return with both Land Rover and trailer loaded with supplies from our Conex. This load of supplies would usually provide two weeks support for the men.

When I arrived in Yung Tau, I would attend chapel, then walk to 1st Australian Field Hospital which was close by to visit and seek to encourage the sick and wounded and if possible and be of service where able. That morning, I had just arrived at the entry of the hospital when the Siren blared loudly warning staff of incoming casualties. I stood back as the medics rushed out to assist the walking wounded, stretchered those seriously wounded, and I noticed one soldier lying face down indicating that he was dead.

As the stretcher was being carried past me, I recognised Dave! I let out an involuntary gasp in shock! I accompanied his body to the morgue. I just stirred at him and wished I could shake him back to life. I touched his cold body as I prayed over him in a reverent, respectful goodbye. Our last words had been-" see you later mate." I was shocked to realize that I had become so arrogant as to expect one could guarantee another day in a war zone. It brought home the Scripture "You don't know what a day may bring forth " but it does not make it any easier to accept.

This incident impacted me more than any other and fifty years later, I still remember with respect the courageous platoon Commander who even while he lay wounded and dying, ordered his men to leave the area in front of the enemy bunkers to safety and to request Air and Artillery support.

I only knew Dave for some thirty minutes or so but his bearing and selfless sacrifice impacted my life in a significant way. I will never forget David Patterson.

Remembered, Revered, respected  
"Hope to see you later mate!"  
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