



MICK STRONG

Peter Adamis 2 December 2016

This article is about Mick Strong, not about his military career, not about me, not about the human and spirit that dwells within us all and the one phone call that made a difference to me. Mick Strong is not to be confused with the soldier from 1 RAR but rather of another who was also a member of the Regiment whose motto was Duty First. On our recent trip to Adelaide, one of my goals was to catch up with a chap who I had never served with but nevertheless became a good friend. Mick Strong is his name and he is well known in military circles. Had he remained in he would have been a strong contender for the Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) of the Army. His values mirrored those of mine and when he retired at the same time as I did in mid-1998 from the regular Army it was because he placed his family first. Mick had completed 30 years Regular Army service and I had finished 27 years as a Regular, only to remain in uniform within the Reserves for a few years later.

Mick was a special bloke, a typical Australian, a quiet chap who got on with the job in an efficient manner without the theatrics and drama that sometimes envelopes us in life. He was and still is a big bastard and say that affectionately as mate when one talk about another. A seasoned warrior who had climbed up the ranks during his 30 years' service and saw much of the world. Deidre and Mick raised a family within a military environment, which is difficult for those who have worn the uniform of Australia.

I first Mick when I was serving as a Military recruiter in Melbourne and working on a special project for the Director General of Recruiting. My role was to speak with as many non-Anglo speaking communities with an Australian environment and identify the reasons why and what were the reasons they did not wish to make the Australian Defence force a career. In other words [Recruiting Non Anglo Saxons into the Australian Defence Force](#) in order that they too contribute to the Australian way of life.

It was a very difficult task that I had been given, in fact it was a poison chalice that I had to drink and find the antidote after I had accomplished my task. Working late at nights, visiting various organisations of ethnic origins, attending functions, events and parents at their home as well giving presentations at educational facilities. All the time leaving my four sons at home alone in the care of my two eldest boys. A decision that was to affect my boys in later life and one that I have lived to regret.

Suffice to say, I clashed with my superiors who were not helpful at all and it almost cost me my military career as well as my self-esteem and confidence in myself; for I could not believe that I could be shafted in such a manner. Despite being removed from Recruiting for a period of three months, I fought back in my own characteristic way and appealed to higher authorities against the unjust treatment by my superiors. During this time, I completed my report titled [RECRUITING AUSTRALIANS FROM DIVERSE CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS TOWARDS A DEFENCE FORCE CAREER BEYOND 2000](#) which was duly sent to the Director General of Recruiting in Canberra.

In the end I won my case and was reinstated back in my old role as the Warrant Officer Recruiting Coordinator. This reinstatement enabled me to complete any other tasks that required to be finished within a very hostile environment. During that time I managed to be chosen for the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of Greece and Crete as an interpreter and adviser to Telamon Force, being one of the highlights of my military career. But that is another story.

All this time, Mick Strong, Deidre his wife and children along with myself and four sons visited each other regularly. The reason being is that our children went to the same school and had become friends. It was only natural that we could meet outside military hours and speak as parents and friends. I remember well the BBQ at the Strong family and the odd joke Mick would make that he would often receive my letters addressed to Mick Strong (ex 1 RAR). That other Mick Strong was just as big and well known soldier now deceased, murdered in Brisbane by an angry patron of where he worked. Again I must emphasise that it is another story that needs to be told for the sake of those who believe that our generation's stories need to be told.

During our time together, Mick and I would sometimes travel in the same vehicle, meet at the school where our children attended, met occasionally with a Military environment, but mainly that we separated our profession life with that of our personal one. It was a good mature way of separating one from the other. Mick was selected to go to Soldier Career Management Army (SCMA), a position that only the best of the best would be selected for their wisdom, military experience and knowledge of Soldiers. It was here that Mick soon found out what had happened to me whilst in recruiting, but kept his thoughts to himself.

As the years went by Mick and I remained close friends on a personal level and we both moved on with our Military lives. During all this time I was struggling to make ends meet on a military pension with four sons and no support; except the odd time from Parents, siblings and friends. I must add though to those responsible for looking after our military careers, I was looked after by my superiors by being posted to units that need my skills, knowledge and experience within Victoria and this helping me complete the four son's education.

By this time I had made a conscience decision that the boys came first and if the crunch came, I would give up my military career. After all I had achieved my ambition of being a Warrant Officer, especially after being influenced back in 1971 by the heroics of the Colour Sergeant in the ZULU WARs movie screened for training purposes. Looking back on life now, it is with great humour to find how our training was manipulated to influence us towards a military setting.

