



A BUNCH OF AUSSIE BASTARDS

Peter Adamis 31 January 2017

Yep, I have had a gutful. Here I am stuck down under in Mexico (Victoria) while my cobber Digger Mates live elsewhere on the planet enjoying life.

Even my mates who live overseas in far flung places such as Tasmania and Bribie Island are sitting back relaxing and enjoying life.

All my bloody mentors, cobber digger mates who have reached the ripe old age of retirement are gathering in their local waterholes, men's sheds and secret places are sharing stories, yarns and fibs of old and yet they fail to record them on paper or type them into a computer. If they have a mobile, then why dont the bastards use the mobile recording programme installed and record the banter, the yarns stories and fibs. If they don't take the time to record the yarns, they will be lost in the mists of time.

Now that I have captured everyone's attention, it is obvious to the reader that all of the above has been written with the greatest of respect and affection and in no way am I admonishing my mentors, cobber, digger, mates. It is my way of expressing myself to a generation that is so rich in stories that everyone forgets to write them down and have them recorded for posterity. Why must we wait for bloody historians to write the stories yarns and fibs of our generation, Historians who will sanitise, filter, analyse, criticise and make comments that may or may not be relevant to our way of thinking and/or how we lived? Stuff that I say. Let's call a spade a spade and record how we lived, laughed, struggled and died.

It's obvious that I have a bee in my bonnet and that I am pissed off. I am thoroughly pissed off because I see my generation dying off slowly and without a word being recorded that we even existed. We will be criticised at some distant future and go down in history as the "Unbelievable bunch of Galahs" that ever lived under the canopy of the Southern Cross. I say that aggressively in order to get my mentors, cobber, digger, mates to wake up and start to see that life is certainly flying by and that we are fading away. Well stuff that. We should be living not dying and by that I mean reflect on life and say it's time we began recording some of the stories, no matter what they are, who they are about and where they were located.

Who is going to remember the training, the long marches, the skills tests, the leadership courses, the mates, the punchups, the grog drinking escapades, the charges for misdemeanours, the hard yakka, the absence without leave, being bawled out for stuffing up, the incessant digging in Australian and foreign soils, the laughter, the jokes, the campfires, the rain, the cyclones, the floods, fires, the behind the scenes operations, the patrols, the heat, the cold, the sweat, the dryness, the venomous reptiles, the sea, the air, parachuting, the mountain climbing and a host of many other unrelated and yet distantly coordinated yarns stories and fibs of old, the camp fire stories where the lesson of the past would be handed down.

Life is what it is and we who are left behind have a responsibility to hand down in one format or another the stories that made us who we are. It does not matter what they are, or where they were experienced as they all important. Imagine if we could but put the back the clock and return to a time where we too were young, full of beans, afraid of no one except the RSM but even then it would out of respect. I challenge all those who are still alive from our era to take the time and begin to record the past, for you all have a part to play in this nation building exercise. You owe to the current and future generations. Get of our butt and do something about it.



Who is going to know or remember the lives of the Tony (Harry the Hat) Hammetts', the Bill McIvors', John Wests', Jim Norths', Rick Brittains', Peter Stammers', Eddie Blacks', Ron Ducies', Geoff Hallam', Peter Veselys', "Warrie" George Mansfords', Mick Driscolls', Dick Spains, the Adrian d'Hagés', Noel Islaubs', Lofty Eibys', Jack Curries', Reg Bandys', Glen Barlows', Mark Stephens, the Maccas, the Colin Bolithos, Steve Bonds', Peter Phillips', Rocky McKelvies', Barrie Daniels', John Guests, the Sgt Grabowskis', PRC Smith, Bert Franks', Wayne Aitkenheads', Peter (Bluey) Roberts', Bob Peoples', the Piggott brothers', Peter ("Flash") Curtis', Sid Gleasons, Ron Stephens' and others from various Infantry Battalions.

