



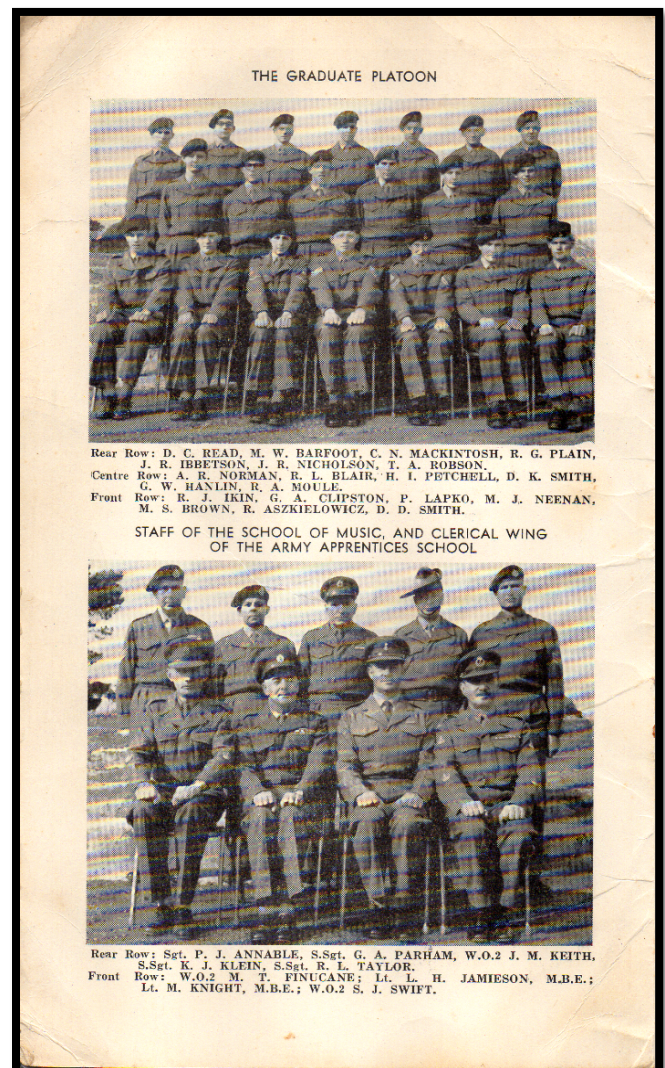
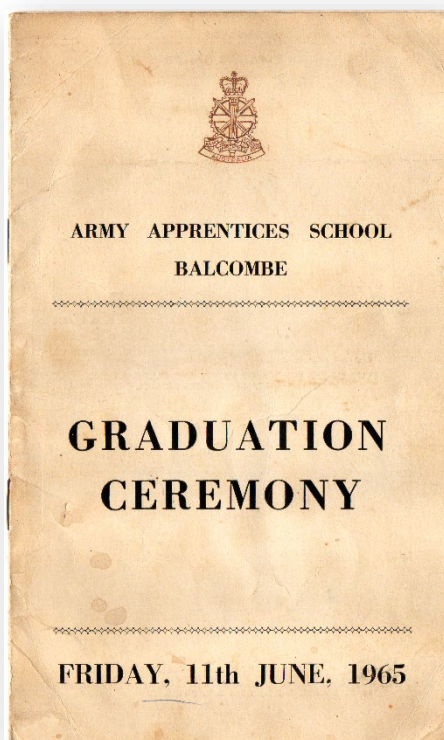
Balcome Army School of Music

