

BARRY TOLLEY

Peter Adamis Abalinx 1 December 2016



**Back Left - Sgt Steve Pratt, Centre - John Wast, Back Right WO2 Barry Tolley AATTV,
Front Left kneeling - WO Laurie Jackson, Front Right kneeling - WO Geoff Smith,
Vietnam 1968**

I just spoke with Barry. He is at home, living in far North Queensland with his wife. I am so pleased that I caught up with him. He was also one of my early mentors. A tower of strength, great Aussie humour, tough as nails and a terrific Australian. His early mentoring in 1 RAR helped shape who I am today. Although he is ill, I found that he could still be able to hold a decent conversation. Its men like him that gave me the strength, reliance and endurance that I have embedded within me. If those who knew of him wish to ring him you can ring him at home via his wife on 07 47210005. In life we don't often get the opportunity to say thank you, but in this case I am fortunate to have been given that opportunity. This very brief article is my thanks to a very good and great mentor, teacher and father like figure.

Barry was one of two CSM's in A Coy 1 RAR when I was a youngster, the other was Wayne (Angry Ant) Aitkenhead. Both good men. In A Coy 6 RAR, I was also blessed to have a CSM named Burt Franks who was of the same age, same build, same sense of humour and a father figure. Ironically Wayne Aitkenhead also became my CSM after being posted to A Coy 6 RAR. Although I have many stories, this is my best memory of Barry Tolley. We were walking out of the Atherton Tablelands like we always did after a lengthy training exercise. Muddy boots, weapons being carried in the alert position, water bottles, ammunition, big pack, webbing and small pack, rations or what was left of them, blisters, tired, but still full of beans with that great Aussie humour of She will be right.

I remember that I was a young 22 year old, wiry, muscles like tensile steel, a bit of a mischief maker, and a smile on my face. Keen as mustard to make the Army my life and to enjoy being with others of my peer group. I was also a time when National Service was still in and the Vietnam War was being scaled down, but that we did not know it at the time. I was never the best of the soldiers in our section but neither did I let my mates down. It would be unforgivable and I would not have lasted if I became a "Jackman" No I prided on being counted upon and my fighting spirit was strong within me. Barry would have been approximately 34 years old a seasoned veteran of Vietnam amongst other areas of conflict. He had been everywhere and we young lions looked up to him as he epitomised the Aussie soldier, tough, wiry, with the tenacity that goes with someone seasoned in battle. That was our CSM.

On this particular occasion we were on a forced march of some 25 kilometres, which was the normal in those days and not unheard of. I was trudging (Marching) forward with one step after another when I noticed the CSM Barry Tolley (SIR in those days) come up beside me and say "owyagoing digger". My cheeky response was "Bloody shit Sir, I hope an old bloke like you can still make it to the end. Barry looked at me up and down and started grinning and chuckling to himself before moving onto the next bloke and encouraging him to keep going. I felt great because I thought that the "old fella would not make it. Any one in my books who was in there thirties wan an old bloke in my books. Little did I know what life had in store for me!

Suffice to say and to cut a long story short, many blokes kept dropping out along the way. Many with blisters, socks soaked with blood, arms tired from carrying the heavy loads, and every fibre of our bodies aching and yet as we went along we all learnt to help one another and the forging of many lifelong friendships. 10 minute rests were a wonderful respite and by putting our feet up against an embankment or high ground the pressure remained on the soles of our feet until we continued our next leg. In those days all that we knew is that we were preparing for Vietnam and that our final Exercise to Papua New Guinea was going to be our final training before being shipped out to Vietnam.

Back to our yarn of endurance and one could see Barry Tolley was going up and down the line encouraging everyone to keep going and that it was not fa to go. The bastard kept saying that for the past 15 bloody miles and still we kept going with the odd bloke dropping out. I saw mate after mate drop out and without knowing how far the end was, I could not take it any longer and was picked up by the safety vehicle. Well, and I can say with all honesty that that drop out was the last I ever did in my whole life and from that moment on, I never dropped out again. The reason for my future decision was based on the fact that when the safety vehicle picked me up, it went another 300 meters and stopped at the finish line which was around the bend and I could not see it. We had marched 24 kilometre and 700 metres and like a stupid beggar bombed out in the last 300 metres. A valuable lesson in humility, endurance tenacity, and resilience.

Barry Tolley was at the end of the march and looked at me grinning. What could I say that I was given a lesson of endurance that I would never ever forget and my respect for Barry Tolley (the old fella - He was about 34 years old I think). All future tests of endurance, I put up with for the next 28 years military service. Although I lost contact with Barry Tolley over the years, the lessons never left me and I for one thank people like Barry Tolley that gave me the encouragement, resilience, mental toughness to survive in all types of environments. As I stated above this is but a brief glimpse of what it was like to have great mentors early in our careers and I for one am truly thankful.

I had hope to write more, but as usual, life in my case has its limitations as well and we all live on borrowed time. I wish Barry all the best and hope that somehow he can recover from this illness. I am sure that there are many like me out there still alive in the world who have had similar experiences and have been the recipient of the same lessons as I. I for one salute him for his encouragement and the lessons he passed onto me as a young man. As always, apologies for the savagery of the English language and as for the grammar, please make your own corrections.



Peter Adamis is a Journalist/Social Media 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