

MCBONNIE WASIU



The Voice from the Pavement - Peter Adamis



"Bonnie". Early years. For those who are about to read my notes on Bonnie Wasiu, I make no apologies and have pulled no punches. Although I have been provided with support to write this story, I have written about Bonnie as I have seen him through my eyes and the opinions are my own only. There many names which have been omitted as I felt that many injustices were made to Bonnie as he was not understood by those who should have known better.

Had he been alive today, he would have reaped the benefits of the Veteran Affairs systems that have been set up to help people like Bonnie. To his surviving children and to his closest relatives, I say to you that you have a lost a great father, brother, friend and relative but he has not been forgotten. I encourage others who knew of Bonnie to add to this story and to comment on any aspect of his life. Bonnie deserves a lot more and there are many who he had befriended and served with. This is my personal tribute to Bonnie.

Bonnie was the third eldest of 13 children. He was the only one to have served in the Australian Army. He left Bamaga (Thursday Island) in Far North Queensland to find work on the mainland. He travelled from state to state before settling down in Western Australia and working on the railways employed by the State railways as a member on a road rail gang, laying rail sleepers and maintenance on the track. It was a hard life for a young man and Bonnie soon began to learn that he had to toughen himself against the jibes that he received from other because of his coloured skin. To be sure, Bonnie was very proud of being an Australian and equally proud that he was from Bamaga.

Enlisted. When the Vietnam War was at its peak, the Army was actively recruiting soldiers to compliment its National Service shortfalls. Bonnie did not hesitate and enlisted to do his bit. According to reliable sources, he completed the gruelling obligatory months of training at "Silver city"

(The old corrugated igloos) at Kapooka , followed by the Infantry "College" at Ingleburn NSW (The new Infantry centre is located at Singleton NSW – read article on training at Ingleburn), before he was posted to 1 RAR, and finally 6 RAR.

He saw active duty in Vietnam and also was stationed in Malaya and Singapore "Whilst On War Service", (WOWS was meant to distinguish between an Active Zone and one which contained war a like environment). I have been advised many times by those who had served with him in Vietnam, tell me that he was an excellent soldier in the jungle and was like a duck out of water if he remained idle for too long in a barracks like setting.

When we served with him in Malaya, Singapore and in Queensland Australia he was an excellent soldier in the jungle and I must agree with his peers that Bonnie hated the barrack life and monotonous routine. He preferred the bush and made no bones about it.



Vietnam. I was not able to experience Vietnam and therefore cannot comment on Bonnie's service in Vietnam. However, I can say in all honesty that after speaking with some of his mates, that he was an exceptional soldier in the jungle and on whilst on active service which rose him to the rank of Corporal.

Unfortunately Bonnie's service in Vietnam will have to be provided by those who served with him, which is another story. (We are seeking background information for this section) During our posting in Singapore we had been allocated to A Coy currently serving in Malaya. We were further advised that Australia had a commitment to Malaysia to provide Airfield security at various bases around Malaysia. One of these airfields was Butterworth at Penang Island. This was conducted on a three monthly tour and shared by all battalions. (Buts another story)

Penang Malaya 973. The first time that I laid eyes on Bonnie was when I first arrived in Penang, Malaysia in April 1973. It was just after ANZAC day and it felt that the flying box car (aircraft) stuck together with a million rivets would take us for hours to reach our destination. The drone of the aircraft was enough to drive you mad and want to jump out than put up with the noise.



Bonnie during weapons maintenance

(Photo by Richard Creagh). We tried lying on the floor, over the seats, in between the seats, in the rear of the plane near the storage compartment, feet up in the air, falling asleep on each other, trying lay down near the door of the pilot, but it did us no good.

I don't know how they used these flying rivet machines as aircraft for parachuting during World War 2, but they managed it somehow.

During the descent phase we noticed that the airfield was strewn with Commonwealth military aircraft and wondered, what the heck were all these planes doing standing there idle and so far away from home. Finally we touched down at Butterworth airfield, driven to the outskirts of the airfield and deposited in front of A Coy Headquarters.



After the usual greetings of welcome to the Company by the CSM, Lance Larcombe and the Company Commander, Peter Langford (Went on to a fine and distinguished military career) we were allocated our platoons. Dropping our gear we were introduced to the Platoon Commander Tony Ralph (Mr. Joe Cool went onto a successful career outside the military) and the Platoon SGT named Gurney.

We were also introduced to the section commanders, Al Chandler, (a real big Aussie bloke and tough as nails), Big Mick Hardless, and Noel Iszlaub along with Mick Driscoll, Ross Seath, Johnny Cech and others in the platoon. It was a warm welcome and we were made to feel at home.



Bonnie the Sportsman (Notice Bonnie's injury to right knee)

Remember that everything is fine but you are not fully accepted or are integrated into the section, platoon and the company until you have proven yourself in the jungle to see what you are made of.

We all knew this and we all knew that it was important to be accepted as quickly as possible. After all of the introductions we were given a quick briefing, shown around the camp and dismissed for lunch.

On the way to lunch with our Dixie's and eating irons in our hands, I came into contact with Peter Phillips, my old platoon commander from Infantry School during our initial employment training 18 months before. He greeted me warmly and said welcome to the company Pete. I couldn't believe that he remembered my name after having trained many other blokes like me.

Still it boosted my morale and put me a good frame of mind. This interaction did not go unnoticed by the other blokes but that did not influence or impress them in any way. To them, Peter Phillips was an officer even if he was a good "boss". Not knowing our bearings in regards to the Other Ranks mess, we as the new REOs'; were obliged to follow the leaders like a herd of sheep.

