



BARRY FRENCH

Peter Adamis Abalinx 12 January 2017.

I had gone to bed this evening, relaxing and as normal reading a book. This book I had purchased some few years ago when we went to Cairns and visited Warry George Mansford. Although it was a great visit and had the opportunity to interview the great man, I must confess I am the only bastard who stepped back in his lounge room and fell over backwards on his huge round glass table.

Warry George Mansford was more concerned about slivers or shards of glass penetrating my body than the damage to his prized table. As for me, I had never been so apologetic in my life and I felt like a real low life coming all the way to visit George and smashing his glass table. Suffice to say, I sent up money to compensate him for the damage. Money that he said he did not want so I told him to give it to his favourite charity.

Although I digressed like I always do, both Barry French and Warry George Mansford knew each other well. Warry George Mansford was the 1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (1 RAR) Operations Officer and Barry French was Officer Commanding (OC) Alpha Company (A Coy), 1 RAR. Both were Majors and both served under Lieutenant Colonel "Blue" Hodgkinson and the RSM being the famous "Jack" Currie (recently deceased). Warry George Mansford was reposted to 6 RAR located in Singapore upon his return back from Exercise Treble Change conducted in the wild and difficult terrain of the jungles in Papua New Guinea. Barry French remained in 1 RAR and continued in his role as the OC, A Coy 1 RAR.

The reason for writing the article on Barry French came on the spur of the moment whilst reading the aforementioned book above. The book titled Queensland Frontier by the author Glenville Pike had a short section on Lieutenant Les Hiddins (Officer who met with aboriginals in Far North Australia, gathered, catalogued and photographed wild food unknown to the rest of Australians) and Major Barry French. Glenville Pike had written about these two men leading patrols into Cape York Peninsula in October 1973 to attempt to find the remains if any and grave site of Edmund B.C. Kennedy; an explorer who was speared in the back by Aboriginals defending their territory.

Pike writes that "A week later after Les Hiddins attempt, a second patrol led by Major French fought its way to the site through swamp and jungle", following the explorer's faithful aboriginal companion description provided in his statement of 1848. However the patrol soon found that to find Kennedys grave in such a locality would be nigh on impossible. I jumped out of bed and came down to write my thoughts on Barry French who was our OC during my time in 1 RAR. As always, I ensure that readers fully understand that as I did not serve with Barry in Vietnam, nor did I serve in Vietnam, I am unable to comment or write about Barry French's active service or theatres of war. For those who know me well, they will understand why I write about leaders and of men and women of a bygone era. The main reason is to remember them and who they were before is too late.

If my memory serves me correctly, I arrived in 1 RAR sometime in March 1972 and allocated to number one section, one platoon, A Coy, 1 RAR. I was made number one Rifleman and subsequently under the guidance of "Randy" Green a national Serviceman from Charleville, who was an ex golden gloves champion and a Kangaroo shooter. Randy left the Army when Whitlam came to power despite being asked to remain as he was highly thought of. I met Randy again in 1976 during an exercise to Winton outside Charleville and met his family. Some 30 years later I would contact him again and find that he was living in Toowoomba with his new partner. Randy had a stroke of bad luck, his first marriage had failed, and then he was involved in a horrific car smash which left him in very poor shape. If it was not for his partner Randy would have gone long before us.



Other ranks Dining in night. Left to right, Unknown, Richo Richardson, Barry French (rear), Mrs Townsend, Colonel Townsend, Unknown lieutenant (rear) Pete (the Greek) Adamis

Therefore being a scout in one section, one platoon, A Coy, 1 RAR, I always thought I was number one in the whole Australian Army. I was naïve and impressionable even though I had some Citizens Military Force training and had reached the rank of Corporal. So what. I was in the real Army now and such childish and romantic notions were soon drilled out of my head. Still it is great to dream. In the Platoon I can remember Jock Smith the Section Commander, I have forgotten our Plato Sargeant, Craig Youle was Platoon Commander, followed by Rick Hollingdrake, then we had the national servicemen such as Col Bolitho, Bondi, Randy Green, Macca who was a Bank clerk in civilian life, Jock Bryson my mate and a host of others whose names escape me after an absence of 44 years.