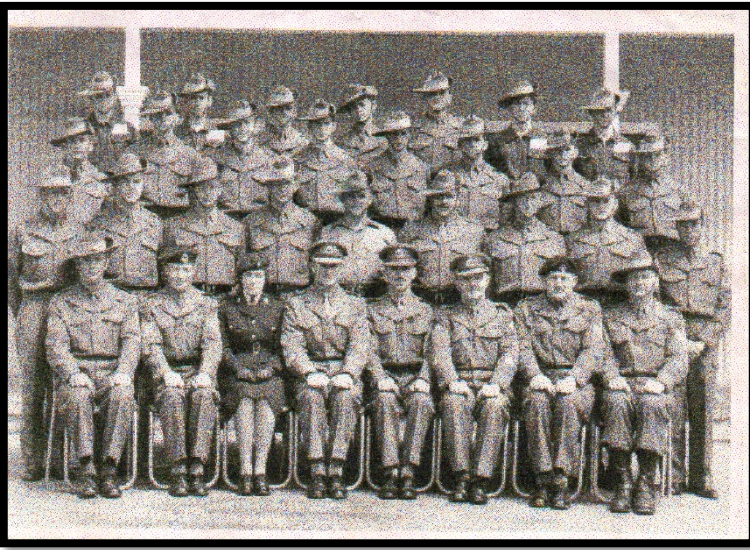
I recall that in the 1960's the local parish priest Fr Nat Fitzsimons was also a vocational guide at the school, so in my third year of high school he asked me had I decided on a career path after I graduated. The answer of course was no. The fact that I was already an altar boy fluent in Latin Mass, he suggested I may look at the priesthood. I declined that offer and informed him that I had a great love for music and wished to someday become a musician. Some weeks later Fr Nat called me in and showed me some recruitment advertising for the Army Apprenticeship School. They were offering music Apprenticeship's to those who wished to join. I thought all my dreams had come true. However first I had to be accepted. With Fr Nat's help we filled out the application and took it to my parents for their approval and signature. I distinctly remember the look on my Mothers face. It was one of terrified horror when I told them I wanted to join the army. It took some hours of talking by Fr Nat before my parents reluctantly agreed to sign the application. As Fr Nat said he may not be accepted. This seemed to ease their mind.

Some four weeks later there arrived a letter from the army saying that I should come to the capital Perth for an interview. I left the interview not knowing what to expect. I was informed over 180 applicants from all around Australia had applied and there was only had some eight or so vacancies for that year (1963).

Two weeks later I was requested to attend a second interview and medical. According to Fr Nat this was an encouraging sign. I remember it was December of 1962 when I attended the medical I went from Albany by overnight train to Perth where I was met and taken to Swan Barracks for my interview. I must admit I thought I was out of contention when I was asked to sight read a piece of music and could not make head or tail of the tune. It was it fact as I discovered later God Save the Queen. It was during my time in the army that my parents sold the farm in Denmark and moved to Albany.

On the 7th of January of 1962 I was inducted into the army and sent to Balcome Victoria to commence my training as an apprentice musician. I was there for some two years and upon graduation I was posted to the Second Battalion R.A.R. at Enogerra Queensland.





The posting was for only a short time, as I recall less than six months. In October I was posted to Holdsworth Barracks Sydney to become part of The Fifth Battalion R.A.R. I was to join the battalion's newly formed band under the baton of Bob Taylor. The battalion was placed under the command of Lt Colonel John (Wingy) War. That December the entire Battalion was sent on four weeks leave with strict instructions not to reveal to any one where we were based or anything about the battalion in general. We later found out why. On return from leave we were **immediately sent to Cunungra in Qld for jungle training. By this time most of us had guessed that the next stop was Vietnam.** On completion of the thirty days jungle training we returned to Holdsworth where I was attached to 11 Platoon D company as a medic.

On the 6th of April 1966 D Company had the privilege of being the first company to be deployed to Vietnam as part of Task Force 1.

Although the 1st battalion was already in Vietnam they were under the general command of the US military. Task force 1 was to be totally under Australian Command. At midnight we were taken to the Richmond air force base in N.S.W. where we boarded the aircraft and flown by Qantas to Da-Nang a US air force base near Saigon, then by helicopter to Vung Tau.

The rest of the battalion was too followed by sea on HMAS Sydney and arrived some 10 days later.

