

I've had the privilege of being one of Tony's best mates for nearly 40 years. I am humbled and honoured to have been invited by Jo-Ann to present a snap shot of Tony's life through the eyes of a lifelong friend.

I would like to express my most sincere and deepest condolences to Jo-Ann, Johnno and Nick and to Tony's family, John, Liz, Dick and Tom from South Australia and, of course, to Jo-Ann's family from Victoria. No-one can imagine the pain and sorrow you are going through at the moment but it's important for you to know that you're not alone – everyone is sharing your grief.

I am going to talk about Tony's life by illustrating some of the good times we've shared as mates. Even if you haven't heard these particular anecdotes, you will all definitely recognise the Tony that I describe.

I first met Tony at the Officer Cadet School Portsea, in January 1974. We came from very similar family, school, sporting and social backgrounds and it was almost inevitable that we would quickly forge a strong friendship, a friendship which subsequently stood the test of time and various Army postings over the ensuing decades.

There was also a bit of the larrikin in both of us which no doubt drew us together in those early days. Although I can not recall the exact circumstances when Tony and I first met at Portsea, I would daresay that it would have been in pretty close proximity to the bar. We liked having a beer or two!!

With the clarity of hindsight, our 12 months at Portsea was remarkably unremarkable. Try as we might, neither of us could ever seem to stand out for the right reasons, more often than not it was some form of minor infraction that drew us to the attention of the staff. They certainly didn't notice us for our academic or military prowess. I think we were both pleasantly surprised when we found ourselves at our graduation ceremony in December of that same year. The most remarkable thing that happened to us in the 12 months *'was that we were graduating at all!!!!'*

It was at our graduation that I had the pleasure of meeting Tony's parents for the first time and it was soon obvious why Tony's future commitment to his own family was so strong.

After graduation, Tony and I were both posted to the 8th/12th Medium Regiment, Holsworthy. We lived in the Officers' Mess with around six or seven other ratbags, some of whom I am very pleased to see here today, and after the strict regime of Portsea, it seemed like heaven. Needless to say we had an absolute ball. However, after 12 months of living in the mess Tony and I decided that we would prefer to live out on 'Civvy Street' in an attempt to escape the scrutiny of our antics by some of the more senior officers in the mess.

I'm sure it's different now, but in those days we had to apply in writing for permission from our Commanding Officer to move out of the Officers' Mess. This has always been a bit of a conundrum to me because Tony and I thought that our departure from the mess would be greatly appreciated by all concerned, especially the mess staff; and yet here we were being required to apply for permission! Needless to say we very quickly received approval and commenced to live what we thought was the 'Life of Riley' in a two bedroom flat in Randwick. I am sure that the subsequent significant drop in bar sales gave the mess committee some cause for concern.

Tony and I lived the free and easy life in Randwick for about nine months before realizing that living in the mess was actually not too bad and certainly a lot cheaper. As junior officers, we were spending most of our time out in the field and consequently found that our rent money was being wasted because we just weren't there. So we moved back into the Officers Mess.

After three years at 8/12, Tony was posted out from Holsworthy to Brisbane to serve with the 1st Field Regiment. In hindsight I think this posting probably saved our military careers - we just couldn't have continued getting away with some of the stuff we got up to.

I'm sure Tony would agree that the most outrageous incident we were ever involved in was the shooting of rabbits off the balcony of the School of Artillery Officers' Mess, which at the time was located at North Head, in Sydney. Tony and I were attending one of our many so called 'career progression courses' and were sitting on the balcony furthering our careers with a couple of beers one balmy summer evening, when we saw some rabbits commencing a sweep of the lawn in front of the Sergeants Mess.

Well! That just wasn't on! Tony went into his room and came back with his point .22, rifle complete with silencer, and we started to take turns in taking pot shots at the rabbits.

We hadn't really given much thought to the obvious dangers to any 'passersby' this may cause, nor to the problem the retrieval and disposal of a dead rabbit, complete with bullet wound, would cause. We were just having a bit of fun. Well, of course, Tony finally pinged one and it was then that we started to think about the possible consequences of our actions. Suffice to say, we got away with it and lived to tell the tale. One tale, of very many!

And I really need to briefly, very briefly, touch on perhaps the most significant debacle of our entire friendship and it involved a boat. In 1976, after Tony and I had returned to the mess after sampling the expensive delights of 'Civvy Street' in Randwick, we decided to buy a boat.

We searched the boats for sale ads in the Sydney Morning Herald and found what we thought was the ideal craft. Something that could go at a reasonable speed, accommodate a couple of young guys overnight, entertain the girlfriends and be stable enough to let us sober up without too much rocking and rolling the next day, and maybe even let us catch a couple of fish out on Botany Bay or in the Georges River.

With blinkers on, we inspected the boat of our dreams in a back yard somewhere, and were only a little concerned when during the reliability demonstration the outboard motor failed to start after about the 15th pull on the starting cord. But on the 16th pull the motor fired up and as far as Tony and I were concerned, it was a done deal, we handed over the \$1000 and just couldn't wait to get out on the water!!

We proudly towed our pride and joy down to the nearest boat ramp on the Georges River and our girlfriends met us at the ramp with champagne and oysters for the christening. After a lot of embarrassing manoeuvring we finally got the boat down the ramp and into the water. Unfortunately, things began to unravel pretty quickly after the launch. Despite our most superhuman endeavours, we just could not get that motor to start.

So it was a pretty disappointing start to our recreational boating lifestyle, but we were OK - we guzzled the champagne and ate the oysters, towed our pride and joy back to the Officers' Mess car park; secure in the knowledge that it would be an easy job to get someone to have a look at the motor and get it up and running for us.