Meeting Bonnie for the first time. We made our way to a couple of waiting trucks located near the front of the lines to be driven the Air Force Other Ranks mess for lunch. As we

jumped onto the back and we were pushed to the rear by those behind us. I accidentally was bumped by this big black bloke sitting on the left hand side of the truck and I looked into his eyes and I said move over mate.

He looked back at me and responded by saying are you calling me a black bastard. This bloke did not scare me, for I know I did not say such a stupid thing and I was not worried about being able handle myself in difficult situations. However as I was I was also a street wise kid, I was not stupid to walk where angels feared to tread. This big black bloke kept looking at me with his Dixie's in one hand and his eating irons in the other.

I had met aboriginals before, but no one as big as this bloke. He did not look like an aboriginal and I had never met anyone like him. Not until later did I find out that he was a Thursday Islander and that they were known for their huge physique and above average intelligence . His eyes went completely black, (if they could go any blacker) his mouth grimaced and his body became tense and poised for action. A chill went up my spine, adrenalin began to flow into my body and realised that here was a situation that need diplomacy and not physical action. I picked all these vibes up in milliseconds.

The whole back of the truck went absolutely still and watched the scene unfold. I realised that I was up against no ordinary bloke here, in fact the hairs on the back of my head stood up, the adrenalin was still pumping into my body and I thought quickly that if not handled correctly anything could happen. Fuck I said to myself, what am I going to do? I smiled broadly and laughed at him and said I am pulling your leg mate, it's OK I can stand.

The tension in Bonnie eased, he looked at me long and hard and said that's OK forget about it. The whole truck seemed to breathe a sigh of relief and soon the chatter was back to normal. Later in the day some of the blokes that we had got to meet told us new REOs' to watch Bonnie because he will not forget what you did even though he said to forget about it.

Luckily for me that after this episode, Bonnie and I somehow took a liking to each other and we began to drink together. The friend ship that was forged in Butterworth Penang would stand me in good stead and Bonnie went to great lengths to look after me when I was in Singapore. (Especially when we visited Bugis Street with Jock Bryson) later in Brisbane Australia once our tour of Asia was over. (But that's another story)



John Neders Bonnie and Mick Driscoll
(Photo by Mick Hardless)

Bugis Street blues and Kai Tais of Singapore 1973

At times when we were bored, Bonnie and I would head for Bugis Street. It was Bonnie's home territory and he was the king.

He had a number of the KAI-TAI eating out of his hand and they also looked towards him for protection (KAI-TAI meaning a man dressed in woman's' clothing) The KAI-TAI of our day were extraordinarily beautiful and could easily pass for a woman. In fact in some cases you could never tell the difference between a real woman and a Kai Tai. Bonnie had apparently advised one of the Kai-Tai's named Lisa Lust to look after me and ensure that no other of the Bugis street riff raff gave me a hard time, annoyed me, relieve me of my money or try to take advantage of me. I only found out this later from Lisa Lust.

I loved going to Bugis Street, because you could meet people from all round the world. There were sailors from every country that had a merchant ship or a navy. I loved mixing with different cultures, meeting new people drinking and whoring. If we were lucky, we would be entertained by our blokes, or the Kiwis who would "Dance of the flaming Arseholes"

This meant getting on top of the toilet block located in the centre of Bugis street, jamming toilet paper up your arse, drinking at the same time, one behind the other, stark naked and singing the Zulu Warrior song. What made it more interesting was that the toilet paper stuck up arse was lit alight with a match and the group of naked men would sing and dance until the paper burnt itself out near their rectum.

They were all drunk of course. I also met a Greek sailor who I saved from being robbed by the locals and in gratitude; he gave me a free ride on his ship for a day, (A huge oil tanker) and bought champagne all night. The Greek was a real funny bloke, small, wiry, happy go lucky but bloody silly to go into Bugis street by himself.

Bonnie's Bugis street battle. There was particular night, I remember when in Bugis Street, Bonnie had a serious row with the Chinese store holders over the price of something and before you know it there was a huge brawl. We thought it was the Chinese stall holders with the tourists or with one of the Battalions. So being curious, we went to investigate (as observers only of course) to see what it was all about. On one side there were the stall holders throwing bottles, debris and other rubbish while on the other side, lo and behold was just one bloke, Big Bonnie.

Bonnie was throwing the bottles back at them as quickly as he was receiving them. However it became apparent quickly to Bonnie that there was more bottles coming his way and that his position was a precarious one. To cut a long story short, before we could reach him, Bonnie began to withdraw into one of the side alleys leading away from Bugis street to numerous waiting the taxis.

He was not harmed but he had a grin on his face as he was leaving, waving to us who remained. The fracas was over in a flash and business got back to normal. That is the serious drinking resumed, the prostitutes were back in business, the madams were kept busy, the Kai Tais (female impersonators) made their rounds, tourist arrived and were fleeced of their money.

The Dance of the Flaming Arseholes started up again, Men slipped over the urine and excrement in the toilet block, others would vomit because of the stench and head back to the outdoor bars for another drink of Tiger ale. The lights went back on, the music started, the Police had arrived, walked around the alleys that made up Bugis street and left. The atmosphere of Bugis street had to be smelt, seen drunk, felt, heard and lived to understand what Bugis street was in our day.

It is my understanding that it was closed down for a while and then rebuilt along modern lines to attract the tourist dollar. Friends who have gone to modern Bugis Street say that the atmosphere is nothing like the past. On a trip to Singapore from Europe we dropped by Bugis and it took a while to even locate it. Bugis Street had changed considerably, but all for the better one can say.