My first platoon commander was Lt Greg Negus a CMF recruit from W.A. The company was under the command of Major Paul Greenhall. Lt Negus was replaced shortly after arriving in Vietnam by Lt Vinnie Rowe. Our commanding officer was Colonel John Warr. When we were not on operations we played music as the regimental band of the Fifth Battalion under the baton of Robert (Bob) Taylor.

After a tour of duty which lasted 378 Days we returned to Australia on the HMAS Sydney. After an extended holiday break I was posted to Kapooka in NSW, with the band of the Royal Australian Engineers later to become the Royal Australian Signal Band under the baton of Lt Kevin Klein.



Kevin was in fact one of my instructors at the school of music some years previous.

I was there for some two years, I had by that time developed a greater and more passionate understanding for AFL football and was regarded by some as better than an average player. The army had two teams playing in the local Riverina competition, one senior side and a second division side. Our senior side boasted many VFL, WAFL, SAFL, players it was a strong side to say the least. I played at full forward and for those who know the sport it is the position from where the team derives to score its goals.

I remember on one occasion very early in the first quarter I was hit about the head in a fair pack marking attempt and without even realizing it I became concussed, so much that although I thought I was lining up the goals properly apparently this proved not the case.

They tell me I played a great game of "footy" marking everything that came my way and by the end of the game having kicked 1 goal 17 behinds."

"We could have one by a greater margin had you kicked straight where were your kicking boots on our percentage would have been untouchable" said our team manager who was also the Battalion Regimental Sergeant Major. An ex Major in the British forces, joined the Australian Army refused a commission to become an RSM and developed a greater passion for AFL game than even myself.

Football could on the odd occasion prove to be a slight problem as I had to fit it in with my band duties. I remember on one other occasion when we had made it to the district regional knockout finals which that year were to be held in Henty NSW but there was a slight problem. The band also had an engagement in Wagga on that same day.

This seldom occurred as the band rarely worked on a Sunday. However it did on this day.

When I informed the coach and team manager I would not be available for selection for the finals apparently all hell broke loose between the Band Master the coach and the R.S.M. The upshot of it all came down to this: The Bandmaster agreed that I could play in the early games that day providing I was back to do my band duties later in the mid-afternoon. Not all parties were pleased at this compromise as the R.S.M could not be convinced how one bandsman could make that much difference to the band until the bandmaster pointed out the reverse as to how could one player mean so much to a team.

When the day came I took my uniform and instrument and drove myself to Henty ready to do both tasks. I played in the first two games which ended at 12pm and at 12.30 pm I went into the change sheds to have a shower and get changed ready to drive back to Wagga and the band job. What I hadn't realized was that when I picked up the dry-cleaning the Friday before that they had by mistake given me the someone else's uniform, it seldom happens and to this day I remember the name Ian John as plainly as it was yesterday it was his uniform they gave me by mistake. Nothing fitted. Realizing there wouldn't be enough time to drive back to the barracks, get another uniform and then drive to the band job I decided to consult the RSM.

When I told the RSM of my plight he seemed to give a smirk of utter delight "God works in strange ways" Mr Lapko "get changed your playing the rest of the games".

The following morning I was hauled before the bandmaster and asked to explain myself. Needless to say he did not believe my story and thought it a complete set up to allow me to play football. He placed me on a charge and I had to front the commanding officer. If not for the testimony of the RSM I would have been in serious trouble. I did my best for the next week or so to keep out of the bandmaster's way however that did not prevent me from being given all the onerous tasks going such as loading and unloading all the band gear before and after band jobs. It was during my time at Kapooka that my grandmother passed. I wasn't informed of her death until after her funeral as not to upset me we were very close.

After two very happy years at Kapooka I was posted to Western Command again under the command of Robert (Bob) Taylor who you may remember was my Bandmaster in Vietnam.

I served in the armed forces until my discharge in January 1971.