Well, to cut a long story short, the motor turned out to be a lemon, an absolute and complete dud that never could and never would, fire up again. The boat and trailer never moved again and in addition to it becoming an embarrassing centrepiece in the car park of the 8th/12th Medium Regiment's Officers' Mess, it also became home to over a dozen stray cats and kittens. The smell was horrendous!!!

Now, as I mentioned, Tony was posted in December 1977 to Brisbane, and I was therefore left with the dubious responsibility of trying to get rid of our mistake out of the car park. When I was finally posted out of 8/12 in mid 1979 and despite direct orders to the contrary, the boat remained in the car park for another couple of years.

I subsequently heard that the boat and trailer complete with the outboard motor was finally relocated out to the artillery live firing range and was subjected to numerous 'fire for effects' over a lengthy period of time until it was finally unrecognizable.

I should say that our then girlfriends subsequently became our now wives and thankfully, Tony's love for Jo-Ann soon shone through, and without me there to lead him astray, he was finally set on the path to responsibility.

Since those early days, Tony and I both served in many postings throughout Australia and overseas but for some reason the Army never saw fit to have us serve in the same unit again after 8/12 – I've often wondered about that!

Just as our adolescent, pre-Army lives seemed to be mirrored, so too were our military careers and we slowly followed each other into similar operational and staff appointments. We never felt the need to keep close tabs on where in the world each of us were, our friendship was such we both knew that we'd meet up again a little further down the track and when we did, it would be just like we'd never been away – just living around the corner from each other.

However, a major turning point in both of our careers occurred in 1992, when we were advised that we were not going to be considered for further promotion, past the rank of major. Personally, I was not surprised that I wasn't cleared for promotion – disappointed yes, but not surprised. I had always been a bit of a 'fringe dweller' and had never really felt totally comfortable in the military skin. Tony, on the other hand, was justifiably shocked and very disappointed. Unlike me, Tony had 'ticked all the boxes' and we were all very surprised that he hadn't been cleared.

I subsequently resigned my commission in July, 1995 and went on to do other things but despite Tony's disappointment; his dedication and love of the Army; the financial security his continued service provided for his family and the faint hope that he may gain that elusive promotion; endured, and he continued to serve proudly and with distinction for a further 18 years on operations in Iraq, Bougainville and in various staff appointments in Sydney.

It was absolutely impossible not to like Tony. His larger than life character, his sometimes outrageous antics, his ability to make people laugh, his unfailing love and commitment to his family and his reliability as a true friend will ensure he lives with us forever.

And despite the sadness we are all feeling at this time we need to understand what Tony has left behind for us. A legacy, if you will. By his passing Tony has reinforced to us all, the need and importance of communication, love and understanding and the need to continually re-evaluate what is important in our lives and the lives of our families and our loved ones.

No one will ever be able to understand why Tony has passed before his time, but we must take what little comfort we can from the knowledge that he is now at peace. He will live on in our hearts and our memories for ever and like everyone here I just wish that I could have one last conversation with my best mate.

On behalf of Jo-Ann and all of Tony's family, I would like to thank everyone for being here. I know 'Thwaitesy' would be mildly surprised by the turn out, but pleased nonetheless.

Service History

Tony joined the Army as an Officer Cadet in Jan 1974 at the Officer Cadet School, Portsea. On graduation as a second lieutenant he was posted to 8th/12th Medium Regiment in Holsworthy, serving in that Regiment from January 1975 until December 1977. He was then posted to 1st Field Regiment Brisbane, serving as a Forward Observer from 1978 to 1979. He was also promoted to Captain in December 1978. He was posted to 5th/11th Field Regiment Brisbane as the Adjutant, serving in this role from 1980 to 1981.

Tony was then posted to Headquarters 1st Brigade, Holsworthy as the Staff Officer Grade 3 Operations, serving in that role from 1982 until 1983. In September 1983, he was selected as a student on the Instructor Gunnery Course in Canada, returning to Australia at the end of 1984. On return, he was posted to the School of Artillery, Manly as an Gunnery in Instructor until December 1986.

In January 1987 he was promoted to major and took up the appointment of Battery Command 107th Field Battery in 4th Field Regiment, Townsville, being in Command until December 1988. After sub unit command he was selected as a student at Army Command and Staff College, Queenscliff in 1989.

As a Staff College Graduate, he was posted back to School of Artillery in 1990 as the Senior Instructor of Gunnery Wing, serving in this role until December 1991. Tony moved from School of Artillery to the Directorate of Artillery in Manly in 1992, serving as the Staff Officer Grade 2 Surface Plans and Materiel until 1996.

Between 1997 and 2007, he filled a number of roles in Land Headquarters, Victoria Barracks - Sydney, including SO2 Combat Development and SO2 Concepts. In 2008, Tony was again selected to an overseas position in the USA, posting to the role of SO2 Training in the Australian Embassy – Washington, filling this role until 2010.

On return to Australia in 2011, he was posted to the newly created Headquarters Forces Command, to the position of SO2 Force Modernisation and Offensive Support and in 2013 he moved within the Headquarters to the Training Branch role of SO2 Lessons Integration.

Operational History

From March to September 2000 Tony served as the Operations Officer of a Mentoring Team on Operation Bel Isi in Bougainville. Subsequently from August 2002 to May 2003 he served on Operation Slipper followed by Operation Falconer as the J3 Operations of the Australian National Command Element Kuwait. He was also selected for an attachment to US Central Command Forward during this tenure.

Honours and Awards

- Australian Active Service Medal with Iraq 2003 and ICAT clasps
- Australian Service Medal with clasp Bougainville
- Iraq Campaign Medal
- Afghanistan Campaign Medal
- Defence Force Service Medal with fourth clasp
- Australian Defence Medal