Bonnie was a legend in my eyes that night, he had taken them all on and had survived. To this day, I still have no idea what the row was about. What I do know is that had Bonnie not left that night and returned to Kangaw barracks, the Chinese stall holders would have killed him. This was evident from the amount of Chinese stall holders and the growing number of other Singaporeans that were pouring into Bugis Street from all the alleys, joining in the throwing bottles and other debris at him.

On reflection, this incident reminds me of the stories that I read in C.E.W. Bean's History of the Australians in Cairo, Egypt, in WW1, fighting the locals in the bazaars, cafes and whorehouses. In Bonnie's defence, one could say he was keeping up the tradition of a bored Australian soldier who felt that once he realised that he was being taken for a ride and robbed at the same time, retaliated in the only way he knew and that was to fight back. Suffice to say a few weeks later Bonnie was back at Bugis Street strong as ever and friends with every one again. It would appear that the Chinese stall holders had made their point and it was bad for business anyway to keep a good customer like Bonnie away indefinitely.

Busted. At one stage when Bonnie was a corporal, a section commander in his own right. He was hard, fair and looked after them, especially in the bush. He had responsibility and was getting on with everyone within the realms of battalion life in those particular days. However, one night after returning in a taxi from Bugis Street and having had drunk a little too much for his own good, events began to unfold for the worst.

The taxi driver had driven through the first gates manned by the local Singaporean constabulary and then up the long drive to the Guard house manned by our Battalion. That particular night, it just so happened to be A Company's turn at the guard house. The drill was that all taxis and vehicles were stopped at the guard house by the guard and the people entering had to identify themselves before they were allowed to move forward and onto the barrack lines. This night Bonnie's taxi arrived at the Battalion guard house and met by the guard stationed outside. It just so happened to be that it was Dean Freemans turn to be stationed outside.

Dean Freeman's went towards the taxi and saw Bonnie who was leaning out of the taxi. Dean Freeman greeted Bonnie and was about to let the taxi through. Suddenly (for whatever reason for the attack, known only to Bonnie) Bonnie lurched out of the taxi window and struck Dean Freeman on the jaw shattering it. Dean Freeman staggered backwards and must have groaned because the rest of the guard turned and arrested Bonnie. It was not long soon after that Bonnie fronted the Commanding Officer who stripped him of his rank and reduced him down to a Private soldier.

Bonnie had lost his self respect, his self esteem, the responsibility of commanding a section, was shunned by many of his peer group and soldiers for some time. I believe that this one incident may have been the catalyst that drove Bonnie further into depression and despair which may explain his dark moods that came upon him periodically. Today Bonnie may have been treated for depression or Post War Traumatic Syndrome brought on by his Vietnam War experiences. Who knows, I certainly don't, for I never went to Vietnam and cannot answer that question. (Dean Freeman now lives in NQLD and has carved out a successful career for himself. Dean was last seen at the 2005 Reunion at Brisbane)

Injured. Bonnie remained until one of the last before returning back to Brisbane Queensland, and apart from being busted to private, Bonnie was an exceptional soldier in the jungle and a also a fine sportsman. He had injured his knee whilst playing sport for the company, an injury that he would carry out with him all his life. I remember that during our physical training or in the jungle, I could see him limping, but he did not complain or seek any additional medical help.

Had Bonnie been alive today, he would have benefited from the support being provided to Vietnam Veterans by the department of Veteran Affairs. In hindsight, one could fathom a guess and say that Bonnie knew that his time in the Army was limited and that his injury would preclude him from being able to contribute at the same level as his much fitter mates. Still he battled on for some time longer despite his injury.

Enoggera Barracks Brisbane 1974. When we arrived back in Australia in December 1973, Bonnie found that he could not settle down into the barracks life and was always getting into fights with other soldiers and civilians alike. His injury was causing him more problems that he could afford and was unable to keep up with the new REO's that were arriving in the battalion.



Bonnie Kevin Kelleher Pete Adamis & John Kendall

My observation of what was occurring is that that we had an influx of REOs' and new Battalion staff that did not of Bonnie. (Like the biblical story of old that told of a new Pharaoh had came to power in Egypt who did not know of Joseph and the Israelites).

Well, it was the same scenario at Enoggera. The older staff always was good to Bonnie and he was allowed much latitude, not so the new staff. He was always teaching the younger soldiers the tricks of the trade in the bush and would often be seen looking after them in the night clubs of Fortitude valley and other hot spots of Brisbane.



Bonnie in the rear (centre) of the truck en route to an exercise in mid west Queensland.

During the barracks life there would be many times that Bonnie would save a digger from making a fool of him and it was not unheard of for Bonnie to give cash to his mates if they were short. He also expected that they would do the same if he was short.

He had a young cousin who was also from Bamaga Thursday Island who was with another battalion and had been told to seek Pete the Greek out as he would help him if it was required. Well, this bloke gave me a bullshit story and he was given some cash. The only reason he was given cash was of his testimony by Bonnie. I never saw the cash again.

Jungle lessons. Bonnie taught me a few tricks of camouflage even though we didn't think we needed it. He would make a joke about his blackness, that at night he could still be seen because of the shine on his face. He was excellent in setting and making traps, where to site the claymores, how to watch out for unusual movement and what to understand about the differences in the bush that is to say what was natural and was unnatural.

To love the jungle and not be afraid of it (except for snakes which he hated and feared). How to set up your hootchie without it being seen and to camouflage it the correct way not the regulation way, and light a fire without any smoke. To appreciate nature and what it had to offer, to understand the jungle and to make you as one when with the jungle.



