

# VETERANS SUICIDE

Abalinx - Peter Adamis - 23 March 2015

## EX-SERVICEMAN'S VERSE

When you look upon me what do you see?  
An aged tired worn out man and or woman.  
Hands wrinkled worn out by long hard work.  
With haunting eyes that look back at you staring.  
Full of wisdom and strong in values or

A young man or woman full of life.  
Tough, strong, courageous and full of life.  
Eager to take on the world alone if need be.  
Never one to give up without a fight.

But can you recognise my despair.

Peter Adamis



**"Feeling that your life is worthwhile"**. If one does not feel that one's life is worthwhile then it opens the door to a dark journey. A journey filled with uncertainty, devoid of hope, self preservation and any reasons to continue to live on as before. It is a lonely journey that not even loved ones or those close to you that will understand as in most cases may be too busy with doing their own thing to notice.

During my time as a serviceman, bringing up four sons on my own and surrounded by the uncertainties of life, I managed somehow to continue to move forward. I did so because I had four boys to think of. Dark thoughts of suicide were far from my mind. As a young soldier who was only beginning to grasp the rudiments of warfare through our rigorous training we respected those officers who had the balls to stand up to the "powers to be" and tell it as it is. Many times when amongst mates we would mutter under our breath the standing joke of *"Come the revolution"*. What it meant is that we looked forward to a time when those in power would make the necessary changes for better conditions of service.

Call depression whatever name you wish to call it, it is still depression. I have seen mates come and go and yet I stand here still counting the loss of those mates as the ranks becoming thinner on the ground. Depression can mean many things to different people and affect each one differently contributing to ones environment, family, friends and striving to live a life according to ones faith and values can make a difference between choosing a path between life and death.

Some mates choose alone and live in the bush, some are homeless and live in the streets, some become bikies and roam the land seeking a freedom from a civilised society and its ills, and others find solace in drink and die a lonely death drowned in a sea of sorrow and despair. Others give up the ghost (so to speak) and die needlessly without reaching out. the reason why they dont reach out may come in many forms, such as not to bother another person, it's a private matter, no one would understand, fear of being ridiculed, who would

care anyway, what is the use, family cannot cope with my demons, let me go peacefully, revenge, sorrow, pity, low self esteem, not valued, life not worth living. Is it all of the above but I am sure it is much more.

Whatever the case may be those who are on the brink of suicide or demonstrate suicidal tendencies need our support. Without society's support some lovely bloke or woman's life will be snuffed out and their light no longer illuminating our lives. This author does not have the answer other to demonstrate that we live in a chaotic world surrounded by technology that that has no room for those who seek peace, tranquillity, understanding and time out from society and return back refreshed with a renewed interest in life. Depression does not have to be a lonely journey. The article below touches the fringes of what faces our veterans of today and we who enjoy our freedom need to remember life is not an easy road.



*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](mailto:abalinx@netspace.net.au) or via Mobile: 0409965538

## ROYAL AUSTRALIAN REGIMENT OVERWATCH CLAIMS ADF VETERAN SUICIDE NUMBERS COULD TOP

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The hidden costs of service ... expert warn the prevalence of suicide among veterans is higher than has been officially noted. Picture: Alan Place *Source: News Limited*. LAST Wednesday night a veteran sent a desperate email to the Department of Veterans Affairs that read; "Thanks DVA. Am done. Talk to you in the next life. You say I have 0% depression. I'll show you."

The alarm bells rang and thanks to a private support organisation called RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] Overwatch the man was tracked to his home on the NSW south coast and a veteran was dispatched to talk him down. His family and the police were also notified and he was prevented from joining the growing list of veteran suicides.

Earlier in the week ex-navy sailor Aaron McKinnon was not so lucky in receiving support when he decided to end his own life.



Another loss ... a picture from Aaron McKinnon's Facebook profile. Picture: Facebook Source: *Supplied*

The former leading seaman boatswain's mate and golf fanatic was discharged in 2010 with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after 12 years of service. He also participated in the St Andrews golf tournament in Scotland sponsored by the veterans' charity Soldier On.

News Corp last Sunday revealed that Defence and Veterans Affairs had no accurate statistics about how many former members had committed suicide.

Following that article the Australian Veterans Suicide Register, run by army veteran and permanently incapacitated pensioner Aaron Gray, was bombarded with another 40 names to add to its list of 128 victims of this insidious epidemic.



That is 168 documented cases since 1986 including an alarming 92 since 2006 plus Aaron McKinnon. The true figure could be well over 200. Compiling the statistics ... former soldier Aaron Gray from Bomaderry pictured during a deployment in Iraq. Picture: Supplied Source: *Supplied*

Despite the tragic evidence the head of defence health Rear Admiral Robyn Walker — a Navy GP with no psychiatric qualifications — continues to deny that military service is a key contributor to the tragic total. An online petition on change.org that had 1600 signatures calling for her removal on Saturday March 14 had increased to more than 3600 names by March 20.

Dozens of damaged veterans such as Annette Lambert from Goolwa North in South Australia have signed up and left strong comments on the petition. "I am personally affected and disgusted by her statements now and in previous interviews over the years. I find it offensive and extremely detrimental to my health as do many other service and ex-service people whom I am in close contact with," Ms Lambert said.

Mr Gray, who suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and who runs the register on a voluntary basis, has been overwhelmed by the response. "We have 168 names but the true figure is well over 200 and this response makes me wonder if the real number is not much larger," he said. Mr Gray said the growth of the petition also indicated that there were a lot of very unhappy people out there. "Hopefully defence and DVA will start to take notice."



Criticised on social media. Rear Admiral Robyn Walker. Source: *News Limited*

He said that like many veterans he was mystified about where Defence spent the \$140 million it devoted to mental health each year. Defence told News Corp that it took the issue of suicide very seriously and it rejected claims that it had no statistics on the subject.

It said that since 2000 some 106 full-time serving members had died by suicide and that 61 of those had never deployed on operations. Of the 45 who had deployed 17 had one or more deployments to the Middle East. Defence said the "vilification" of Rear Admiral Robyn Walker on social media was unwarranted and unacceptable.

Australian Veterans Suicide Register. T Shirt for sale. Supplied Source: *Supplied*



"Rear Admiral Walker is a strong and vocal advocate for improving and delivering effective mental health services within the ADF and she works tirelessly to remove the stigma many feel still exists around the issue of mental health within the defence community and among our service men and women more generally," it said.

"It is important that this debate focuses on the issues and not on individuals doing their best for the wellbeing of the serving and former members of the ADF." Mr Gray runs the register with two other volunteers and he is seeking funds to establish a professional website to deal with the increasing workload.

He is selling fundraising T-shirts on the register's Facebook page and would welcome any assistance. Meanwhile the government has released a new mobile phone app to help serving and ex-serving defence personnel.

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Michael Ronaldson and Assistant Minister for Defence Stuart Robert launched the High Res app saying it was part of the government's innovative approach to improving mental health outcomes. Any veteran or serving member who feels they need help should contact the RSL, Soldier On, Mates 4 Mates, the Australian Defence Force Assistance Trust or Lifeline.

Lifeline can be reached on 13 11 14 or by clicking here.

<http://www.news.com.au/national/royal-australian-regiment-overwatch-claims-adf-veteran-suicide-numbers-could-top-200/story-fncynjr2-1227272524485>