We must not forget the Smithys' of this world, the Gus Guthries', Bonnie Wasius', Richard Creaghs', Eddie ("Jock") Brysons', the Hume brothers', Ron Hills', the Spud Murphys', the Eric Swains', Andy Prings', Dennis Dyces', John Arenas', Wayne ("Nog") Whitrods', Michael Hardlesses, Warren Paynes, Doug Balls, Maurice Barwicks', Danny Wrights', Arpad ("Paddy") Backsias', Doug Luiks', Mick Armstrongs', Jim Carrolls' and a host of cobbler, digger, mates; each with a story to tell. I know that I am going to be criticised for not adding mate's names onto the list and close mates to boot, but the above is but an example of the thousands I have personally met throughout life and all deserve a mention in one form or another. Ahhhhhh, how can I remember them all when I have forgotten many names and for that I ask for forgiveness?

SKILLS TRAINING. I wrote this article immediately after chatting on the phone with a mate of whom I have kept in touch sporadically over the years and remember him with great affection as one who also had a hand in my development as a soldier. Rick Brittain is his name and I remember his teachings well. In his particular case, Rick was the training Sargeant in Charlie Company 6 RAR around 1975. At one time Rick called me into his office and asked me to explain in words the load and unload sequence of the M60 machine Gun.

Rick was trying to teach me that it is difficult to explain a skill in words and that the only way was to demonstrate how to do it. But I was just a young digger learning the ropes of training and leadership principles at the time and it was all new to me. Well just when I got stuck in my explanation, Rick said "M60 load". I instinctively dropped to the ground, behind the M60 and went the complete sequence. A few more orders of command and I was speeding through the procedure like a knife slicing through butter. Rick smiled and said, "Now that was not so hard was it"?

I learnt a valuable lesson that day which remained with me ever since. I say that because when I returned back to a life as a civilian, I returned back to school and re-educated myself in Certificate 4 in Training, Diploma of Training and Assessment and finally the pinnacle of training at Monash University, obtaining a degree in Adult Learning and Development. But I must say that my foundations in training began a long time ago whilst a member of the Australian Army and for my mentors, I am truly thankful. I will add that whilst I was re-educating myself, I came to realise that 95% of what I was being taught at lectures was all based on military concepts of training. Something which our lectures admitted as being true. Ironic is it not. I have not written my civilian qualifications to big note myself, other to demonstrate how important my military training held me in good stead after separating from the Australian Army.

PERFORMANCE REPORTS. Another lesson in man management was when I was posted to 2 RVR (now 8/7 RVR) in Ballarat. The RSM was PRC Smith, big bloke who was well liked and respected by the men and women under his wing. I had been promote to Warrant Officer and was the Chief Clerk and a member of the Australian regular army cadre staff at the reserve battalion. Geoff Skardon was our Commanding Officer, who I must say I did not see eye to eye but that's another story. Near the end of the year it was time to prepare the confidential reports for the Non Commissioned Officers (Lance corporals to Staff Sergeants) and PRC as the RSM called me into his office and asked me to write a confidential report (PR66) on my Pay Sergeant who was a Reservists.

The Reserve Pay Sergeant had been the Battalion Pay representative for so many years that no one dared question his skills and abilities. I on the other hand had spent the past four years learning the new methodologies and pay procedures that had been implemented and knew full well the system. It was inevitable that we would clash. Whether it had something to do with me going out with his daughter at the time, I am not sure, but he certainly felt threatened by my presence. After my meeting with the RSM, I went back home and I wrote the confidential report on the Pay Sergeant. I confess that it was scathing report that defied logic, common sense and full of emotion. I really wanted to get tis bloke. I put in so much work into it that when I presented it to the RSM, I was pleased as punch, knowing that I had excelled myself.

