



With due respects to the creators of Bluey and Curley

OLD SOLDIERS DO DIE BUT THE MEMORIES LIVE ON

Peter Adamis 22 January 2017

Attending a cobber's funeral is no easy matter, especially when the bloke who has gone was a good mate.

At his funeral we would listen to the chap's achievements, the good and the bad side of his life intermingled with the jokes and tales that made us remember him and the reason we attended their funeral.

For many it is a mark of respect to a bloke that you may have much to do with and/or he may have had a part to play in the orchestra of life. For me, I would attend a mate's funeral because he was special and it was someone who I admired or was a mentor to me, I would make the effort to see them off providing I had the funds available.

This reminds me of the saying quoted by General MacArthur of WW2 fame who noted the line "old soldiers never die, they just fade away", we can be excused for believing that he initially coined it. The truth of the matter is that its origins are rooted in a popular song amongst British soldiers during World War I. The song was called "Old Soldiers Never Die." It is interesting to note that at MacArthur's Farwell speech, he said:

"When I joined the Army, even before the turn of the century, it was the fulfilment of all of my boyish hopes and dreams. The world has turned over many times since I took the oath on the plain at West Point, and the hopes and dreams have long since vanished, but I still remember the refrain of one of the most popular barrack ballads of that day which proclaimed most proudly that 'old soldiers never die, they just fade away.' And like the old soldier of that ballad, I now close my military career and just fade away, an old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the light to see that duty. Good-bye."

Well, we have all lost mates along the way and each has their own way of demonstrating grief or expressing their feelings when some of their past succumbs to the seductive embrace of death. No one has a monopoly on life for history is but full of gallant men and women who have given their all and paid the ultimate sacrifice in order that we continue the freedoms we take for granted. We romanticise the words "old soldiers never die, they just fade away" because it has a pleasing sound to it and like all good memories they linger on long after our mates have gone.

Whenever I happen to be attending a funeral I am quiet and view the coffin whether it is open or not with the respect the person deserves and I silently shudder within as the candle that was once lit within me has been put out. That is how I cope with the passing of a family member or a cobber that has decided enough was enough. For those who have left this earthly life and have served the nation, I have a different way of looking at life and I would prefer to think along the lines of:

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For family members and/or those so very close to my heart, I would plant a tree or an ever green bush, or write an article as a gentle reminder that they too walked upon this earth. The trees would provide shade and my thoughts would naturally drift towards that person and in my mind I would think of them again and of our time together. Planting trees and/or writing about someone in your life who has gone is a wonderful concept and should be considered by everyone. The more trees, the more memories, the more memories, a much greener and brighter world. Thus their memory lives on.

This now brings me to my Cobber Digger Mates who have since moved onto another journey without the trappings of an earthly body. In each case, a brief not the individual and why they are being mentioned. I will not add recent funerals because I have already written something about them. For those readers who believe that I am being morbid writing about those gone, think again, for this is the only way I can ensure that the memories of each individual lives on using my own thoughts.

NORMAN "NED" KELLY. I first met Ned in 6 RAR on our return back from Singapore and Malaya. He had been posted to RAR and had made the transition to the administrative field once having served in Vietnam as a young digger. Ne was extremely well liked by all who had dealing s with, a very intelligent individual who had everything going for him. We became friend through the good offices of "Mac" and his lovely wife Mary MacLean. Those of us who had transferred to the administrative field would often congregate at Mac and Marys for a weekend BBQ at their home in the married quarters allocated to married soldiers and located with ten kilometres of Enoggera barracks.

As the years went by, Ned was posted to Melbourne to another unit which I am of the belief may have been Monash university as his married quarter within the vicinity of the barracks. When I was eventually posted to Central army records to their computing division, I tracked him down and our friendship was renewed. We would visit each other's home for a BBQ and soon he was asked to become my sons Godfather. My third son Matthew had been born in Melbourne and it was only fitting that Ned be the God father. Hence my third son names were Matthew, Allan Norman Adamis, in memory of Ned and another childhood friend Allan.