I remember once when he said to me that when you enter the jungle familiarise yourself with it quickly and learn to blend in with it. If it meant getting down on the ground and rolling amongst the dirt, the leaves, mud and getting the smell of the jungle into you even amongst the myriad of jungle bugs that abounded it did not matter. What mattered he advised was to become part of it.

His lessons were not forgotten and were added to the ones that I had previously picked up from many other soldiers who had similar experiences as Bonnie, the only difference was that Bonnie would advise me by adding his personal twist to it. That is to understand the flows and the moods of the jungle and not to be afraid (not that I was) of the jungle and to listen to it. (He never told me about the huge lizards, tigers, elephants, Pythons and other animals that lurked around at night and how to combat them. I had to find out about them myself the hard way)

He would say that the jungle would talk to you and you only had to learn to listen. A bird singing, the rustle of the wind through the trees, a cricket, a frog, the sun above, the clouds, the signs in the ground the softness of the earth, the trails left by animals, the scurrying of animals, the flight of the birds, the weather and its effects on the jungle and its community, watch the jungle how it reacted to the rain and when the rain fell on the foliage, why the ants always seemed to climb trees when there was going to be a heavy downpour of rain, why birds appeared distressed and lead you away from their nest, and much, much more.

Many of the blokes that Bonnie served with, may or may not remember Bonnie advising them and as far as I am concerned we lost a great teacher of the jungle when Bonnie was finally discharged. Still as I mentioned earlier, that the Army was changing and the paradigms of the past were being reviewed and those who did not conform to the new teachings and doctrines were placed under the microscope. Those who could not embrace change were slowly phased out.

Once beaten twice shy. There was only one bloke in all the time that I knew, that took on Bonnie and beat him and that was a digger who was an ex British Royal Marine who had enlisted in the Australian army and was member of the Battalion. This ex Royal marine was short, thickset, bull necked and a broad shouldered bloke built like brick shit house and only about 72 cm (5' 8"") tall.

I don't know exactly what happened other than that, when the ex Royal marine and big black Bonnie (Our Thursday Islander) clashed, Bonnie came out second best and had been floored. Bonnie was no light weight when it came to a stoush, but in this particular case his opponent despite his small size was not intimidated by Bonnie's height, reputation or his aggressive nature when riled up.

The following day the rumour mill was rife with many different varieties of what had occurred that it was not funny. Anything that had to do with Bonnie was news in the Battalion whether it was good or bad was immaterial and that it made up for the boredom of barrack routine. One rumour was that he had been knocked out and taken to hospital, another that he had taken on five blokes and was beaten up, another that he was caught fighting the local Police and the worst was when it was reported that that he had been killed fighting some blokes in a bar.

When I heard most of these rumours, I went to Bonnie's room and found him sitting up on his bed looking no different to his normal self. He greeted with his normal soft voice of "Hi Pete". When I brought him up to date about the rumours, he just grinned, laughed and said "you can't win them all Pete". I guess Bonnie was amused by all the rumours.

Clash of the titans – 1 RAR

When I was in 1 RAR, I was told about this big black bloke that had a punch-up with a bloke called Mick Strong. An ex Infantry SGT who was discharged from the Army on his return from Vietnam. Mick Strong was a legend in the First Battalion, long after he had left and he was occasionally seen down at the Other Ranks boozier drinking with his mates.

(The big black bloke was apparently Bonnie) Mick Strong was still considered family and a part of the battalion despite being discharged, I was told through one of the many fire camp stories that abounded at the time after the exercises when I was in 1 RAR that two blokes named Bonnie and Mick strong having a stoush in the battalion. Whether this was a true story or not I don't know and only recount it here because that's what I was told as a young digger in 1 RAR. From what I can gather the fight came to a standstill with neither bloke coming out a clear victory.

I was not to know at that time that this big black bloke would end up being my mate. As for Mick Strong, we had our little clash in the confines of the 1 RAR Guard room while I had come into visit Jock Bryson who was in the cells at that time and Mick Strong had come to visit his mate "Richo" (another good bloke) Sad to say Mick strong was last heard of. Was that he was working in a Brisbane Brothel where he was employed as a bouncer and that he had been shot and killed by a patron. (I have digressed too much and the clash between Mick Strong and myself is another story)



Hungee – Kiwi style.

There were many times that Bonnie would pick me up and we would go to the other side of Brisbane where he had some Kiwi mates. Man they were tough those Kiwis, but the family was absolutely lovely, kind and generous.

I have lost track of their names, but the whole family adopted me as a result of Bonnie's friendship. One time Bonnie picked me up and we both went by cab he told me that his Kiwi mates were having a Hungee. As I didn't know what a Hungee, I was interested to find out.

The information that I was provided with was to take some grog with us which was not hard to do when the other ranks Boozier was close by to the A Coy lines. When we arrived we were all greeted very warmly as if we were brothers, with me being the only white man amongst them. When I say they were tough, man they were tough. Big mama was a big girl and her man loved her and did not mind showing it.

Overall the family showed the warmth that all families should. Into the back yard we went to be confronted by other Kiwis with beer in their hands greeting us like long lost brothers. We all shook hands and were introduced to the others that we did not know. I looked around and found that the Kiwis had dug this huge pit in the middle of their backyard somewhere in the suburbs of Brisbane. It was a beautiful clear day, the sun was warm and bright, a gentle breeze in the air and it was becoming quite humid.

The palm trees in the back ground swaying in the gentle breeze, the Banana fronds drooping down moved in rhythm with the other vegetation that abounded in the back yard. Music was blaring in the background with a few kids running around the back yard chasing each other. After a few beers, I asked what was the big pit in the ground for, and why the fire? The boys laughed and said we are having a Hungee man.