Well two days later, PRC Smith calls me into his office at ranger barracks which was then located in the heart of Ballarat and said to me, I want you to rewrite the confidential report and this time, only report on the Pay Sergeant's performance and not what thought about him. Well what can I say, but that I was devastated? I marched out of the RSM's office and went back to my own, wondering what had I done wrong. Still, I was not one to dwell on something that long and before you now it I had written the confidential report again devoid of any emotional expression and reported only on the performance of the Pay Sergeant. A few days later, I handed the confidential report back to the RSM who sat me down and read the report in front of me. That's better Pete don't you think. Can you see the difference? I must say that I did feel better as I had learnt a very valuable lesson that day. A lesson that I would carry with me long after I had left the embrace of the Defence Department. PRC Smith was a very smart man and his methods of management were well honed.

MANMANAGEMENT. There is never a bad soldier, I learnt, only poor management. In 6 RAR, we had a number great Regimental Sergeant Majors, (RSM) and one of them was Lofty Eiby. Lofty was such a beaut bloke that you just could not but follow him everywhere. In the battalion we had a young aboriginal soldier named Alby" (Albert), a real good bloke who I was led to believe had a brother who was also serving. Like all siblings there would be some form of rivalry, but it was not something we knew at the time. Alby was our mate and we would often be doing normal digger stuff when not at the barracks or on patrols in the jungles of Queensland. Alby always had a good word to say about his mates, always a smile on his face and not one to let life get him down Alby was full of life one could say. But Alby being Alby he would often get into trouble with the platoon staff or in trouble over something minor.

If an incident occurred in the Battalion, Alby was in on it one way or another. After all we were all just young and wild blokes kept in check by the discipline of our training. Well, I can remember that Alby was called to the RSM's office one day. And we all were concerned that he may be given his marching order or transferred out of the Battalion. The RSM Lofty Eiby must have had a very long and fatherly chat with Alby for the next day we saw a different Alby coming down the steps of Battalion Headquarters with one stripe on his arms and grinning from ear to ear. Lofty had somehow convinced the Commanding Officer that Alby was worth saving and that our soldiers were our problem and not to be transferred elsewhere without some form of advice and support to bring them back into line.

Suffice to say, Alby became the Battalion Regimental Policeman (RP) who followed the RSM around the battalion, in the jungles, on route marches, on parades and carried out any additional duties and responsibilities assigned to him. We who were just still learning the ropes of man management learnt another valuable less that day. Never transfer out your difficult or recalcitrant diggers, give them the additional support and advice and support them during the difficult periods. Alby turned out to be an exemplary soldier who put the rest of us to shame. Every morning you would find him in the RSM's office given instructions on the day and what was expected of him.

Alby in our eyes had changed as a soldier and still remained our cobbler and a friend. That was important to us and in no way did the rank go to his head. Years later I would meet with Alby again at a 6 RAR reunion and I instantly recognised him. After the customary hugs, handshakes and a few beers we got down to picking up from where we last left off. Reunions are great for reliving old memories I must say. Sad to say, although I heard that Alby had passed away a few years ago, the lessons of management were not lost on me. Lofty Eiby was in a class of his own and the lessons he passed onto us by his example have stood the test of time.

A LESSON IN HUMILITY. Late in 1987, after Lieutenant Colonel Geoff Skardon was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Douglass Ball, the Reserve battalion in Ballarat, Victoria was renamed 8/7 Royal Victoria Regiment (8/7 RVR). Doug Ball became synonymous with putting the Reserve battalion back on the map so to speak and was often travelling from one depot to another raising the morale, the standard of leadership, making the necessary changes and above all bringing back to the Battalion a renewed confidence. Mind you he had a lot of help from his ARA Cadre staff, such as Paul Prickett, PRC Smith, Bill (Yank) Akell, Pup Elliot, David Lewin, Geoff Hallam, Peter Vesely, Mark Stephens, Rocky McKelvie, Warren Payne and many others that were posted throughout the various depots in the West and North of Victoria.