As stated earlier, Barry French was the OC and the Second in Command was John McCausland with our first Company Sergeant Major (CSM), warrant Officer Class 2 (WO2), Wayne (Angry Ant) Aitkenhead) who upon being reposted was replaced by one of my favourite WO2, Barry Tolley, (recently deceased). I am hoping to add more names to this list once tis has been read by those who served with me at the time and look forward to some input from John McCausland and Craig Youle. It was a great bunch of blokes with whom you could go to war with, knowing that you could count on each and every one of them. You did not have to like each other, as long as the bloke was competent, not a "Jackman" and never let his mates down, you would work with each other. It was as simple as that.



Boxing against Jock Waiter, the battalion Physical training Instructor. My first impression of Barry French was that he was a good bloke who cared for his soldiers, was firm, fair and could mix it with the blokes without losing his credibility or status. He was more like a father figure in some aspects as many of the reinforcements were between the ages of 18 to 23 and many had never been outside their state of origin. The first interaction I had with him was when I was being charged for not carrying out my duties whilst on guard piquet.

It so happened that a few days before hand, Corporal Glen Barlow was seen by me carrying grog (Beer bottles) to his room located on the first floor at the end which were reserved for the non-commissioned officers. I happened to be on piquet that balmy night with my self-loading rifle (SLR) slung on my shoulder and was doing my rounds. In the early days we were allowed to carry our SLR's until they were replaced by big long axe handles. I happened to look up and saw Glen carrying his grog (which in those days you were not allowed to drink in the lines) and I said good evening Corp. (Corporal).

Glen looked down at me and said come up and help him. Being a good digger, I came up and helped him to his room, unbeknownst to me that the Duty Sargeant happened to be doing his rounds and sprung me coming down the upstairs from the lines and not doing my rounds as I should have been. Well, the shit hit the fan and I was advised that I was being charged. After that episode the relationship between Glen Barlow took a nose dive and I had two altercations with him. One in boxing and the other a brawl between Glen and I. Glen may have been a battalion boxer, but I was a street fighter and I would use anything to save me from being hurt. History is full of demonstrations that the aggressor will in most cases lose. In our particular disagreements. Lest just say that we never saw eye to eye ever again and that Glen never laid a hand on me again.

Shit, I said myself, my career is over. I had visions of being discharged dishonourably, I would not be able to serve in Vietnam (which was stopped by the Whitlam Labor Government), I would bring disgrace upon my family and the Army would hold it against me as I had already been [charged for belting another soldier](#) when I was doing my Initial Employment Training (IET) at Ingleburn, NSW. I had been thrown in jail for that offence and was not looking forward to being charged again. Within a few days, I was summoned over to Alpha Company Headquarters to face the OC, Major Barry French. For those who have been charged they will see the comical side of things after all these years, but to a young bloke like me, I was shitting bricks.

Wayne Aitkenhead took me to one side and explained the procedure to me and advised what was going to happen, looking me in the eye as if I was already guilty no matter whatever the outcome. I stood outside the OC's office at the "at ease" position and all I can remember was: Private Adamis, Attention. Left Turn. Quick March, Left Turn, Halt. The CSM stood like a ramrod in front of the OC and behind me and bellowed out, Private Adamis Sir. I looked straight ahead, not daring to look at the OC in his eyes. Private Adamis you are being charged with "Conduct to the Prejudice" in that you left your post whilst on guard duty. What have you got to say for yourself?



Mount Stuart, and 1 RAR Barracks, Townsville 1972.

Well sir I blurted out, I don't know why I am in fucking trouble. All I did was to assist fucking Corporal Barlow back to his fucking room and I thought it was the right fucking thing to do. Fucking Corporal asked for my fucking help. I did not know at the fuckin time I was not fucking allowed to fucking go up to his fucking room. Corporal Barlow should be able to fucking vouch for me Sir.