What is a Hungee I said stupidly? Man, just where are you from white brother? I said from Melbourne Victoria, they laughed and said you mean Mexico way. I said no Mexico is in North America. They all looked at me and laughed. Bonnie turned around and said Pete, Victoria is what they refer to as Mexico because its south of the border. (I was never to forget that again) As for the word Hungee, it's very similar to an Australian BBQ but the Kiwi and Polynesian way.

I said that when I was in Papua New Guinea with the Army we saw the local blokes there had also dug a pit and cooked a pig. Bonnie and the other blokes began to listen a little more intensely when I began to describe the Moo Moo version of their Hungee. When I had finished they said, man that Moo Moo mumbo jumbo is just them New Guinea blokes copying us Kiwis. What could I say but to diplomatically admit that a Moo Moo is just another word for Kiwi Hungee.

I did however tell our hosts that when I ate the pig in Papua New Guinea, I found on my return that I had worms in my stomach for months after my return and that it took a while (with medication) to remove them. Our hosts said that we didn't have to worry about that here man, because we are cooking a whole lamb. Besides we got it straight from a friend who owns a sheep farm outside of Brisbane. We are going to cook this mother fucker real good they said, just don't you worry about that. (They way they said "just don't you worry about that" reminded of Queensland's Premier Jo Bjelke Petersen)

What could one say but to shut up and not offend our hosts, besides I was not going to leave on my pat alone without Bonnie. I helped build the Hungee with the banana leaves that were in abundance in the back yard and growing all over Brisbane. The difference between the previous Moo Moo experience and our current Hungee was that we used more layers of banana leaves rather than any rocks. When we had enough banana leaves the sheep carcass was placed on top of it. The sheep had been slaughtered hours earlier and had been wrapped in a blanket of sorts, covered also by ice and beer bottles.

I must admit that on reflection that our hosts were environmentally friendly and conserved resources and energy long before climate change became a problem and people started to conserve their energy. Anyway the blood on the beer bottle from the sheep carcass only added to the flavour . The sheep was then covered with a lot more banana leaves and then covered again with soil that had been dug up previously from the pit. A huge fire was lit on top of the mound and only then did we then sit down for some serious drinking.

We, the blokes stood around the fire as if to pass on our wisdom of the past, tells stories of where we had been, but mainly to size each other and talk shit about how good we were. The more we drank the more shit we spoke and said that we would be brothers forever. (It must be a bloke thing) As for me, I was their white brother and they all gave me a hug. Man the hugs these blokes give were real crushers.

A few hours later big mama gave the word for the fire to be put out and to dig up the remains of the carcass and asked that we check for its edibility and flavour. A team of blokes got stuck into the mound despite our intoxication and began to unravel the Hungee. As the palm leaves were being removed, a rich sweet aroma of burning flesh arose and went into our nostrils, intoxicating us with its smell. Couple this with the grog that we had consumed and the aroma only made us salivate more and more as if we were addicted to the meat.

The meat was left in its casement of Banana leaves and meat taken as was required. There was plenty of bread, different sorts of salads, tomatoes sauces and other types of condiments; as the meat had already been prepared with salt, pepper, and other spices that made the meat even more delicious prior to the Hungee. While we began our feast like ravenous vultures around a dead carcass, we continued to drinking and tell bullshit stories to each other while not noticing that the sun was sinking down over the horizon.

The birds began to settle for the evening, neighbours lights went on, songs were a plenty. One kiwi bloke brought a guitar and began strumming along a song in which the other Kiwis joined in. Bonnie knew some of the songs and sung along with them. If they repeated a song, which they did quite often, I would join in and mouth the words as much as I could. I was pissed but bloody happy.

When it was time to go and we knew that we had to go, because there was no more grog, food had almost finished, and we had already repeated most of our bullshit bloke stories. (The bullshit stories were getting more outlandish as the day had gone by and the grog was available). We said our goodbyes and received our big crusher hugs from our hosts, vowing to see each other again in the future.

I am sad to say, that once Bonnie left the Army, we never saw the Kiwi family again. We returned to the barracks via a cab, laughing and joking saying that we would have to go back again, which as events turned out, we didn't. Still, those memories of Bonnie being at home with the Kiwi family, only makes me wonder whether he was lonely for not being surrounded by his own kind of people and living in a white predominant environment.

Although the Army was his family and had been accepted, he still had to face the odd racial abuse from those who did not serve with him. It was not long therefore before a new wave of Dorian invaders (soldiers and staff) was coming to the battalion with fresh ideas and no room for the old.

The green snake. Bonnie was afraid of nothing it seemed and from what I have been told. However I did witness an event where I saw fear on his face whilst on an exercise at Shoal Water Bay, Queensland. During the exercise we were preparing for our night routine and were about to set up our hootchies, checking weapons, setting of trip flares, booby traps, sentries, attending an orders group, checking equipment, rations, bedding, clothing, water, camouflage and a myriad of other items that we had been trained to do without being told before sundown.

(Stand to in the morning was another well honed drill that was carried out as a second nature by all of us in the battalion and throughout all of the Australian Army. Although all of the above being considered routine in nature we were also highly skilled in the art of camouflage, contact drills, fire and movement, tactics, weapons instruction, physical training, navigation, unarmed combat, additional weapons instruction, parachuting, swimming rivers with full gear, route marches and many other types of training that made the Australian soldier superbly prepared for any contingency at a moment's notice.

