



Apologies to the creator for changes

COBBER DIGGER MATES AND MENTORS

Peter Adamis 18 January 2017

Those who have served the nation, worn its many uniforms and contributed to the security and longevity of this country we call home – Australians will not need to be told what the words “Cobber Digger Mate” mean. Better qualified, experienced and far more knowledgeable people than I can provide better descriptions of what the words mean. But having said that, the words do resonate within each and every one of us and brings out a range of emotions that describe who we are and where we come from and what our upbringing or environment has been.

In this country, it matters little who you are and where you come from, as you will often hear those words being spoken in all corners of this country from one ragged shoreline to the very heights of our maintain peaks. You could be in the

middle of the Simpson Desert, the Nullarbor Plain, and the Daintree forest, on many of the islands that surround our great island or continent whatever you please. Yes even down in the caverns of the many mines being carved out by men who are as tough as they come. You don't have to have worn the uniform to understand the meaning of “Cobber Digger Mate”.

You will find the words spoken in places such Wagga Wagga, Orange, Sydney in New South Wales, the Glass Mountains, Cairns, Winton, Cooktown, Townsville, Charleville in Queensland; Eucla, Albany, Geraldton, Kimberley's, in West Australia, Darwin, Gulf of Carpentaria, Katherine in Northern Territory, Hobart, Launceston in Tasmania, Echuca, Orbost, Portland, St Kilda, Apollo Bay, Ballarat in Victoria; Barossa valley, Alice Springs, Cooper Pedy in South Australia and yes you will find in in the Antarctica amongst the men and women who operate under those harsh conditions. No matter where you're live, work and play, what status you have and what your environment is, the words “Cobber Digger Mate” being heard.

I have written this article not because I am anti American but to question how and why the words “Buddy” came into our vocabulary. I don't have degrees in Behaviour, Psychology or even in Neuro Linguistic Programming, but what I do have is a rough knowledge of my environment based on my life experiences and of who I am and where I belong in this vast land of ours. I know what the words “Cobber Digger Mate” mean to me and how special they can be when being referred to as such. To me no higher complement can be given to a bloke and if you happen to be a Sheila (female) and referred as “Cobber Digger Mate” then you have made the grade and considered as one of the blokes. Nothing is sacred and nothing would be hidden from you. Vice versa.

Some 16 years or so ago I wrote a very small poem on “Cobber Digger Mate” and what it mean to me. Although I have lost the original poem, I can still remember what the poem meant to me. At that time I was attempting to describe the emotions that were associated with those words and at the same try and invoke the feelings associated with them. I found over the years that the words “Cobber Digger Mate” were associated with: love of a friend, loyalty, friendship, bonding, reliable, tenacity, committed, always there for you, dedicated, enduring, compassionate, caring, never afraid, pillar of strength, valued, ethical, good, bloke, sheila, companion, tough, soft, It mattered little how you looked physically but what was in your heart. It was of no consequence whether you were ugly, beautiful, handsome, crippled, educated, poor, far away, mentally and physically impaired, what colour your skin was, what you had done in your previous life, what religion you may have and or where you came from. What mattered was what and who you were right here and now and whether you qualified for being a “Cobber Digger Mate”.

Although I took the words “Cobber Digger Mate” for granted, did not make a fool or was naïve when meeting new chums, it was because of the value I placed on someone I met and shared life with over a given period. There have been many times when those words would come back and bite but they were few and far between. What I can tell you is that if I did refer to you as one of the words “Cobber Digger Mate”, then if you truly knew me or who I was a bloke ten you would know you were a “Cobber Digger Mate” for life, no matter how the years may have separated. I will attempt to describe what I mean below and if it attracts constructive criticism it means that it is ok to be criticised by another who is either A “Cobber, Digger or a Mate”.

Recently as many would know a few of us congregated at Bendigo to see a mate of a bygone era off on his final journey. His name was Peter “Flash” Curtis. I first met Peter if my memory serves correctly in 1974. In short we lost contact with each other despite sharing some moments in the same Battalion. It was only in the recent years that we reengaged in conversation using social media and the old friendships came back again. At the funeral I met with Annette, Flash’s lovely wife whom I had not met before and yes I consider her a “Cobber Digger Mate”. However I also met up with David and Rick Piggott, brothers who I met some 43 and 44 years ago. I consider them “Cobber Digger Mate” and their ribbing me is all part of being an Aussie. But on that day I all met up with “Smithy” of ex D Coy 6 RAR. When I saw “Smithy” gain after an absence of some 40 years, my mind just had flashes of good memories and I gave him a hug as I had thought that somewhere along the line he had passed away. (Sorry “Smithy”). Yes “Smithy” was a “Cobber Digger Mate”.

