

“What The *TRUCK* Have You Done???”

The main story here, about a disappearing truck, was told to me over the phone by one of our members, who prefers to go by his nickname, ‘Crystal. Now Crystal was a wee bit vague on some details, such as what type of truck it was, so I embarked on a few enquiries. During my ‘research’ I was told two other truck stories – it seems that every second person has a truck story just itching to come out. So what I have done is to bring the three stories together to make the one.

The first was told to me whilst I was waiting at a suburban bus stop and got chatting to a fella wearing an RSL badge – turns out he was RAEME but I guess that is just a sapper who can’t spell.

102 Fld Works RAEME was based at Vung Tau, and were often visited by U.S. trucks delivering stores of various types. If you recall, all the U.S. vehicles had a large, white star painted on the doors. Well, some mischievous little ‘crafty’ had developed an obsession that it was his mission in life to modify as many of those stars as to which he could get access. Every time a U.S. vehicle pulled up in front of where he was working, he would rush out with a stencil and a can of red paint and plaster a neat little red kangaroo in the middle of the star. He had developed his technique down to a fine art, and could do both doors in about 30 seconds flat. Apparently the Yanks loved it – even went there on purpose to get it done.



U.S. Mack and 60 ton low loader similar to the one buried at Nui Dat

Now for Crystal’s story. Says he: “I was in one of the last groups to leave Nui Dat and for some time we had been pulling the camp down and getting the new ARVN jungle warfare training centre built, which I think was located near the top end of the dam. All this was happening around the time of the 1971 VFL Grand Final. I remember it so clearly because we were listening to a direct broadcast of one of the games. On the morning of this day, somewhere in the vicinity of 1 Fld Sqn, most likely around the 3

Troop area, a D8 started to dig a long and deep trench with a pretty shallow gradient at one end. Once the D8 finished and it had gone down a bit deeper than its own height, a 60 ton low loader – trailer, the lot – was driven in. They just turned off the motor and left it there. The word then went out that if any illegal booty was to be gotten rid of now was the time to do it, no questions asked.

I tell you, it was an amazing sight to see: over the next couple of hours, vehicles from all over the place turned up and all sorts of things went in, from electric fans to AK47s. Then, just as quickly, the D8 turned up again and back filled the lot. Within half an hour you thought you were just looking at a patch of bare red soil, but underneath was a 60 ton truck plus whatever. I can't recall the type of truck, but I think it must have been 'recovered' from the Yanks at some stage and not have been of Australian Army issue otherwise it would have gone back to Oz – we took everything back."

A few days after Crystal told me his story there was a knock on my door. It was the venerable super sapper Mick Mace, come to have a chat. I told Mick Crystal's story, and he gave weight to the theory that it was most likely a 'recovered' yank job as the Aussies left nothing behind that had to be accounted for; and he backed this up with his own little story. The only tar sprayer (Tar Baby) 17 Const had in SVN in the early days was a WW2 THORNYCROFT, which at some stage was under the charge of the well-known Max Kelly (deceased), who one day neglected to clean out the tubes and spray jets, resulting in the whole system clogging up with solid tar and being beyond repair. The THORNYCROFT, complete with gummed-up tar, was eventually sent back to the land of Oz; some years later, Mick saw the same truck – still with tar – in a used-truck sale yard in Liverpool.



