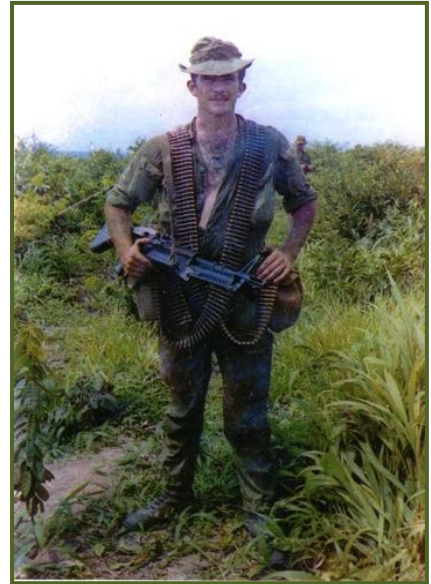


Jock (Robbie) Buchan – a 6RAR Soldier lost but now found Fred Fairhead

Pte Robert Buchan, known to his mates in D Company 6RAR as Jock and to his family as Robbie, was killed in action on 11 December 1969 in a contact on the Nui May Tao during Operation Marsden. He was the acting Section Commander of the lead Section in 12 Platoon (*Lt Paul Jackson*) and when the Forward Scouts (*Ptes Henry Higgins and John Gosling*) became concerned at the possibility of an enemy ambush ahead, he went forward to deploy the section. As he did the enemy opened fire hitting him in the chest, fatally wounding him.

Jock Buchan, probably taken on Operation Mundingburra near Long Phuoc Hai in August 1969.

Jock's family had immigrated to Australia when he was a small child but returned to Scotland to farm in the Tay Valley, near Dundee. Jock studied at an Agriculture College and worked in a Dairy near Craigdallie but in his late teens decided to return to Australia to live with foster parents near Perth, WA. He subsequently joined the Australian Army and was posted to 6RAR in Townsville where it was preparing to deploy on the Battalion's second tour of duty in Vietnam. Thus when he was killed, his body was taken to RAAF Butterworth for a military funeral (see left) and



cremation, with the ashes returned to his parents in Scotland.



Many years later, in December 2015, the Gosling family, including John's son, Dan, then a serving Major, arranged for Jock to be honoured by a Last Post Ceremony at the Australian War Memorial. I had said I would attend because although I didn't know Jock well I had taken over as the D Company commander the following day in 1969 and had been taken by Paul Jackson to the contact site and the spot where he had died.

However, in the end I wasn't able to make the AWM ceremony but promised that on our annual pilgrimage to visit family in the UK, I would take photographs of where his remains were in Scotland to send to his old mates from 12 Platoon. Trouble was of course no one knew where in Scotland that place was and so began a search by a number of people including Dan and John Gosling who were able to locate a letter sent early in 1970 from Jock's mother to his foster mother in Perth. This letter gave valuable clues such as his parent's names and their address at the time of his death and importantly indicated that his ashes had not been scattered.

I then contacted the Tay Valley Family Historical Society (*Mrs Helen Beat*) based in Dundee and subsequently the Dundee Council's Parks and Burials Department. I had reasoned his mother would no longer be alive and that when she died Jock's ashes would have been interred with her which is in fact what occurred on 6th August 1998. For those that might wish to visit the grave it is in Birkhill Cemetery, Section D, Lair No 23. It is adjacent to the car park.



As I was travelling with my family to the Yorkshire Dales for a celebration on 3rd August, I arranged with the Dundee Council for a graveside service on 5th August and with the Tay Valley Family Historical Society to arrange a Minister from the Church of Scotland and a Piper to assist with the Service. I also arranged for a wreath to be prepared complete with a 'Skippy Badge' at the UK's leading maker of poppy wreaths, ie the Lady Haig Poppy Factory in Edinburgh which I picked up on my way to Dundee.



The Historical Society's involvement had also prompted an article in the previous weekend's Dundee Courier newspaper which attracted interest in the Service, including by the Royal British Legion Scotland in Dundee and Scottish TV. Thus on the day, there were several members of the Legion, including two Standard Bearers, a TV crew from STV, the bloke who employed Jock in his Dairy, another who went to School with him and a friend of the family.

Left: The two Royal British Legion Scotland Standard Bearers at the Service. On the left with 'The Queen's Colour' is Capt Frank Smith (Retd), RA Sigs whose service included in Borneo with the Royal Marines and awarded an MID; on the right with the City of Dundee Standard is Sgt Neil Brown ex Royal Scots Dragoon Guards. Their drill was impeccable.

The Service

5th August in Dundee was a reasonable sunny(ish) day and about 30 people gathered at Birkhill for a 12 noon start. We commenced with a thank you from me on behalf of the 6RAR Association to those present for their participation and to describe Jock's circumstances and the nature of his death.

The Minister then read some prayers for the fallen (right),

L to R: Mardy Walker (Fairhead family friend), F², Rev Robert Calvert, Steeple Church, Dundee



I then recited:

Jock, I have stood on the spot where you died, I now stand on the spot where you lie for eternity, but Jock we have found you mate.

It has been over 46 years since Jock passed from our presence and some 30 years since he was interred here with his mother;

But he shall remain known to us

Just as the stars remain known to the night;

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,

Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain,


As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness.

To the end, to the end, they remain. (With apologies to Laurence Binyon)

The Piper (*Teir Milne*) then played 'Flowers of the Forrest' after which I recited The Ode.

I and the Tay Valley Family Historical Society (*Mrs Helen Beat*) then laid wreaths while the Piper played *The Crusaders* (Regimental March of 6RAR). After the Minister gave Benediction, the Service concluded with the Piper playing *The Black Bear* (Regimental March of the Royal Australian Regiment). Interviews were then done by Scottish TV with a 3 minute clip occurring on the 6pm news that night.




 VI
55613 Pte Robert (Jock) Buchan
12 Platoon D Company 6RAR
Killed in Action on 11th December 1969
Laid by Lt Col Fred Fairhead (Retd)
on 5th August 2016
On behalf of his mates in 12 Platoon and on behalf of the
6RAR Association
LEST WE FORGET



After the Service, L-R: Frank Smith; Rev Robert Calvert; Helen Beat; F²; Murray Nicol (Chair TVFHS); Rev Dave Taylor (RBLs Padre and ex Black Watch); Neil Brown.

Postscript

At a meeting of the City of Dundee Branch of the Royal British Legion Scotland on 1st September, Jock's details were added to its 'Acts of Remembrance' and it intends to visit his grave each 11 December to lay a wreath. He is being cared for!

The day after the service I went by train to Thurso at the top of Scotland and during a howling gale as I looked out at the Orkneys where so many RN sailors died on HMS Royal Oak in October 1939, I reminded myself that war is both stupid and intrinsically evil. I also reflected that what occurred in Dundee with so much Scottish generosity was something to lift the human spirit.