Hmmmmmm said the OC looking at me with a dead pan look on his face. CSM march out Private Adamis. Wayne Aitkenhead, I could swear to this day had a smirk on his face in trying to stop himself from laughing, bellowed out: Private Adamis about turn, quick march, right turn, halt, left turn halt. Stand at ease. The CSM marched back into the OC's Office and I could swear again that I heard laughter and some murmuring which I could not make out. After a few moments the CSM came out and we went through the same drill again. This time the OC said to me, Private Adamis do you know now why you are being charged. I said yes sire, it was because I fucking left my post. Well this time the OC, Barry French had a grin on his face and he said, No Private Adamis, you are being charged for swearing too much and therefore you will be fined for having done so.

I will have to look at my AAB83 to find out the exact penalty, but I can tell you that there was a sigh of relief on my part as I was not going to be kicked out of the Army. I would find years later that they could not stop laughing as my intention though good, they had to charge me with something that was believable as I would not question the charge itself because I felt guilty and expected punishment anyway. Glen Barlow never vouched for me and I guess the OC (Barry French) was reluctant to charge the Corporal without any evidence. In any case I was the one out of place at the time of the incident.

Another time, we were in Papua New Guinea, climbing all the way to Mount Sattleberg to re-enact the WW2 battalions attack against fortified Japanese bunkers and trenches. On this particular day we had been climbing and climbing and mote climbing. One false ridge after another sapped our strength but not out tenacity and the will power to endure more hardship. The tracks were tiny, the river current strong, making the crossing even more difficult, know ing that once we crossed there would be more climbing. At the bottom of one river the company stopped in tactical fashion with sentries put out and forward scouts sent out ahead to reconnoitre the jungle.

It was at this point that Major Barry French asked Platoon Commanders to ask the men if they wanted to keep going knowing that if we kept going it would be almost dark, we would be extremely tired, but that once we had reached our next destination we would not have to face the next morning with such a steep climb. Such was our faith in Barry French to lead us that we did not even question his judgement but that we all agreed to keep going until the next ridge. Suffice to say this episode has already been recorded in one section of the article called [Treble Change Jurassic Park](#) and it is best to read the article without it being mentioned here again. I will however add that we would have gone everywhere with Barry French, such was the calibre of the man.

My other recollections of Barry French was at the other Ranks Dining in Night where Colonel Townsend who commanded 6 RAR during the Battle of Long Tan in 1966 was the guest of honour. I was fortunate enough to be able to sit next to the Colonel and enjoyed the night being served by my old boss, Barry French who as all good officers do on such nights, serve the diggers that they commanded. As the years went by and I was reposted to 6 RAR, I ensure that I kept in touch with Barry French by writing letters and ringing him up when he was living in New Castle, NSW. When my marriage broke up and I was fighting for my boys, my mind was elsewhere and I lost contact with him and sad to say did not know what happened to him.

What I did find out many years later was that Barry French had passed away and when I heard the sad news, part of me just died. No at the age of almost 67, many mates leave and pass onto the other side without even saying goodbye. For me, being passionate about mates and the people I have served with, every soul that has gone, is like a candle being snuffed out and I made poorer by their loss. That is why when I was in hospital last year, I promised myself that whatever time I have left, I would dedicate it to writing about my mates, those who led me, mentored me, developed me and made me who I am to today. I intend to keep on writing so that it encourages others to do the same.

In hindsight, I wish I could far more about Barry French and others as they all deserve to be mentioned and not in some notebook about who they were and what we as soldiers did when it came to our turn to serve this nation. I say this because so many of us who served just did not get the opportunity to participate willingly or unwillingly in an active war zone that we too could say we came through with flying colours. Others were lucky I guess like myself to have remained in long enough to be posted overseas and to visit exotic places, but having said that, my postings do not make me any better or less than the numerous National Servicemen and regular soldiers who trained so hard in order to survive the ravages of battle. Battles that were denied to the many who sought to serve the nation other than in a training sense.

Still I look back upon my time, knowing that it was my generation that passed on the skills to those young men and women who have served us proud in the Solomon Islands, East Timor, Afghanistan, Iraq, Rwanda, Somalia, Cambodia and other far flung and exotic locations. I look forward to additional contributions that will enhance this article on Barry French or throw additional light in the dark recesses of the holes I have failed to fill in. I miss very much all my mates who have gone.

As always, apologies to purists for my poor grammar and savagery of the English language. I wish you all well and hope that this article does not cause ambiguity in the minds of those who read it.



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