

# *Gunner of Renown*



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

## **Major Peter BADCOE, VC**

**(1934-1967)**

Peter Badcock (changed to Badcoe in 1961) enlisted in the Australian Regular Army on 10 June 1950. Graduating from the Officer Cadet School, Portsea, Victoria, on 13 December 1952, he was allocated to the Royal Australian Artillery. Postings to 14th National Service Training Battalion (1953 and 1955-57) and the 1st Field Regiment (1953-55 and 1957-58) followed. On 26 May 1956 he married 17 year old Denise Maureen MacMahon in the Methodist Church, Manly, Sydney.

Promoted temporary captain in December 1958 Badcoe was sent to Army Headquarters as a staff officer. While serving in Malaya with the 103rd Field Battery from September 1961 to November 1963, he spent a week (7-14 November 1962) in the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). He saw the conditions under which the South resisted communist insurgency directed by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam). Back in Australia, Badcoe returned to 1st Field Regiment but in 30 July 1965 transferred to the infantry. On 10 August 1965 he was promoted provisional major.

His former battery commander, Brigadier John Salmon, was of the opinion that Badcoe transferred because of an adverse report by Lieutenant Colonel Drew Bethell, CO of the 26th Field Regiment, RA, when Badcoe was Battery Captain of 103rd Battery. Badcoe had clashed with the Regiment's quartermaster, and Salmon could not persuade Bethell to change his low rating. Badcoe, realising that this would hinder his career in artillery, decided to transfer to infantry. Others thought that while this might have been a factor Badcoe was also a small arms enthusiast keen to show his mettle.

He arrived in Saigon on 6 August 1966 to join the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam. Short, round and stocky, with horn-rimmed spectacles, Badcoe did not look like a hero. He was a quiet, gentle and retiring man, with a dry sense of humour. He was a competent Command Post Officer with a strong intellectual streak. His wife was his confidante. Badcoe neither drank alcohol nor smoked; bored by boisterous mess activities, he preferred the company of a book on military history. To his colleagues he was an enigma, yet many humoured his boundless enthusiasm on field exercises and his off-duty discourses on martial matters.

Serving in Thua Thien province, in December 1966 Badcoe became operations adviser at provincial headquarters, Hue. On 23 February 1967, during a small operation in the Phu Thu district, he ran across almost 650 yards (594 m) of fire-swept ground to assist a platoon of the South Vietnamese Popular Forces. Taking charge of the unit, Badcoe led it in a frontal attack, averting defeat and inflicting heavy casualties. He collected the corpse of an American adviser and braved further volleys to rescue one who was wounded. Commanding

the province's reaction company on 7 March, Badcoe conducted a series of fierce assaults which put to flight a strong People's Liberation Armed Forces (Viet Cong) formation and saved the district headquarters of Quang Dien and its defenders.

On 7 April 1967, he wrote his last letter to his wife: 'It's time I came home. I'm getting bitter and cynical. I can see more and more good about the Vietnamese and less and less about the US advisers'. That day he learned that 1st Division Reaction Company was in difficulty near the hamlet of An Thuan. Knowing that the company would be denied air support unless advisers were present, he drove there by jeep with a United States Army sergeant. On arrival, Badcoe found that the force had fallen back. He took charge and rallied the men in the face of withering fire. Crawling ahead, he made several attempts to silence a machine-gun with grenades. His sergeant at one stage pulled him out of the line of fire. Rising again to throw another grenade, Badcoe was shot and killed.

For his feats of gallantry and leadership, he was awarded the Victoria Cross and the United States Silver Star. The Republic of Vietnam awarded him its National Order, three Crosses for Gallantry and the Armed Forces Honour Medal. Badcoe had been highly respected by his Vietnamese and American comrades-in-arms. Survived by his wife and three daughters, he was buried in the Terendak military cemetery, Malacca, Malaysia. His widow presented his decorations to the Australian War Memorial.

Major Badcoe's memorabilia is now on display at the Point Nepean Community Trust.

Source: Ian McNeill, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 15, p.87. Comments by Lieutenant Colonel C. F. Dodds (Retd); J. R. Salmon, 'Peter J. Badcoe, VC in 103 Field Battery RAA', *Cannonball*, No.74, pp.2-3.