At that time Warren Payne was our RSM as he had replaced PRC Smith who was posted elsewhere. Warren and I had served in 1 RAR many years ago and I was dimly aware of his being there as we were in different companies. We both went on Byrne Basch and Berry Training exercise as a prelude to Exercise Treble Change in Papua New Guinea and upon our return we were posted to different units around Australia before meeting once again in Ballarat. On reflection, I must confess that 8/7 RVR was probably the closest I would ever get to call a Reserve family Battalion that would remind me of a Regular family battalion. Warren and his lovely wife Lyn and I have remained friends ever since we left 8/7 RVR. That friendship also extends to the other cadre staff but more so with Warren and Lyn and put that down to our families and shared experiences. Warren is one of those individuals that will support you through thick and thin, whilst at the same time ensuring that the established status quo is not in any manner questioned unless there was a serious error of judgement. This was a lesson in humility for me as I will explain below.

One of my corporals who was my administrative clerk at Battalion Headquarters was an excellent digger in the Battalion. He was competent, skilled, mature and also well-liked by his peers and superiors alike. In fact, both our families would often have BBQs together and his wife would take my sons to school in Alfredton which was a suburb on the outskirts of Ballarat and close to where the new Ranger Barracks is now located. Alfredton was a quiet suburb where I had rented a home and it was where my four sons and I lived after I gained custody of them approximately on the 23 July 1998.

Well at one time or another, it came to my notice through various channels that there was a discrepancy in my corporal's financial transactions which did not fit in with the normal procedures at that time. I brought the matter to the attention of my Corporal who assured me that all was above board and that documentation was in fact correct. I believed him and left the matter as it was.

This issue however would not go away and again on a number of occasions it was brought to my attention. Again the matter was denied by the Corporal and yet again I believed him. On each occasion that we spoke about the matter, I did say that I would support him to the hilt and if there was something irregular about the transactions, I was sure that we could rectify the matter. The Corporal assured that all was well and not to worry unduly about the matter. One day, I received a call from the Military Police Investigation branch that they wanted to speak with my corporal over matters pertaining to financial transactions. I said not a problem and that as his chief clerk I would accompany the corporal down to Watsonia Barracks. On arrival, we were introduced to the Military police representative and was asked to remain outside while my Corporal was spoken with.

After some two hours of waiting the door opened and the Corporal came out with the investigating Officer who happened to be a Corporal as well. I was asked to go into the office while my Corporal waited in the car so that we could drive back to Ballarat. When I sat down I was advised by the investigating Military policeman that my Corporal had been lying to me all the time and the reason that he had lied to me was because he did not want to let me down. I sat there looking at the investigating military policeman not knowing how to respond, how to react and was just lost for words. I thanked the investigating military policeman and walked out to the waiting car. I confess yet again that all the way back to Ranger barracks, I gave my Corporal a mouthful and said how disappointed I was in him that he did not have the courage to tell me the truth. I will admit that it was a sheepish Corporal that was full of remorse that arrived in Ballarat that day, knowing that he had let me down. I reported the matter to Warren Payne (RSM), expressing my disappointment and went back home.

Some weeks later when the full report was received, the RSM called me into his office and said that the Corporal was being charged via a Court Martial. I looked at the RSM and said that's fine, it's out of my hands now and the system can take its natural course. I was still disappointed, but hid that in from the rest of the ARA Cadre staff who had realised that the relationship between myself and the Corporal had changed. On that day in the RSM's office, I must say learnt a lesson in humility and compassion. Warren Payne, the RSM said that I was to be the Corporals Defending officer as I was the only one qualified to defend him. I was enraged at the proposal and refused on the grounds that I would be harbouring ill feelings and it would be a conflict of interest on my part and I felt was a travesty of justice if I was to be the Corporals Defending Officer. The RSM asked me to think about it and reflect on why he had selected me and not others to act as the defending Officer.