Having digressed enough, let's get back to Bonnie and the green snake. On this particular fine evening, with the sun was sinking fast into the west over the rim of the horizon, a scream was heard coming from the perimeter of the platoon. Everyone went still and immediately went into combat readiness. The loud scream was followed by more screams and we shit our selves. (I did anyway). We cocked our weapons, went to ground as we had been trained and tried to locate where the scream came from. A few seconds later we spied Bonnie running for his life with real fear on his face.

Gosh we thought, it must a wild animal after him (none that I knew existed in those parts of the jungle as we only had dingoes [wild dogs], crocodiles [too far away to be a threat] and Taipans [snakes were about in great numbers] in our parts of the woods). When we finally caught up with Bonnie he was sitting down in the middle of the perimeter, sweating, laughing, nervous and shaking. When asked what the problem was he said the word snakes. I hate them and I can't stand them near me.

Big Bonnie had shown his fear and what did we do to show sympathy? We did what we all good soldiers and mates would do under such circumstances, we all burst out laughing. When he had calmed down we returned to his hootchie and we looked at the wriggling of something under the hootchie as it lay on the ground. At first we thought that it was a Taipan, the world's deadliest snake after the Western Brown also found in Australia. We got out our machetes and shovels and beat the shit out of the "wiggler" (snake) that was crawling under the hootchie. After a few moments of belting the snake and we were sure that it was dead, we lifted the hootchie expecting to look at this huge venomous and dangerous reptile.

The snake had been mangled beyond any recognition, except that we could recognise that it was not deadly at all and that it was only a small green tree snake, about 60 cm long. We picked it up by the machete and showed it to Bonnie who stepped back laughing at his own fear, saying that he wanted nothing to do with it. That story made headlines all the way back to battalion Headquarters and I am sure that the CO (Lt Col Hammett) and his staff were kept amused on hearing the story of Bonnie and the green Snake.

Drinking after dark. Bonnie had a liking for Bacardi and coke, the more the Bacardi the less he liked the coke. I liked to drink whiskey and dry and Bonnie liked his Bacardi and coke. Many times throughout 1974 he would come home late and burst into my room. Being a late sleeper, I would normally go to bed late anyway. Bonnie always would come in to my room like he owned the place with a bottle of coke and a bottle of Bacardi Rum, (sometimes Burgundy rum) and say, Pete let's a have drink.

Which if translated in blokes talk, it really meant "Pete we are going to have a drink until morning if we have to and I need to talk with my mate". (To be sure, I will admit that I was a hopeless drinker and could never hold it down too long. My frame was slim and wiry and could not too absorb alcohol like other blokes; even though I would drink a lot during my time in the battalions.) When drinking with Bonnie, I would stay up until the early hours of the morning drinking but at a much slower rate than Bonnie and anyway, it was his grog.

There was this one particular night when he arrived at my room a little after 12.00 am with a bottle of Bacardi and coke. It was the usual story, Bonnie did not want to drink alone. It just so happened that at that time I shared the room with a young bloke who had not been long in the Battalion. He was ex Police cadet from NSW who had decided that the Army and not the Police Force was the place for him. When Bonnie walked in that night the young bloke in the opposite corner looked up and said hello Bonnie.

Now how Bonnie was able to somehow translate "Hello Bonnie" into "hello you black bastard". How Bonnie was able to use his linguistic skills to come up with that statement in his mind is anyone's guess. I really just don't know. In my mind the thought of my first meeting with Bonnie in Penang 1973 flashed in my mind and I immediately went into damage control, because I had a vision of Bonnie ready to pounce on this young bloke and throttle him.

Before Bonnie could reach the young bloke, I stopped him and said that the young bloke was a real good bloke and that all that he had said was hello Bonnie. Instantly the rage left Bonnie and he was the smiling old Bonnie again. That was a relief; believe me when I say that the last thing that I wanted to see was Bonnie doing something that would lead to more conflict and strife. The young bloke really was a good bloke, even though only just a recent acquaintance at the time. (Being a new bloke to the battalion, the young bloke had not been tested or accepted by his peers as yet).

We sat down and began to drink the usual Bacardi and coke. I



Bacardi. He had bought the drinks so I thought that was fair anyway. I was not to know at that time, but that young bloke (acquaintance) who was sleeping in the corner and shared a room with me would turn out to be my very best mate (cobber digger mate) who would stick by me through thick and thin throughout the next 34 years no matter where we would be posted throughout Australia and the world. Today we are not only best cobber digger mate; he is also our best man at our wedding. (Second marriage, but that's another story)

Home visits. When I got married, Bonnie would often grab a taxi and come out to our place in Everton Park and drink with me. The family had been relocated out to The Gap, (Brisbane suburb) and Bonnie would often visit us at the new home. Many a time Bonnie and I would sit on the porch looking at the stars, both of us with a beer, in one hand, (I would also have a smoke in the other) and just sit around talking about life and the normal shit that blokes do when drinking.

Sometimes Bob Peoples would drop over with his wife Pearl and we would all sit on the porch drinking together. Bob Peoples lived across the road with Pearl and her two children. (Bob Peoples has since passed away and was a good bloke who unfortunately left this life far too early – but another story). Christine my wife at the time would come out once our young bloke David was put to bed and join the group.

On some of these nights Bonnie would confide in me and tell me that he found it hard at times to speak to his mates when their wives all thought that it was his fault that their husbands would come home late from drinking. When I asked him why, Bonnie said that his mates would go home and tell their wives that they were late because they were drinking with Bonnie and he would not let them go.

He knew that it was not true but he could not dob his mates in. This sensitive side of Bonnie was only known to my wife and me. To explain this sensitive side of Bonnie to the Army hierarchy would not have helped Bonnie remain in the Army as they would not have understood anyway.