When I was in hospital receiving treatment for cancer, I contacted one of my mates, Peter Hatherley to come and see me. I asked him to reconnect me with Greg Pike and Pup Elliot whom were a part of my life many years ago. Both were senior in rank but both treated as me as an equal and as a friend and the feelings were mutual. Now I write this because many people who I have met in life do not understand the high value of friendship I place on the relationship. Now if both of these two blokes read this article they will may begin to understand how much I valued their friendship. Peter Hatherley had the wonderful understanding of people in my environment at the time and as life took its many changes, Peter and I remained “Cobber Digger Mates”. I must say that was very much overwhelmed by the mates of the past coming out of the wood work to wish me well. <http://abalinx.com/blog/2017/01/18/cobber-digger-mates-and-mentors/>

Greg Pike. Greg Pike was a young bloke, a lieutenant in 1 RAR and throughout my time in 1 RAR we got to know each other. Greg may have forgotten like I have of those memories, but when his name came to mind in hospital, I knew I wanted to contact him again. I will admit that as Greg rose up through the ranks, I would occasional keep in touch, but much changed after my bitter divorce and I concentrated on my four sons. I still have in my photo album a newspaper clipping of Greg and his marriage to Wendy.

Pup Elliott. As for Pup Elliot, he was in the same mould as Greg and when I first met Pup in Ballarat when he was the adjutant and I was the Chief Clerk, we hit of off instantly. I like his communication skills, his devil may care attitude, his ability to analyse and see things through and to see through the foliage rather than at it. Infantry men will understand what that means. He had a great understanding of tactics which became evident when we were at Katherine on Kangaroo 89 and he was able to visual the strike being undertaken by the “enemy” who were the SASR at the time and prepared for them when they landed at the airstrip thinking that they were going to create havoc. Pu always had a smile on his face and when speaking with him you always felt at ease. He was well like by many.

Barrie Daniel. Barrie Daniel is one of those rare individuals that you meet in life that you cannot but wonder whether the bastard is your guardian angel, mentor, or plainly just a “Cobber Digger Mate”. Well what I can say is that Barrie is all of the above. I first met Barrie in the Drill Hall of a reserve unit in West Australia. I called out to him and then in his own words “interrogated” him on who he was, what was his job and what did he do. Barrie will provide his own constructive criticism I am sure, but what is important to note is that since 1981 when we first me, he has been a constant mate through thick and thin. No matter what my life experiences were, good, bad and ugly, Barrie was always there. I could never ask more of a “Cobber Digger Mate”.

Ron Hill. Ron like his brother Greg who I met before as a young Corporal in Central army records Office, called a spade a spade and could see through the foliage as to what type of person you really were. I found Ron to be a great leader of men and women by the manner in which he took an interest in their affairs. Few people would know where and what Ron has done in his life and he would be the last bloke to tell you of his exploits. I can only tell you what I know of the man himself and of his compassion for the soldiers under his command. One example should be enough to describe him. One of the soldiers under his command was a young lady who was a single mother, bright, intelligent and caring individual. The trouble was that she had a drinking problem. I witnessed Ron go to extreme lengths to look after her wellbeing which was reminiscent of my old Commanding officer Tony "Harry the Hat Hammet, another fine Officer who my barometer against I was judged all future commanding Officers. Ron in this case pulled me to one side and asked to assist him in bring back the soldier from great despair. It took some time but in the end he saved her after many months of rehabilitation and visits in and out of hospital. I will write about Ron again in the future.

Eddie Black. I first met Eddie in 1974 when he was posted to A Coy 6 RAR. In those days your reinforcements would be placed in rooms with other experienced soldiers who had been in the Army for some time. My first interaction with him was when Bonnie came into the room with a bottle of Bacardi rum and a bottle of Coke wanting to continue drinking with me. Bonnie looked at Eddie upon which Eddie said "hello Bonnie" Bonnie being a Thursday islander thought that Eddie called him a black bastard and was about to belt him. Intervention on my part was the beginning of a lifelong friendship that was built on respect and a "Cobber Digger Mate" attitude that has lasted between us ever since. Mind you, that did not mean we were not competitive against each and as life being what it is with its twists and turns was a good demonstration that despite our competitiveness we remained "Cobber Digger Mates". He was there when I need him as a mate.

Sandra Mercer Moore. No military bloke would know she is because she was not with the military at all, but of those rare individuals who has contributed to this nation behind the scenes in many ways that one and yet is a saint in my eyes. When I first met her in the early nineteen nineties, we were both in the Liberal Party. I was but a lone political activist who had been befriended by Michael Kroger the Party President at the time and a "Cobber Digger Mate" who became a member of our extended family. Michael Kroger is in league of his own and I will be writing about him in due course. As for my mate Sandra what I can say is that over the years, I have learnt never to judge a book by its character. If there was one woman who should have been a politician, it is Sandra.

