

AUBREY THE SALLYMAN

In which Eastgate recalls a gentleman in every sense of the word...

OF all the welcoming embraces at Point Hut 1968, of which there were miserably few, one stood out above the rest.

It was the Sallyman's tent run by 2950002 Brigadier Aubrey Richard Hall.

Aub turned 61 on 13 January 1968, a milestone which we have all now surpassed, even the boy Jones.

We rightly considered him ancient then, though having served in World War II and Vietnam as the first philanthropic representative deployed there, he was truly a military veteran. He spent 12 months in Vietnam mostly with 1RAR from May 1965.

Aubrey Hall was from Orange, NSW, but ministering to the army with the Salvation Army was his vocation. Although Sydney-based he was at Point Hut with us and then on every field training exercise until we graduated.

Subsequent Sallymen, with their wives, have been based at Duntroon.

Aub had a small tent at Point Hut, plus his Red Shield Range Rover. Both were lit at night by the Point Hut RAE Power Company, and I assume he slept in the tent when our day was done.

This sanctuary where we could get a cup of tea but not coffee, cold cordial plus writing material and chewing gum four-packs, was a welcome diversion to our otherwise stressful regime.

Aub encouraged us to write letters home on his Red Shield notepaper, sent in his envelopes, which he would then post, always providing the stamps of course.

It was a lesson for us cadets that wherever we might be deployed, the Sallys and Red Shield would be there to support us and so it later proved.

A few days after arrival I needed a birthday card to send to a young lady I had appallingly abandoned when I ran away. Aub bought one and after I wrote a grovelling apology then sent it, the nil response I received was more than I deserved.

A few days later a schoolmate's mum committed suicide in horrific circumstances, the only occasion when home sickness threatened momentarily to engulf me.

Aub and the future father-in-law of a callow classmate carried me through those difficult circumstances and I remain ever grateful to them both.

When we left Point Hut, so did Aub.

I guess we all looked forward to those following exercises when Aub inevitably appeared, seemingly remembering us all by name and genuinely enquiring as to our progress.

Writing material, tea, cordial and chewing gum and a chance to chat with the bloke who not only endured but survived Point Hut with us.

I never met him again after graduation though he cropped up occasionally in remarkable ways.

After returning from PNG in late 1974, I was told I had to do two days as 1TF duty officer at Holsworthy over the Christmas break.

Christmas Day was Wednesday, so I successfully negotiated to be able to spend that with my first wife's family in Canberra, then return to Sydney on Friday so we could spend Saturday and Sunday, with the dedicated, duty mess staff catering for us while watching the Boxing Day test on the colour telly, then a novelty. The plan was my wife would join me for a leisurely, non-stressed weekend.

That did not happen as Cyclone Tracey devastated Darwin on Christmas Day.

To cut a long story short, at about 0300 on Monday, 28 December I sent an immediate, confidential signal to air movements at RAAF Richmond dictating what army material and personnel could, and what could not be sent in the severely limited space available on the first C130 leaving at o-dark-hundred for Darwin.

Around 0700 that morning, 1TF commander Brigadier Geoffrey Leary backed my decision, but the RAAF chappies who had reluctantly obeyed my earlier anonymous direction were not amused.

Harsh words were exchanged.

We did not then know then another individual had intervened.

Two days later we got a phone call from Aubrey Hall's wife.

"He's left home," she said, "and we don't know where he are".

Apparently he'd left home – aged 73 – in his military Red Shield uniform and with some bits and pieces.

He'd arrived at Air Movements at RAAF Richmond early on that Monday morning, identified himself as "Brigadier Hall" and demanded a seat to Darwin on the first available aircraft.

He had a large electric urn under one arm, no doubt full of the necessities and a biscuit tin under the other full of, well, biscuits. Where else did we get the empty tins for our bogging gear?

He was given a seat when I had been assured some personnel regarded as essential by the RAAF would be denied travel.

We finally discovered him in Darwin near an operating power point dispensing good cheer.

He was reluctantly detained and returned to Sydney and his wife.

Many years later as Surfers Paradise RSL president – I am now having a déjà vu episode - I bought as was my usual practice on a Friday night a copy of *War Cry* from the Sallyman who sold them around the clubs.

Maybe 1999 or 2000. Aubrey would have been in his ninth decade.

There was some resistance from a few club members for supporting the Sallies, usually from those who had run Melbourne pubs during the six-o'clock swill period which the Salvation Army had opposed. None of them had obviously experienced the Red Shield's generosity while serving.

I only ever bought the *War Cry* for the racing tips which were hidden in the bible quote printed on page three.

As in Romans 8-7.

"The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."

So you had the race and horse numbers, but had to decipher the quote to identify the track and a horse, so it was probably Sydney. Or Melbourne. Possibly Adelaide. Maybe Brisbane? Never mind.

As I leafed through the rest of the *War Cry*, there was a story about Brigadier Aubrey Hall being “promoted to glory”.

He’d remarried after his wife died, was living in a nursing home and had finally cashed in his cordial, pads, pencils and chewies.

No doubt he arrived for his St Peter entry interrogation with a large urn under one arm and a tin of biscuits under the other.

I’ll admit I shed a tear for someone who had shown us such kindness and demonstrated when the bastards are getting you down and you have time on your hands, there is always someone who cares.

He also survived Point Hut with us.

Cautiously, I didn’t back Randwick, race 8, horse 7 and I never checked.

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