

MACHINE GUNS 0.50 INCH AND RADIOS AN/VRC 46

In 1 ATF, VIETNAM, in 1969, there were major equipment shortages, including 0.50 calibre Browning Machine Guns and AN/VRC 46 Radios, both of which were required for the M113A1 Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC). One contributing factor was that, for unknown reasons, our RAEME Fitters' APC had been procured without Complete Equipment Schedules!

In support of 1 ATF was a US Artillery 155mm M107 Self Propelled Battery known as Husky Bravo. 106 Field Workshop RAEME provided that Battery such repair support as within its capability, and a good working relationship developed. OC 106 received a phone call from the Battery Sergeant Major asking if 106 could use any surplus unserviceable weapons or radios. Of course, the response was affirmative, and, in due course, a US truck arrived at 106, the back stacked with, amongst other useful items, 0.50 MG and Radio 542s, which were part of the AN/VRC 46! Further, 106 had obtained access to the US salvage yard at Long Binh, so a visit there was arranged. For the modest price of a few digger hats, further useful parts were acquired.

106 promptly cannibalised the acquisitions, which had already been written off the US inventory, producing at least two completely serviceable 0.50 MG, and three 542 sets, all with 'new' serial numbers for accounting purposes. These were then issued to 1 ATF Armoured units in need.

Months later, the Task Force Commander received a phone call from a Staff Officer at COMAFV Saigon, demanding to know what disciplinary action was being taken against OC 106, who had signed the accounting documents, for unlawfully procuring controlled stores from the US Government! The Task Force Commander told the pompous Staff Officer words to the effect that 106 had been commended for its initiative, and that, unlike others in Vietnam, was saving taxpayers' funds! Nothing more was heard from COMAFV.

However, in 1980, that OC 106, now Army Reserve CO 1 EME Services Unit RAEME, BULIMBA, in conversation with a fellow ARES Officer who had been attached to COMAFV Saigon (but not the abovementioned Staff Officer), said that COMAFV never found out which Australian NCO had signed procurement documents at Long Binh as 'Master Sergeant E. Kelly'!!!