

WEARING THE NATIONS UNIFORM, SUICIDE AND REFLECTION OF WHY

Peter Adamis - Abalinx 15 December 2015



This article is as a result of hearing of another suicide in the military environment. Whether it occurred during or post military is immaterial. What does sadden me is that it is still occurring despite all the support being available. I write this because I am reflecting back on all the comments on social media of another young digger who has taken his life.

Suicide is a difficult subject to comprehend and the many questions of "WHY" always come to mind. I am extremely pleased to see the outpouring of condolence messages, the anger, the grief and messages of support to the family and to all those who are currently serving. We are all attempting to express our own grief and/or passion seeking reasons why.

It is also good to see that those who have bothered to make a comment are concerned about the after care provided to our men and women after they have left the service of the nation. I am equally heartened by the fact that the depth of the Aussie spirit is alive with a passion. I don't have the answers as that is the realm of those well versed to give professional advice and support to those left behind. However I am compelled to write in order that action can be taken to provide the assistance necessary to keep our men and women alive. After all they are our future. I guess this is how I express my grief at hearing another taking their life.

From a personal point of view, I find that despite all the political rhetoric, administrative doublespeak and soothing words from agencies, nothing can replace the loss of even one of our members who are and/or wore the uniform of Australia. NOT ONE. As stated above, these men and women are our future and as such are a rare commodity that must be looked after.

I can remember as a young digger being advised by Officers, Senior Non Commissioned Officers and warrant Officers that while we were still a part of the Defence Force it was we who looked after each other. Just like the law enforcement agencies have their own motto of looking after their own, we who have served and continue serving have that same outlook on life. I say this because when I became a Warrant Officer, I ensured that the lessons and advice embedded into my psyche by the many good men and women who managed me did not go astray.

I had realised the importance of good management both on and off the field of a military environment led to the longevity of our men and women and their families. If that is NOT the case now I wonder if that is a contributing factor to the suicide of our young during and/or after leaving a military environment. Do we as a society care enough about our men and women in uniform, do we care about what is happening around us, have we become insulated against the horrors of war because the media brings into our living room on a daily basis. Have we as a society lost the capacity to say enough is enough.

Military life is difficult to explain to those who have not served and/or are not associated with the military to comprehend how a suicide can affect everyone in different ways. For those that have served it is akin to belonging to a family and within that family all sorts of relationships can occur, Disagreements, happy events, breakups, solutions found and a myriad of other relationship issues. But having said all of this, suicide in a family always united everyone and with death, expressions of grief followed by anger and action being taken to ensure it never happened again.

I also write these comments because those agencies responsible for catering for the welfare of our men and women who are serving and/or have served are doing a good job, but I wonder whether their heart is in or whether it's just a job or part of the administrative structure to go through the motions. This is not a criticism of their responsibilities other than to make a point of their dedication and commitment.

I could be accused of not putting things into perspective by shrugging off the death of one of our own, but I am afraid if we all did that then our men and women will think that we as a society do not care about them even when they have left the service. I have also experienced soldiers taking their own lives, some of which were my best friends and with their deaths being announced, another candle was snuffed out within me. The grief remained within me for a long time and it made me even more determined to enjoy life as much as I could given my meagre resources.

The Vietnam Veterans (of which I am not) when they returned suffered silently and only glimpses of their grief, sorrow and pain could be seen through the many little actions of emotions being demonstrated on ANZAC Days and reunions. They were and still are a close knit community and it is this relationship that enabled them to survive the hardships they faced on their return.

Those who have taken their lives outside the military environment are just as vulnerable to the rigours and pressures of life and also deserve to be considered as precious to the nation's future and longevity. The youth who find it difficult to come to terms with aspects of their lives, the many who work in high pressure environments, the elderly who lack the financial resources to cope, the others within our society that suffer in silence for one reason or another, all need our compassion and understanding. I ask the reader, how many times we consider those around us or do we keep to ourselves and talk only

through the myriad of electronic devices to remain connected. I guess "love thy neighbour" has other connotations if you think about it.

Life being what it is has many faces and many directions. What faces and what directions we take in life all point to a journey of the life challenges we encounter. As we travel along that path of life encountering those challenges, we draw upon the resources we have accumulated in order to overcome them. Whenever we encounter a challenge so great we reach out and call upon our friends to help us to seek solutions. Having said this, I wonder whether those who have taken their lives reached out to friends and loved ones and whether the signals of distress were identified as such.

My advice to those captains of industry, the small business owners, political lawmakers, welfare agencies, the bosses, the managers, the supervisors, the team leaders and all those responsible for those they lead, manage or direct to remember that you too have a duty of care towards those you are responsible for. Occupational Health and safety in and off the field of work is a responsibility for one and all. With that the word "Health" within the duty of care is often overlooked, misunderstood and mainly forgotten in the workplace.

It is un-Australian to kick a person when they are down and it is equally Un-Australian not lend a helping hand to those struggling with life. After all, as Australians no matter what manner of life we have chosen we must learn to look after our own, that is our people. In closing, remember that there is no blame, no repercussions, no other action, other than to bury our dead and grieve for their passing.

RIP IN PEACE DIGGER.

As always please accept my apologies for the grammar and punctuation.



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