

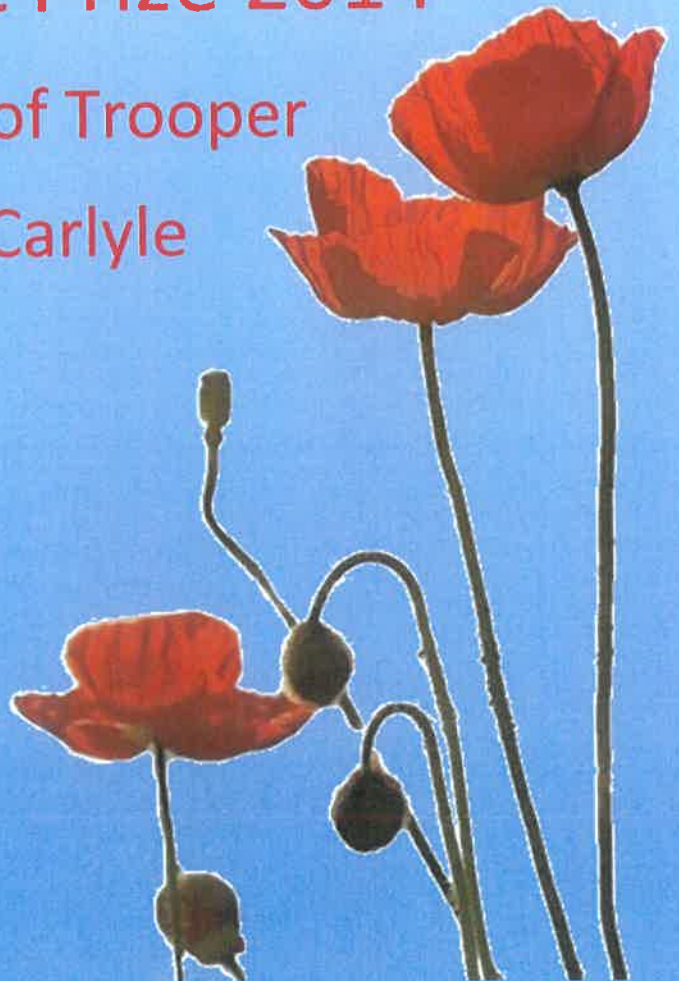
Anzac Spirit Prize 2014

The story of Trooper

Hugh Carlyle

By Amy Watson

Media Project



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Media Transcript

NOTE: The following text is the transcript that accompanies my media project. This transcript is a back-up for if the audio is for some reason distorted, or if the judges would like to read through the script that is spoken in the media project in case they have missed something as it was spoken. This is not the project itself, which is attached as a CD.

On the 10th of December 1948, Hugh Carlyle was born in Berkeley Hospital Prospect, to parents Teddy and Doreen. He had a happy childhood with his older siblings Ian and Bernadine and attended Meningie Area School when his parents ran the Roadhouse in Salt Creek, later attending Forbes Primary and Mitchell Park High. Hugh enjoyed rugby union, and was a boot maker, but his ambitions lay elsewhere. Hugh's namesake was his uncle, Hubert George Carlyle, a navigator in the RAAF shot down over France during WW2, and the two were similar in aspects other than name. Hugh wanted to be a professional soldier, and his opportunity came during the Vietnam War. Hugh was only twenty when he completed his training as an Armed Personnel Carrier Driver and travelled to Vietnam to serve.

Hugh flew out from Richmond RAAF base on the morning of March 26th, 1969, spending the night in Darwin and flying to Vietnam the next day. He arrived at Nui Dat base on the 27th, where he worked in the command post. Hugh writes, *"I reckon it's great here. Barrack blocks to sleep in, movies every night and the food is great. I been eating like a horse ever since I been here."* Soon Hugh was going on operations. In early June of 1969, his troop scrambled to Bin Bah, where a company of North Vietnamese regulars were occupying the village. It took 9 ½ hours to flush out every house. The next day they did the same thing at Hoa Long.

In July, missions intensified. Hugh began driving lead vehicle for his troop, and spent a month on jungle ambushing tasks, moving around a huge area. Upon return to base, the troop were sent straight to the Bien Hoa province where Americans were clearing jungle where Viet Cong had bunker complexes and base camps. Hugh's troop provided them protection for 2 and a half months.