Although we kept in touch through normal military channels it was via the grapevine that we were to be told that Ned had Leukaemia. It was a terrible blow to everyone to hear that a good friend had been struck down at such a young age. If my memory serves me correctly, Ned may have been 32 at the time. From the meagre sources at our disposal we managed to find out that Ned fought the disease and battled in vain to overcome it. I visited him in hospital and I remember having tears in my eyes at seeing my mate Ned with no hair and looking pale and thin.

He looked at me and smiled, giving me words of encouragement at a time when it should have been the other way around. It was not soon after that Ned was reposted back to Enoggera Barracks, Brisbane, this time to 8/9th battalion The Royal Australian Regiment. As for myself, I was posted to 11 Independent Rifle Company West Royal Australian Regiment at Karrakatta Perth.

The news coming out of 8/9 RAR was not good and despite some calls to Ralda his wife, Ned's journey was beginning to come to an end on this earth. I was later to be informed of his death and of his subsequent burial in Marlborough Queensland, a place where my first wife and had decided to live upon retirement from the Army and it was also where her parents had a home and her younger brother Phillip was buried. Life is peculiar to say the least and our lives did not turn out as expected. Today another mate called Mick Armstrong is also buried there.

Friends that had served in 8/9 RAR later advised me that when Ned died the Battalion was in shock and it would take some time for the men in the battalion to recover. Apparently the Commanding Officer at the time observed the negative effects of the death of Ned had on the men under his command and took steps to assist in the grieving process. Such was the respect shown to Norman "Ned" Kelly. After my marriage broke down, I lost all track of Ralda and her two young children and have always wondered how she and the children have coped.



BOB "PEEPS" PEOPLES. Bob Peoples or Peeps as he was known to us was a loveable character who you just could not but be captivated by his Aussie charm.

Bob was a Vietnam veteran who had seen much of war but through his positive outlook on life assisted him to get through the rough patches whilst he was in Vietnam, Singapore Malaya and even when he lost his best mate during a posting to Rifle Company Butterworth. I remember Bob's cheeky grin when I first met in 1973 in Singapore.

He was a brilliant soldier in the bush and hated any thought of wearing rank of any sort. In fact he shunned leadership courses. Whoever his name came up to attend leadership courses he could not be found and soon our military bosses took it for granted and left him alone. It was only many years later did they force Bob to undertake leadership courses where he excelled. Bob just wanted to be a digger and that was all. Everyone who met him could not but hep liking him and even if he led them astray with his wild ways of drinking and staying out late even though a curfew may have been imposed.

Apart from spending time in Singapore with him, we served together in B Coy 6 RAR as a composite company in 1976 where we sent to the United Kingdom to study and train under the British soldiers in urban warfare, anti-Terrorism tactics and fighting in the Moors under wet weather conditions. Bob Peoples was in his element and one could say with a shadow of doubt that Bob Peoples had found what his niche in life was. Bob and I had had come back along with the rest of the company to have dinner and I must say that I can remember how hungry I was. I called out down the food line what was on for dinner. "Welsh Rabbit came back the reply, down the line from the cook.

As I approached the cook, I held out my plate and I was given a piece of fried toasted bread with cheese on top. Up until now I had been salivating as I turned over in my brain the thought of eating meat in the form of Welsh rabbit. The cook laughed and so did all the other blokes because the word rabbit had come down the line like Cheese whispers ending in the word rabbit. In fact the original word passed down was "Welsh Rare Bit". I was not a happy chappie.

On our return to Australia, Bob Peoples became part of C Coy on the training section, a sniper, a survival trainer and played the enemy during our numerous training exercises. Sometimes "Peeps" would be found wearing what was commonly known as a "Yowie" snipers suit, other times his jungle greens and other exercises you would find him in camouflage dress. Yes Bob Peoples was something special. He could drink like a fish and tell some of the best yarns and camp fire stories we bloke would often hear. An accomplished cartoonist whose drawing are still to be found amongst the 6 RAR Year books and many a joke or two would be amongst them. He had a vast knowledge of the jungle and his infantry minor tactics were superb.

Bob was originally from the Ballarat region in Victoria who left the District, joining the Army and going to Vietnam. He once told me a story that upon his return from Vietnam, he went along to Ranger Barracks which was 2 RVR at the time and pretended that he was an officer. The rest of the mob believed him and they all fell for his impersonation hook line and sinker. Had he been caught it would have cost him possibly sometime in the cooler as well as being fined.

