

Nasho's extended stretch of bad luck

Sgt Dave Morley

THE belief that lightning never strikes the same place twice was shattered by former national serviceman Sig Stretch Gamble's Vietnam service.

Mr Gamble was a lineman with the Post Master-General (PMG), now Telstra, when he was called up for National Service in August 1966.

"I'd just finished two years schooling with the PMG and was jointing 3600 pair cables at the Belgrave and Croydon Line Yards, but I only had to joint two pairs with the Army," he said.

"I did my recruit training at Puckapunyal and my signals training at Ingleburn.

"After Ingleburn, I went to 101 Sig Sqn and, while there was always talk of me going to Vietnam, after 18 months of National Service, I thought I wouldn't be going.

"Then I got the orders: 'Pack up! You're going to Vietnam'."

Mr Gamble said he did all the usual operations after arriving in Vietnam in late February 1968.

"Then came Coral - I was in the advance party that arrived on May 12, with my mate LCpl Terrance Rochester and we were put down about a kilometre from where we needed to be," he said.

"Our OC, Maj Norm Munro, carried our weapons and the other six of us lugged all our gear to our site - it wasn't tactical as we were told the Yanks had cleared the area for us.

"That hadn't happened because they were too busy."

Mr Gamble said they didn't have time to dig weapon pits because they were setting up the network.

"An engineer, John Korwoski, had a calf dozer and dug the scrape where HQ was to be put in the next day, and we put the radio at the deepest end, but then a monsoon hit and they said we should move it to higher ground," he said.

"I was on said radio about 2.30am, when all hell broke loose and I was wounded by one of the first mortars to come in. It took the brim off my floppy hat, but only minor bits to my head, but I copped it in the left leg.

"It was pretty much keep your head down, or lose it - I don't think too many blokes thought we would get out of there."

Mr Gamble said LCpl Rochester had the job of holding the radio aerial to the back of the set after it was severed by a mortar round.

"We were able to keep comms going all night and at daylight they called for wounded, so I put my hand up," he said.

"As I wasn't badly wounded, I was one of the last to be air-lifted to Long Binh, where I was patched up and returned to Nui Dat, where I did light duties until it healed."

But that wasn't the end of Mr Gamble's run of bad luck.

About a month later, during a mon-

soon, a radio remote went out, so he went out to fix it.

"Down at Luscombe airfield, I hacked into the open wires to test it and lightning hit the wires and lit me up," he said.

"I was thrown backwards about eight feet, from a crouching position and when I picked myself up, I told my mate Sig Rod Palin I didn't feel good and I needed to go back to base.

"He was in complete shock - all he'd heard was the bang, and saw me coming through the air at him.

"I drove us both back; I was later told we were picked up by the MPs, who said I was drunk."

Mr Gamble said he didn't remember much for the next three days, but understood he'd been sent back out again to fix the problem.

"Then just days before I was due to return home, I was accidentally shot at the Sig Centre," he said.

"A switchboard operator fell over with an F1 sub-machinegun with the barrel looking at my right leg, so now I had two gammy legs.

"I was due to get out of the Army at the end of August, but after hospital time, I got out in January 1968, 115 days late."

Mr Gamble returned to his former job with the PMG and continued until 1986, when he said PTSD, "threw me some wobbles".

"I still have a crook leg, and wear a calliper to help me walk," he said.