In September 1969, Hugh met Chris Blackett, an APC Crew Commander. In stressful conditions, soldiers became close friends, and were often given nicknames. Chris tells me: *"Hugh was a very good looking young man with a sort of fresh baby face look and we all thought that he was much younger than he was, hence the name Junior."*

Hugh received letters from family and friends whilst serving. He professes in a letter to his sister Bernadine *'I was very surprised to hear from you. I thought you might have given up writing to me as I'm the world's worst at writing letters or even getting around to answering them.'* His letters reveal much about him and his interests. He constantly writes to his father about the football asking him *'Can you send me the papers over each week, the News and especially the Sydney Mail as it has the footy news in it.'* He plans ahead in a later letter saying *'I'm going to play footy again when I come home.'*

Hugh's biggest mission was still to come. Hugh and Barry Whiston were on 'happy pills', medication taken in the 10 days before returning home to clear up malaria. When soldiers were on the pills, they didn't fight as it was considered that they had done their time. However, on the 16th of February 1970, the two soldiers were seconded when extra troops were needed to support infantry in the Long Hai hills. The hills were a Viet Cong and NVA stronghold and the allies wanted to flush out the enemies. They were also impeding the development of Route 44, which would connect villages and was aimed to undermine Viet Cong influence by gaining favour with local Vietnamese. On the 17th, progress was difficult due to antipersonnel mines, so air strikes were called in. The next morning they returned, and in the confusion, Hugh and Barry's APC became lead vehicle. Due to mines, the infantry couldn't assist the APCs and as the vehicles approached the stronghold, they were hit by heavy fire. Hugh's vehicle got stuck, and was soon hit with a rocket-propelled grenade. Lance Corporal Barry Whiston was killed instantly. Hugh struggled to escape, but an enemy soldier threw a satchel charge onto the engine deck beside him and Hugh died on the spot. Twenty one years old, and less than ten days away from going home.

Chris explains *'Due to the fact that we lived, worked and fought so closely together we developed a bond with each other that ensues to this day and will continue to exist until the last one of us pass on. It also made us very aware and upset when we lost one of our own. It was more like losing a brother than losing a friend.'*

'40 odd years later I still think of them both. I remember two laughing, happy, handsome young lads, proudly serving their country. They had their whole life in front of them. Never to be Dads or Grandads. Never allowed to show their full potential. No more to be brothers and sons and I think what a waste. What a waste of two good, strong young sons of Australia.'

Mateship, perseverance, initiative, trust, respect, independence, bravery, courage and humour. The ANZAC Spirit. The relationship between New Zealand and Australia, and the values we share. We help friends, knowing that they would do the same. We do what needs to be done, and confront the issues that would be easier to forget. We show initiative and overcome incredible odds by persevering. We trust and respect one another, and build wonderful friendships. We prefer to rule ourselves than submit to authority. We are brave and courageous, and find humour in the darkest situations.

Hugh Carlyle was a regular Australian man, young and enthusiastic. But he was also a soldier with the ANZAC spirit. He was brave, volunteering his services, deciding he wanted to fight despite the risks. He was brave in many respects: wanting to be lead vehicle and to be in the action. Due to the close confines of an APC and the alien action they experienced, soldiers became more like family than simply friends. Hugh was greatly loved by his mates and was generous, sharing presents from home with other soldiers, and always writing home about the presents he'd bought. He persevered for months on missions, and continued even when deprived of promised rest. He had initiative and embraced any job assigned to him. In his final battle, Hugh showed mateship when trapped in the APC with Barry, as they undoubtedly supported each other whilst waiting for rescue. He persevered through mine-ridden country, and took initiative, showing his independence, by leading the troops when the chain of command was confused. He trusted Barry, his crew commander and mate, throughout the battle. He was brave in the line of fire, and courageous until the very end.

Hugh Carlyle was a kind and much loved young man. He fought for his country and embodied the ANZAC Spirit. He is, and always will be, sorely missed, and I am privileged to have told his story.

'Well, that's all for now. Love, Hugh.'

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Other sources of information:

Bernadine Roach, sister of Hugh Carlyle. Communicated via email.
Photos of and letters written by soldier received from Bernadine Roach.
Visited Vietnam War memorial, Torrens Parade Ground, Adelaide, SA.
Visited Centennial Park Cemetery and located Hugh's grave.