Bonnie the black God father. Bonnie and I became so close that I asked him to be the God Father to our first son, David. At that time that I first mentioned the proposal to him he was overwhelmed and agreed to the request. However as we had been drinking together and despite him agreeing, I believe in hindsight that he did not believe that I would go through with it. What Bonnie did not know was that I had already discussed this with my wife Christine at the time who agreed that it was a great idea. A few months after the birth of our son David, we made arrangements to have the Christening at the Army chapel located within the grounds of 6 RAR at Enoggera barracks. My wife, son David, in laws, guests and others were waiting at the chapel.

We sat down and began to drink the usual Bacardi and coke. I The Padre came along and introduced himself and briefed us what was to occur while the guests and others made small talk about what was happening at the battalion. In the mean time it was becoming evident that the Godfather was missing, so we waited, and waited and waited and still no Godfather. I said to my wife to give me a few moments while I go and seek Bonnie out. I didn't know what to think, did Bonnie forget, was he on duty at the last minute, was he on leave and had forgotten? (He could not have been because I saw him yesterday and he said that he was going to be at the chapel on time.) Maybe Bonnie forgot even though I had advised him the day before to be at the chapel at a specific time.

I was really pissed off by the time I arrived at A Coy lines. I walked up to Bonnie's room located on the bottom floor and waded into his room like a wounded bull, seeking an explanation. There in front of me stood a very meek and mild Bonnie all dressed up in his very best Sunday clothes just looking at me. I said what the fuck are you doing here? You know that you're supposed to be at the chapel at a certain time. We are late as it is and why aren't you there. I was mad and I didn't care if we had a blue over it. He looked at me again and said, I didn't think that you meant it. I said what the fuck you mean that I did not mean it.

He looked at me again with his sheepish eyes and said in a soft voice that he always had, "that I did not think that any white man would want me to be a God father to his son". I just stood there and said nothing. What could I say? I walked up to him and gave him a big hug and said come on you big cunt you are David's God Father and began to drag him out. By the time we arrived at the chapel Bonnie had relaxed and said what do I have to do, what do I have to do? I said I don't know what you have to do, but I guess the padre will tell you what to do.

When we arrived my wife Christine also gave him a look that could have killed a raging bull, but said nothing. What can I say at this juncture? It all went well. There was Bonnie all six feet and four axe handles across, big and black and bloody beautiful, holding in his huge arms beautiful little young David. Bonnie was tickled pink and had a broad grin on his face. His face was beaming so much that I wondered if the door was big enough to let him through the door. Well we all went back to our home in Everton Park at that time and had a great old time of it. On reflection, I can still vividly remember even until this day, his soft words and his look at me when confronted in his room by me. This was another example of Bonnie's tender and sensitive side that others were not aware of.

A mates confidence. Just prior to him being discharged from the Army he dropped by to say goodbye and we had a heart to heart chat. We all felt that the new Commanding Officer (After Lt Col Hammett) at the time was being somewhat harsh on Bonnie and despite his numerous charges we felt that some allowances should and could still be made to a bloke like Bonnie. After all he was an icon in the Battalion and revered by many of us. We also felt that Bonnie still had much to teach us about the jungle and how to live in its environment.

and CARO Melbourne had given directions to discharge or encourage voluntary discharge to soldiers who had numerous charges or were seen to be deemed to not in the interests of the new Army of the future. The Vietnam War was finished and the Army was reshaping itself for the future.

Many soldiers who had three or more charges received a letter from CARO advising them that if they continued on their current path of self destruction, (committing misdemeanours like getting drunk, fighting, insubordination and other charges) they would be discharged. It had appeared that Bonnie had fronted the CO far too many times and that the CO did not know how to handle Bonnie but to discharge him from the Army and as not fitting into the new Army of the future. (What utter bullshit)

Other Commanding Officers like Lt Col Hammett (Harry the Hat) had a far better approach with his soldiers and they loved him for it. Lt Col Hammett was loved by all and the soldiers respected him. (Lt Col Hammett was killed tragically in an aero-plane crash that he was piloting at the time somewhere in Queensland.) The time came when for Bonnie to pack his gear and return back to Bamaga, Thursday Island.

He did not stay around long as there were only a few that were left from the old Battalion. Even now after 38 years, I still think that the action that the army took against Bonnie was harsh. I myself had charges of being drunk, insubordination, fighting and missing from a place of parade. But the only difference in my case was that I got married and was able to settle down.

The last night with Bonnie. The night after he was discharged, Bonnie and I stayed up late and talked about his life in the Army, his family, his aspirations and where he wanted to end up. During the course of the night, he confided in me that he was unsure what the future lay in store for him, that the Army was all he knew and that he looked upon the Army as his life. He said that the Army had looked after him, clothed him, fed him, trained him and paid him accordingly. In those days, the resettlement scheme is nowhere near to what is being offered to those leaving the services today and therefore Bonnie was not equipped or prepared to face life outside the Army.

Retirement. When Bonnie left the Army he returned to Bamaga Thursday Island Group in NQLD and worked in a variety of jobs before settling down with his partner Sabui. Bonnie and his partner had five children between them. They were four sons and one girl, named McBonnie, Patrick, McRonald, William and Eima the girl. Bonnie passed away due to kidney failure at the age of 50.

He had celebrated his 50th birthday in Bamaga with his family. He passed away on the 26 February 1997. Sad to report that Bonnie's partner Sabui also passed away some years after Bonnie. His youngest son William had enlisted in the Army Reserves and had carried on the family tradition.

