

Maurice David Shiels "MOZZA"
7 Platoon C Company 5 RAR
6th December 1946 - 25 September 2010



Below is the Eulogy, delivered by Andy MacDougal, at Maurie's funeral:

Dear Jennifer, Shane and Guy, members of Maurie's family, and his many friends.

What a sad day for us all. What an opportunity for all of us to share happy memories, and events of long ago that shaped the character of your husband, father, and friend.

Maurie entered the Army with the 10th intake of National Servicemen in September 1967. What a time the 1960's were – the Beatles were in full swing, hippies were high, and Vietnam was in the papers every day. To have a marble pulled out of a barrel with your birth date on it meant you would get "called up" into the Army, and potentially, to go to war for your country. December 6 came out of the barrel and into the Army Maurie went.

It was a rude awakening for some, and a boys own adventure for others. Maurie went to Singleton to do his Basic Training. He was thrown together with a group of total strangers, not knowing what was going to happen or what to do next. A short back and sides haircut, a set of jungle greens, boots and a rifle were issued on the first day. No privacy in the barracks, even less hot water. Getting yelled at, tentative conversations with your fellow recruits.

Recruit Training finished after 13 weeks. Everyone was fit, could march, could sort of shoot, sort of map read. Now everyone talked all the time (except on parade). At the March out Parade, Mums and Dads, brothers, sisters and girlfriends marvelled at the transformation of their young men. They would never be the same again.

Then for Corps training selection. Were told that if you didn't want to go to Vietnam, don't volunteer for infantry. But there were more volunteers for infantry than there were places. Only the best got the nod. Maurie put up his hand - as all his old mates here today did.

But rather than stay at the School of Infantry at Singleton Maurie was posted directly to 5RAR at Holsworthy. It was a lot harder than Recruit Training they thought they were fit, but discovered they could go a lot further and a lot faster for longer than they could ever have imagined. They got to fire all sorts of new weapons, learnt how not to get lost with map and compass, how to walk quietly, how to gobble down food quickly, and, they got to know a wonderful new bunch of soldiers who came from all over Australia.

By this time, individual differences between soldiers brought about by different upbringings, family circumstances and education are almost completely blurred out. National servicemen and regulars together were melted down and reconstructed into a great Battalion. They were now all trained soldiers. All keen as mustard and ready to fight. But whilst the common mould was there, in the true spirit of the Australian digger, individualism, own unique character, a great sense of humour and an innate larrikinisms were all retained and indeed enhanced.

It was here that Maurie discovered his potential as a machine gunner. The M60 machine gun is not an easy weapon to shoot accurately. As Terry Bates recounts: "Maurie astounded all with his expertise his shooting 3 and 5 round bursts hitting the target all the time. He had far more hits than anyone else. Maurie had that trademark grin on his face, until the soldier on the mound next to him realised he was also firing at Maurie's target!" So Maurie was destined to become a machine gunner.

After gruelling weeks in Queensland doing jungle training, Maurie and the rest of his mates boarded the HMAS Sydney for the trip to South Vietnam. This is what they had been training for.

In the following months, 7Plt worked and developed as a unit in battle. In an infantry platoon, you get to know the men in your own section and platoon really, really well. Battle enhances this close relationship – it is born out of total dependency and total trust. The sense of comradeship and mateship reaches new levels, and it never ever leaves you.

On a pitch black night of July 4 1969, 7plt hit mines. Very soon there were three men dead and 17 wounded – most with serious and grotesque wounds. This wonderful band of brothers was totally decimated. There are a number of survivors from that night here today. And Maurie was one of them.

I first met Maurie a few days later. The platoon had to be reformed – and reinforcements were rushed in. Maurie was then 22 years old. I was 20. We really didn't know a lot about life as we all understand it here today – we were just too young. But Maurie already knew more about life, about death, about fear and about utter despair than most of us would experience in a lifetime.

As a reinforcement coming into 7PL, I felt like a primary school kid at his first day at school. What do I do now? What do I say? Where do I go? Maurie gave me a strange look as if he wasn't quite sure how to treat me. Within a few months, I too

knew exactly how he felt. It's as though you have been a soldier for 100 years, and a new green bright eyed reinforcement comes along to replace departed comrades. How could they possibly do that? It would have been very easy for him to be indifferent to me after all that had gone on.

But not Maurie ... he said to me: "what do you want to do?" I had no idea what to say, so I said: "what do you do?" I'm a machine gunner said Maurie. So I said: "that's what I want to be".

So this wonderful soldier became my mentor and my great friend. He was back in Australia a month later having completed his National Service. Cast into an indifferent and empty society.

In 1977 I was given the job of managing the Wormald International operations in Newcastle. On my first day, I was looking through the list of staff, and saw the name Maurie Shiels. I thought ... it couldn't be! At precisely that time, Maurie stuck his head around the corner of my office and said ... Andy, it really is you!! The years melted away. We hugged each other and went straight to the pub where he introduced me to all the boys. He was such an inclusive friend. I saw Maurie almost every day for the next 4 years. And how good was that.

Like many, Maurie preferred to get on with his own life – to build some sort of normality out of the chaos of Vietnam. In 2009 he attended a reunion of 7Plt members in Perth. A wonderful occasion, where these men reformed as a group for the first time since 1969. The Platoon commander David Mead came out from Italy. It was like a coming out for Maurie. He had turned a big corner. I was to meet Maurie again at our 5RAR reunion in Tweed Heads earlier this year.

A month ago Terry Bates and Wayne Herbert visited Maurie here in Tweed heads. He was asleep when they came into his room. But when Terry said in a sharp voice "are you asleep on piquet again Private Shields?" Maurie was awake in a flash, and immediately grinned from ear to ear!

Just a few weeks ago Geoff Pearson Blue Schafer and I visited Maurie. What a privilege it was for us to share a few moments with him, and how generous of Jennifer and the family to allow us such precious time.

To Shane and Guy, your Dad was a wonderful soldier, and comments from his many mates give testimony to this. He was always the gentleman, you could always rely totally on Maurie, he was unassuming, he brought people together; he always had a ready impish smile.

To Jennifer, the look on Maurie's face when you walked into the room last week said it all – he just radiated happiness and love.

Dave Mead sent me an email last night, and I quote "I will be thinking of you all tomorrow. I will visit an old restored monastery just near here which is perched on the lake and has a beautifully restored chapel – there I will spend some quiet time

and light a candle for our man.”

For all of us in this room and for all his mates from long ago, Maurie’s candle will never go out.