At Enoggera Barracks, "Peeps" married Pearl, an aboriginal lass who was a single mother of two young girls. What people did not know is that "Peeps" was also part aboriginal and as a result he was eligible for obtaining cheap housing loans. They lived across the road from us in Eranga Street the Gap, close to where Boob Buick would also reside and more often than not the two girls would be left at our home to be looked after until Pearl arrived home. We would often have weekend BBQs when we were at home and not in the jungle training. It was a hard but a good life.

Later in 1978 he was reposted back to B Coy 6 RAR and subsequently flown with the Company to Rifle Company Butterworth under the leadership of Major Bruno Wallis an ex SASR officer. It was in Penang that on the first night, a curfew was imposed on all Australian soldiers that anyone caught outside the perimeter would be charged accordingly. So what did "Peeps" and his mate Mills do? Go over the wire (through) of course, and not return until the very next morning in time for the morning roll call. Peeps became a legend to the young blokes as flaunted authority. Not even the bosses wanted to see him charged and always turned a blind eye.

I must confess that he made me chuckle each time and Peeps would wink at me as he sneak out for the night on other occasions. Sad to say that on one of these outings at night, young Mills was killed by a hit and run driver. He had been out drinking with "Peeps" and ran behind a bus thinking that it was safe, only to be hit by a local taxi driver who had his lights off. Bob was shattered as he was right behind Mills his mate. Mills did not die outright but his body was damaged beyond repair and despite being flown back to Australia, he died and was buried in Australia.

On one occasion I travelled with Bobs Platoon to Langkawi Island and participated in the survival training that was conducted by the Sarawak tribesman who was training us in survival training. I found it interesting that the tribesman who had tattoos all over his body had taken a car spring and somehow had made a parang (machete like long knife) out of it. This parang was so sharp that I could swear it would split the hairs off our heads. We sat around in a semi-circle while he demonstrated to us how to skin, clean and eat frog. I must say it was a great experience and the frog morsel was like tender meat with spice on it.

Back in Australia Bob and I kept in touch no matter where we were in Australia and we shared yarns and fed off each other what was known on the military grapevine. When Bob was posted to Darwin and had reached the dizzy heights of Sergeant, he would often send me down material that I could use during my survival training when I was posted to Deakin University Regiment and/or 5/6 RVR. That would be the last correspondence that I would have with "Peeps" as he died if I am remember correctly at the age of 40 on the day before ANZAC Day. Hearing of his death on the military grapevine sent shocks through our military community, especially those blokes who had served with him. I have yet to see the likes of Bob Peoples for the remainder of my military service. As they say that when God created Bob Peoples, he threw the template away.

Tom Crummy. My time with Tom was very short. We served together in Singapore and Malaya where I witnessed his promotion to Corporal on the same day that Johnny Cech and Ross Seath were promoted. Tom was a very loveable bloke, married, serious about his role and responsibilities as a section Commander Respected by his peers and colleagues alike. Brilliant in the jungle and a smart soldier in the Barracks. Tom was an aboriginal who had enlisted in the Regular Army and had gone to Vietnam. His experiences in Vietnam did not appear to have changed him much other than to mature him beyond his civilian counterparts.

Tom was an exceptional hockey player and could run rings around many of the Battalions finest whilst we were stationed in Singapore and upon our return to Australia. He was also an accomplished runner and a very good Australian Rules football player representing A Coy 6 RAR. Tom separated from the Australian Army and went and lived in the countryside of NSW where he raised his family. I heard that he was coaching youngsters in the game of hockey and was well respected by the town folk. When news of his death reach us it was with disbelief. I for one could not understand how Tom could have a heart attack being so very active and fit young man. However, his memory lives on his children and one would hope that it lives on in the memory of those of us who can still remember him

Keith Annersley.