Little did we know that the Career Advisers and those making the decision in Canberra At last contact, Patrick brought me up to date and recently advised that his Auntie Debbie Siganisucu, Bonnie's sister was currently in the hospital at Cairns. All the children are doing well in life and had Bonnie and Sabui been alive this day they would have been proud of their children.

Feedback on Bonnie. A bloke called Norm who lived in Cairns; NQLD went and saw him a number of times. I believe he was the last person from the Army to have seen him. I was also advised during the last reunion in 2005 that a group of ex 6 RAR members travelled to BAMAGA and left a memorial to Bonnie. Had he been alive, he would have been very humble and proud to have received such recognition. I was fortunate enough to speak with him just before he died, not knowing at the time that he was dying.

That's Bonnie for you; he didn't want to upset me. I also had the opportunity to speak with his sister Debbie who advised me of Bonnie's passing away and how he had lived since leaving the Army. This article is not yet complete as I would like to gather more stories on Bonnie. I hope that one day to meet with his children and tell them what a wonderful man their father Bonnie was and tell them the other side to his character, a truly wonderful human being that was misunderstood by many.

On reflection, I would like to think that Bonnie is in the big jungle up in the sky looking down and watching us with some amusement. He is in a better place now and preparing the way for many of us who will jungle track in single file to be greeted by big Bonnie. I can see him now on arrival; he would greet us with a big grin on his face, slap you on the shoulder, a warm hug and escort you to the big chief in the heavens and in his soft voice, put in a good word for you.

He may be gone from this life but his memories live on in the minds of his children, family, and his friends for future generations to come. As Bonnie would say, "Where there is life, it can always be beautiful. You just have to go out and enjoy it." Sleep well my friend.

This article was written with the support of Patrick Wasiu, his sister Debbie and those who served with him. This story about Bonnie is a living document in itself and is expected to grow with time. We are still waiting for more stories to be added to Bonnie's story of his life. Constructive recommendations, additions, support and photographs are most welcome.



The Voice from the Pavement - Peter Adamis is a Journalist/Commentator and writer. He is a retired Australian military serviceman and an Industry organisational & Occupational (OHS) & Training Consultant whose interests are within the parameters of domestic and international political spectrum. He is an avid blogger and contributes to domestic and international community news media outlets as well as to local and Ethnic News. He holds a Bachelor of Adult Learning & Development (Monash), Grad Dip Occupational Health & Safety, (Monash), Dip. Training & Assessment, Dip Public Administration, and Dip Frontline Management. Contact via Email: abalinx@netspace.net.au or via Mobile: 0409965538

FEED BACK

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Mary Wasiu. Sunday, November 02, 2008 11:15 PM Subject: RE: BONNIE WASIU

Hi, Please find attached an article written by Peter Adamis, one of Dad's friends that came to Bamaga. I saw a blog on the internet and followed through, contacting Peter and this is what he sent me.

A very interesting read that makes me proud as punch, in awe and puts another dimension to Dad's character (the unknown). In hindsight, Dad never really talked about anything in he's past or nothing that I've heard. Which is sad cause by the story that's being told he was a top bloke who made friends for life in a time of hardship and trial.

Anyhow, please do pass around so the whole family could have a glimpse of Our Gently Giant! Peter- You have not only left me with a smile on my face and a heart full of pride, you have also left me thirsty to know the sort of person Dad really was. All I can remember is a quiet, successful, generous, kind, loving person, who never said much, very hard working, and had a drive to achieve the best whether it was doing he's job or coaching a football team.

I am ever so grateful for that glimpse into that part of Dad's life through your eyes. I would definitely like to keep in contact and since I now live in Canberra, maybe meet Dad's godson – David one day. I have travelled nearly all of Victoria in the last couple of years. As west as Mildura (Vic) and South as Mt Gambier (SA). A trip to meet you and your family would be my pleasure. I look forward to talking to you again soon. Lots of love
Mary Wasiu

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Garry Adams

Hi Pete. Well done, that's a great story about Bonnie.. I remember one night, not so long before we went to Singapore. 2 RAR was about to take over our lines and the advance party was in already. Bonnie had been into Townsville having his normal few beers and returned around midnight. There were a couple of 2 RAR diggers downstairs in the laundry having a bit of fun with the ever present cane toads by dropping them into the spin dryer on the big Maytag washing machines ...pissed of course when Bonnie arrived, equally under the weather. I was viewing and listening to all of this from the balcony above.

Anyway, Bonnie cannot resist and goes into the laundry to see what all of the laughter was about and see's the diggers spin drying the toads.. "What are you doing" he asked. Everyone knew Bonnie of course and the reply was "G'Day Bonnie, were spin drying these bloody cane toads mate".

There is silence for a few moments then the sound of a punch striking home and one of the 2 RAR boys comes flying out of the laundry and lands on his backside on the grass. "What did you do that for mate", he asked.. Bonnie's reply was simple. "Them's my fuckin frogs !!" and with that all headed off to their respective bed spaces.. Just another one of those nights.

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McBonny Wasiu (jr) *February 10, 2012 at 1:45 pm*

lovely stories mate, there was one particular story he once told me about a scare on his left quads. Don't know what year it was, but his platoon was falling back from a very heavy v-cong fire and his pack got stuck in the trench. The fire first v-cong that rushed over with their bayonet attached drove it right into his legs. So he did what he had to do, putting his M60 machine gun on the little men's jaw and watched his whole scalpel blew away with his straw hat.

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Peter Adamis. *February 10, 2012*

Thanks for the comments. Bonnie was a big and rough bloke for his era. Very misunderstood, but respected as comrade by those who went to battle with him. I wish I knew more of him to give him the credit he deserved. Regards Peter