I left the RSM's office and over the next few days, brooded and reflected over what my response would be. It took a while and yet it only dawned upon me, that here again I was learning another lesson in life, one of humility and forgiveness of one of our own. After all had I not learnt the lesson that we looked after our own whilst I was operating in Central Army records Office many years ago looking after the careers of the soldiers. Those words of wisdom of many years ago came back to haunt me and I realised the significance of why the RSM selected me as the Defending officer. Smart man the RSM. Humility was certainly something I learnt can go a long way in the rehabilitation of our soldiers. Something that our civilian counterparts have much to learn from.

Within a few weeks the Court Martial date was set and the Prosecuting and Defending Officers prepared their briefs. I went back home and over the next few days prepared the best defence I could muster, putting aside my personal feelings and went to bat for my Corporal. In doing so I learnt very quickly to master the art of negotiation, speaking in a controlled environment and how to present the facts without jeopardising my Corporals case. I built a case of a young soldier who had erred not with the intention of defrauding the Government but on the grounds that he had not disclosed all of the facts at a time when they should have been, thinking that the transactions would be overlooked and eventually forgotten.

Furthermore, in my defence I added that the Corporal as an exemplary soldier who demonstrated leadership and had the potential for higher office amongst other matters. In closing, I asked the Court that although the Corporal did not deny the charges, he did feel remorse and that he had let the team down and requested that a suitable fine, plus paying back what was owed to be a suitable sentence. Witnesses, were brought in to testify the positive soldiering aspects, documentation produced, and examples of the Corporals demeanour and respect held by others all helped in creating an environment that one hope would be conducive to bringing about a reasonable good outcome.

The Court Martial adjourned, returning back a guilty verdict, fining the member a sum of money, repayment of monies owed and if I remember correctly, a loss in time regarding promotion. Now I am I am not going to speculate on the Court Martial judges position no that of what went on in the mind of the RSM, but I can bet my bottom dollar that the outcome was a win win for all. I for one had learnt another valuable lesson, this time in humility and I added that experience to my war bag of management. I had no hard feelings for the corporal and by the end of the year the Corporal regained my confidence and he was back on his way to becoming a great soldier. Many years after I had left the Army, I heard that he had risen to ranks of warrant officer and we exchanged pleasantries. He then apologised again for letting me down and thanking me for supporting and helping him in his time of need. As for me, I must say that Warren Payne and is suspect David Lewin (ARA Major) had much to do with my learning.

This lesson in humility would hold me I good stead when I went into bat for another Corporal who was let down by an RSM and an Adjutant of another battalion who should have known better and supported the soldier. The lesson learnt in 8/7 RVR did not go to waste and I am pleased to add that the other incident had a good outcome, but that the RSM and the adjutant lost credibility and self-respect from me as I expected better from them. I would always go in support of our soldiers based upon the lessons and experiences learnt from my betters. I have no regrets whatsoever.

After all the above, the reader would wonder what was the article all about. Well it is said to keep matters simple and is it not obvious that the point of the article is to write about the manner in which our generation lived and that we too as soldiers living under an umbrella of order and discipline are the same as our civilian counterparts. It is also another demonstration of writing and recording our generation and of those who managed and trained us to become who we are today. Lessons are learnt every day and only a fool would disregard the lessons of life, no matter where they are learnt. After all these years, I am still learning something new every day from my own sons who are on the way to surpassing me with their own life experiences. Such is the way of life and mankind is it not?

I hope that when I am in Greece this year that I still have the passion and the ability to continue writing about our generation and that future generations do not judge us by their standards and code of ethics. As for the title "A BUNCH OF AUSSIE BASTARDS" I believe it has captured enough readers to realise that it was designed only but to capture their imagination. I love all my cobber digger mates, even those with whom I have disagreed with.

2015 and 2016 for me were years of reflection, treatment and recovery. Not to dwell on what could have been but to ensure that whatever time we have left is not squander in futile objectives that lead to nowhere. I intend to make life more meaningful and worthwhile, worthy of those who had a hand in making me who I am today. Life as we know it can only be sustained by vigilance and with that vigilance comes responsibility. Let us hope that 2017 is a good one.



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