My memory of Keith is scanty indeed, but I do know that we were mates and got on well together. He reached the rank of Warrant Officer long before he died of cancer. I remember in the Battalion and of his superb efforts in assisting the township of Brisbane throughout the 1974 Brisbane floods. Cleaning out homes, scrubbing floors, removing river silt from the ceiling, cleaning the debris from the streets and helping out where he could. Keith was well liked by all and never did I hear of an unkind word being said against him. Whenever I was Rifle shooting interstate for the Army we would sometime catch sight of each other and chat from we left of before. His sudden death strike home like a thunderbolt and another candle was snuffed out.

Mick Armstrong.

Our mate Mick, how can we ever forget him and his larrikin ways? I cannot forget the wonderful memories of him, the antics he would get up to, the punchups he would be involved in, typical Aussie bloke who would give the shirt off his back. Served with Mick in Singapore, Malaya and then at Enoggera on our return. A much loved character who would always be there for you. Although Mick had many great friends and mates scattered throughout Australia, his best mate was undoubtedly Doug Luik. Doug was also a member of A Coy 6 RAR, who was recruited by another mate of ours who went to SASR, Mick Hardless and once in the West Doug rose to the rank of Captain whilst in SASR.

I had the pleasure of meeting with Beverly who Mick married and I am of the belief that they had children and lived in Maryborough after Mick was discharged from the Defence Force. Beverly if I can remember was an extremely beautiful young woman and we would often wonder how an "ugly bloke" like Mick could snare such a beauty. Obviously my comments of Mick being "ugly" are tongue in cheek as he was your typical Aussie larrikin. A great soldier in the jungle whether it was in Malaya or in the wilds of Queensland, he was at home in both. A good soldier in the barracks and often seen with his mates when training had finished. Mick could train hard, play hard and be there for you as a mate. You could not ask more of him.

As many of us who are married or have been married, life as a married soldier is very difficult indeed, bit more stress is placed on the families when the man is absent on training or overseas and it is not unusual for marriages to fall apart. Mine was no different Doug Luik was the same and certainly Mick was no different despite being married for a long time. Nobody knows but only the couple are aware why and how people separate and get divorced, and it's one of life's risks when getting married. I received a number of calls from Doug Luik who advised me of Micks health and that he was deteriorating. It appeared that Mick and Beverly had separated from each other and that Mick had gone working somewhere on one of the tourist islands. I don't know how long Mick worked in that service industry but what I do know is that he had to come back home to be treated for heart related issues.

It was 2001 and my wife had arrived in Australi from Canada. We would drive to work together and in doing so we would be ringing Mick and Doug Luik to get an idea how Mick was progressing. Doug sent me a number of photos while Mick was in hospital and we often chatted away while we were on our way to work. On the last time I spoke with Mick he also had the opportunity to speak to my wife and his last words to me were. "Look after your missus mate and she will look after you. Just try and be happy and don't worry about any other bastard." I will Mick I promised I will mate. You just get better. The next day Mick passed away from what I gather was a massive heart attack. His death nearly broke me as he was a good cobber, digger mate.

Even today I can still have a strong memory of his smile, his larrikin attitude, and the numerous tattoos that covered his arms along with that grin on his face. I wrote a brief note on him and found a small video clip of Mick marching along and for that one brief moment looking back at the camera as if to say bye for now mate, until we meet again. That video clip was taken in Singapore during one of many training sessions. I spoke with Beverly after Mick had died and whatever I said to her could not and may not have consoled her. Yes it is true that Mick and Bev had previously separated but the good times always remain. I have not had the opportunity to say hi to Beverly since Micks death and although I am aware that she still resides in Maryborough I wish her well. I would however like to see a photograph of Mick, Bev and their children.

The stories above are but a few of the memories of mates who have gone before us and I write of them in affectionate terms because in truth they were my clobber digger mates of my youth. I have left out the fighting, the disagreements, the punchups, drinking, causing and much of soldiery attributes, concentrating mainly on what they meant to me and what I could remember of them. Yes everyone was a fine soldier and in each case they deserve a far better description than I have given them.

However, having said that, I would like to think that somewhere, somehow, a son, daughter or grandchild types in one of the names to have these brief stories for them to read. As I have stated on many occasions, I will continue to write about mates of old and hope that in doing so it attracts and encourages others to contribute and/or do the same.

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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