

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS CAN'T DO!

By Gary Channells

In Nui Dat, first orders were to march in to Captain Robinson's office, which was located in the tin shed (Aircraft hanger) I felt at home immediately after the stamps on the galvanised iron walls caught my eye. These stamps were made at Lysaughts, a company located in Port Kembla very close to home where I had worked as an apprentice years before.

Anyway, Captain Robinson told me to sit down. There were only two chairs in his office, one for me and one for him (this chair was most uncomfortable so I wouldn't stay too long!)

The Captain was looking very hungry and had been rubbing his stomach since I had entered the tin shed. He said 'Now draw up plans for another mud oven, we must get cracking with this, I am starving. The year before we had already experimented with a mud oven in North Queensland with great success.

After this direction, Cpl Chuck Fellenberg from the workshop started collecting materials to weld the oven into shape.

This oven was built in Vietnam in 1967, as we were short on equipment of this type, it is all made from scrap pieces, one 44 gallon drum inside another and 1/2 of a drum for its bottom as the fire chamber. Diesel, used as fuel, would drip down a water pipe into the chamber through a series of bent up water pipes which after pre-heating the chamber, gas flame would ignite from a row of small holes (similar to a primus) As the diesel burns, the holes sift up which control the temperature required for what is baking at the time. A long steel rod with a nail on the end was used to control the flame.

As you can see in the photo the oven is set in mud bags and Vietnamese bricks, which were purchased at a very low price. The mud insulated the oven perfectly.

After all the effort put into this project, it was very rewarding to see the smiles and happy eyes and receive the appreciative comments from the officers and diggers. It was so satisfying to see them gorge themselves with the baked goodies from the new oven. This oven proved to be the leading cause in keeping morale high amongst the fellows in the rubber trees.

Bread rolls were a favorite. They were baked in the mud oven with the American hard flour. Sometimes we were lucky if the flour had weevils in it as an added extra and also their dry-balm (yeast) was a bonus. Dough was kneaded up by hand on an old wooden table. The weather and monsoon rain that fell in the rubber-tree plantations in Nui Dat, provided steam to proof the dough. The steel trays and cutters used were made from disused steel from aircrafts (see photo)

The scones were also a favorite with the boys who worked in the tin shed (Aircraft hanger) The exact same recipe used in Vietnam is used to bake scones today in this shop, but better ingredients are available and used. All the goodies Mums and girlfriends would send to the diggers, such as dried fruit and fruit slice, would be baked off on a small tray and be kept in the fridge with soldier's name on it.

Apple cake and custard was a favorite with the Yanks. Then came the baked small sharks which were bought from the Vietnamese. The boys argued whether it was really shark.

There are still so many things that I baked in the mud oven that has easily slipped my memory as it

was thirty (30) odd years ago, but I will never forget the last day I used it and walked away to come home.

Garry was a national serviceman 1966 to 1968.



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Cpl Chuck Fellenberg