One day during the mid-Nineteen Nineties, I came home to find that my second eldest had left home with the daughter of a Sergeant who lived across the road from us. Mind you we were living in the Macleod patch of military service personnel close to the Watsonia barracks. The majority if not all the families were in the military serving in Melbourne, at Watsonia barracks or units within a 25 kilometre radius. They were comfortable homes and sufficient to meet our needs. We however were located at the bottom of the hill and water would often flow down and reside underneath our floor boards which led to the boys become ill at various times. Mick and Deidre strong lived at the top of the hill and were not hit by the deluge of water during the heavy rainy season.

My reaction to my son disappearing struck me down with one blow and I had to find the reserves of strength to endure the hurt behind my son's disappearance. I knew that I had elided the two eldest and that my son could no longer take the responsibilities of looking after his other brothers. Yes life was tough, but we did what we had to do to survive given the circumstances. It hard for one parent to be the disciplinarian, living parent, bring home the bacon so to speak and go on living in a world where stress was the norm. For the next three weeks, I went into action and did everything humanly possible to find my young son. I rang people all over the state, including interstate, friends, relatives and military connections, all of which came to nought. At night after work, I would drive around putting up signs looking for my son. Even newspapers took up the story to highlight my distress.

One day after work, working on my schedule on which region to search, I rang what I believed was the father of the daughter who had disappeared with my son. I said "mate, come you come out with me tonight to help look for the kids" The voice on the other end said "Not a problem mate, I will be down there soon" or words to that effect. Now at the time, all my military mates had known of my troubles and concern for my boys and all provided support when and where they could. Now after talking on the phone, I began to recollect my thoughts as I had found strange the sound of the voice on the other end. It sounded more like Mick strong and not like the father of the daughter. I rang Mick Strong telephone number and said mate did I just speak with you. He said yes Pete, I will down there soon. I apologised to Mick and said mate I thought I was speaking to someone else. Sorry about that, I did not mean to bother you. I said thank ever so much for your help and support, but I need to get the father of the daughter to help. Mick said no worries and good luck. My response was to thank him again and that I would not forget his kindness and caring response.

That in a nutshell epitomised to me what true mateship was all about and that all the negativity surrounding my superior's negative attitude when I was working as a recruiter vanished. Mick and I both belonged to the Regiment, commonly known as the Royal Australian Regiment all of whom are Infantry trained soldiers.

We as soldiers of the Regiment had the motto DUTY FIRST embedded within us so deeply that we would go out of our way to help one another and it makes one feel part of one big family. As one senior warrant officer once said to me: Peter, we who serve ae the Army, the Australian Defence force and t is we who look after our own within the parameters of our ethos and military organisation. Wise words indeed for I was to witness many kind acts of generosity, compassion, military justice and wise counseling throughout my military career. Experiences that would hold me in good stead, long after I left the military environment and the umbrella of support.

Recently as last week, my wife and I made quick trip to Gawler, north of Adelaide in South Australia, to say visit Mick and his wife Deidre and merely say thank you for those words of support some 25 years ago. Mick had not changed, despite some serious health problems and still had his sense of humour. He still towered over me, being a little bloke and his grin was still discernible behind that tough exterior. To me he was a big bloke with a heart of gold and it was wonderful to see him and Deidre once again. We dont often get the opportunity in life to say thank you, but I have been blessed to still be alive to pay my respects to friends of a bygone era.

Mick and Deidre's home is just beautiful, set outside Adelaide, amongst the leafy gumtrees and natives, their home is a heritage one, built around 1910. They have both worked very hard in restoring the building and the surrounding gardens, making into a relative paradise. The home inside is comfortable, reminiscent of the Victoria era r the look of the 1920 where one could say it was a joy to be inside. After a two hour chat, strolling through the garden, sitting in the drawing room, cup of tea and biscuits we quietly left the Strong family amongst the lea suburbs of Gawler with rich memories of Mick and Deidre. After all that's what mates are all about. Thank you Mick and Deidre.

As always, apologies to purists for my poor grammar and savagery of the English language. May we all have the opportunity to thank our friends and those who have been a big part of our lives? I wish all my friends, relatives and close mates all the best and hope that 2017 is a better year.



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Mick and Deidre outside their home in
Gawler South Australia



Mick reclining in his armchair



Mick Yovanna and Deidre



Peter Mick and Deidre