Some years ago, Michael Kroger asked that I support Sandra in a campaign that unfortunately had negative results. Not because of Sandra's inability but negativity surrounding the events at the time ended in disaster. During my time with her, I had never met a woman who had not served in the military and that that I could truly come to terms with as a "Cobber Digger Mate". I found Sandra, extremely loyal, very compassionate, and caring and there when you need a mate. When I injured myself in Greece when I was on a mission of mercy for my great aunt (now deceased), I was involved in a car accident that almost crippled me. I had dragged myself out of hospital and moved into my parent's cottage to recuperate alone. Apart from my wife, Sandra was the only other woman that I spoke with in Australia. When she heard the extent of the injuries, the words she said were: "What can I do to help, I will find ways to get you back to Australia and what can I do for you now". I have never forgotten those words of encouragement.

Giuseppe de Simone. Whenever I think of a "Cobber Digger Mate", Giuseppe is there amongst the top. Not only has been embedded as part of the Adamis family but his someone very special to all of us who know of him. There has never been one moment when I can point to and say he was not there as a mate. Even during the dark periods of political activism when we were against each the friendship never waned or ever became neutralised. He has come to know all of my four sons and has been instrumental in guiding them as a mentor over the years. Although I shall be writing about Giuseppe again in some distant future, I can say that Giuseppe was one of the few who was with me and assisting me during some e very dark moments of my life. A time when life looked bleak, Giuseppe somehow became that beacon of light that brought me out of the darkness that had enveloped my life. Truly a man who went beyond what was feared by others.

Peter Vlahos. One bloke who can never be underestimated and/or overlooked. Not a man to trust others lightly, it would take some nine years of peering at each other from across the great divide of political factions to realise that we were heading in the right direction all the time, using different modes of transport. I on a camel and Peter on a stallion. In the end we both crossed the desert at the same to realise we had much in common. In fact he and Eddie Black became our best men at our marriage. We both have a love of history, proud of our Hellenistic origins, love of this nation we call home, Australia and have been there for each other when needed. I foresee much in the portents of the future that our “Cobber Digger Mate” friendship will endure throughout the ages. It is not often one finds comrades amongst his own kind and when one does, you hold on onto them like glue.

Tony Kelly and Clinton Breeze. I cannot separate these two blokes as they are peas in the pod. Both of them became mates during my interaction with the Reserves and during that time all three families became more than just friends but “Cobber Digger Mates” over the years. Each has a character of his own and each have a special place in my life. They were and still are a very huge part of our lives and not one day goes past when they are not in my thoughts. Both of these two gentleman would find the time to give the “old Aussie Greek” a call and say hello and to their old bastard mate is still ok. We could go for months and possibly years of not talking to one another and know that the moment we do speak, we take up where we left off from our last conversation. May you blokes live forever?

Just a glimpse. I have just provided only a tiny inkling of my world through my eyes of what “Cobber Digger Mates” mean to me and the above examples are but the very few I have met throughout life. A “Cobber Digger Mate” once said to me many years ago, “Pete, I notice that you choose your friends and not the other way around”. The statement is true indeed to this day. These are but a few examples of “Cobber Digger Mates” to enable the reader who is not an Aussie what it means to have friends in life and especially those we consider as “Cobber Digger Mates”. Those who translate this article using the Google translator provided on the website will get the gist of what I mean. I am but a man rich in “Cobber Digger Mates” and not in the material sense.

As for my other “Cobber Digger Mates”, they have not been included because somewhere along the line they will be woven into the yarns and stories that will be written as a perpetual reminder that we too once roamed this earth young, free, full of beans, afraid of no one. After all are we not Australians. I have not yet to begun to write about my “Cobber Digger Mates and Mentors. Blokes the likes of Maurice Barwick, Peter “Bluey” Roberts, Warrie George Mansford, Barry French, Barry Tolley, Wayne Whitrod, Peter McLennan, Doug Luik, Bob Bak, Dennis Dyce, Don Norman, Leon Tsongas, Nick Bantounas, Emanuel Vardakis, Jock Bryson, Mick Driscoll, Christine Ethel, Ron Lunt, Terry Styles Harold Eather, Bob Gladwin, Peter Flash Curtis, Dave and Rick Piggott, Michael Kroger, Bonnie Wasiu, Percy Meredith, Bob Peoples, Burt Franks, Mick Olsen, Graham Tucker, Sid Gleeson, Noel Greaves, Barry Fitton, Mark Stephens, Mick Hardless, Andy Pring, Jock Bryson, John Arena, Ron Lovelock and many many others who all deserve a mention. Maybe while I am in having a quiet beer under the shade of the olive trees in Pellana Lakonia Greece, I will get the opportunity to reminisce and write about them.

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.



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