

Peter John Turner- Eulogy 7 Oct 16

Kel Ryan

Peter Turner was many things to many people. To us in the Cairns Defence community he was an institution.

As a paid up member of the Old Guys Walking Group he and the group used to walk briskly along the Esplanade on Mondays and Wednesdays followed by coffee at Dolce Caffè. On Friday the Group would do the Red Arrow, which for the visitors is part of the Botanic Gardens area, and now at least it is the equivalent of doing the Kokoda Trail. Coffee would then be at the Wild Bean Coffee Shop.

Of late the brisk walk has become a stroll and the Red Arrow has become a sightseeing amble around the Botanic Gardens followed by coffee at the Wild Bean Café on Collins Ave. In reality the OGWG has become a coffee club and a great opportunity to meet and to share lies about service life, where is the next Lions Sausage Sizzle and who is going to which medical specialist next.

On Monday the comment was made that despite the overcast weather and the rain “You would not be dead for quids!” Oops, the penny then dropped that Peter Turner was gone and who do

we get to fill his slot in the 10 man Lotto syndicate? The black humour started? And we all copped it.

So please bear with me as this eulogy is not going to be a melancholy walk through Peter's life. It will be a celebration of the life of a friend, a mate, an infantry soldier, and a military policeman.

Peter was much more than these. He was a long time member of the Cairns RSL sub-branch and Club. Indeed for many years he was the go to man for matters veterans and RSL here in Cairns.

More of that later though!

Peter was easily defined by his email addresses.

BONDIBOY

'Bondiboy_1' told the world where he was born, where he grew up and where, in his moments of reverie, his heart was. He often spoke of sitting in The Rathouse or the front bar overlooking over Sydney Harbour and letting the world go by. For the life of us who knew him here we could not see why he thought The Rathouse overlooking Sydney Harbour with its view was better than this? [Point to the Mudflats]. Now I ask you?

Bondi was a great time in Peter's life and a source of many positive memories. He often extolled its place in his life and shared tweets and twits and Post from the North Bondi RSL. It gave him great satisfaction that it was an RSL sub-branch that was doing good work.

NUIDAT

'Nuidat@icloud' or Nuidat told the world that Peter was proud to have served in Vietnam and more so to have served there as a member of D Coy 5 RAR on its second tour in 1969/70. Peter had the good fortune to serve as the rear link radio operator for the then major, later Major General, Murray Blake. The two of them maintained contact over the years.

Murray wrote that "he could not have wished for anyone better as his rear link radio operator. He was steady under pressure - and we had our share of that - reliable, and went to great lengths to ensure we could get through (and there were occasions when I would not have minded being out of touch!)."

Peter's role was at times to read the mind of the company commander, comprehend the moment by moment changing

tactical situation and then in moments of action to convey the scene to the battalion commander and sometimes higher. No doubt Peter had to pacify those higher who were after ‘what is going on?’ or ‘get me Sunray’ NOW all the while the OC was indicating SIGN ACROSS THE THROAT, ‘I don’t want to talk to the CO or whoever’.

The urgency of Peter’s time as the rear link radio operator was brought home during the Battle of Binh Ba which occurred between the 6th and the 9th June 1969. D Coy fought a two day combined arms battle clearing the village just north of the Australian Nui Dat base. D Coy swept through the village twice while supported by helicopter gunships and artillery. In a 48 hour period the artillery fired over 2,000 rounds in support of both D Coy and B Coy 5 RAR. One Australian was KIA and eight WIA during the battle, whilst more than 90 VC and NVA soldiers were known to have been killed.

In such situations well trained and quick thinking radio operators are GOLD.

Murray Blake went on and said that, “As you know Peter related well with others and was therefore popular and respected by all. I cannot recall any complaint made against him and he had the wonderful ability to convey to BHQ a sense of what was happening when I was unable to take the handset. The fact that we stayed in regular contact after Vietnam is testimony to the respect and affection which I held for him and I will miss him”.

RAY WARD

Ray Ward, who was the 11 Platoon sig, wrote to me from Perth that Peter always claimed that Ray was a good sig only because he, Peter had taught him everything he knew. An ever so humble chap was our Peter. Ray went on to say that “Peter was certainly a man who had confidence in his ability and was a good mentor”.

Again Peter and Ray continued to chat regularly and to catch up at reunions – which Peter attended religiously.

Talking of religions and therefore the need to seek forgiveness for ones transgressions or ‘sins’ Peter, to this day has never sought forgiveness for transferring to the dark side post Vietnam. He joined the Military Police and the records show that not long

afterwards he went on a two year posting to the United Kingdom. Not that I am suggesting there was any untoward coercion on the part of the MPs mind you.

Peter often spoke of the two years in the UK and reminisced that it was a great posting from which he learnt so much. If you know your history the Australian MPs were in the UK at what has been described as the bloodiest years of the Irish Troubles. It would have been an interesting time to be there and working with the British Army as it rotated in and out of Northern Ireland along with the impact and uncertainty in England as well.

Peter served on in the Army until 1980 when he and Maree decided it was time to head north to Cairns.

In Cairns they developed property and business interests in a motel and dry cleaning. This gave Peter an appreciation of business and it was this that he was to bring to the next phase of his life.

Cairns RSL

Peter joined the Cairns RSL Sub-Branch Committee in 1996 and step-by-step became the President in 2002 where he stayed until 2012 when David Clifton took over. At the same time Peter was variously on the Club Committee and then it's President for three years. Peter and his mate Merv Hains brought the Cairns RSL into the modern era. It was as President of the RSL that Peter made his mark.

As was mentioned in the Cairns Post earlier this week Peter vision for the Cairns RSL is everywhere for us to see. Among other initiatives he was responsible for:

- a. Establishing the Day Club.**
- b. Computer courses**
- c. Care packages for the troops overseas.**
- d. The Tax Help Program.**
- e. Support for the Men's Shed.**
- f. Men's Peer Health Program,**

Peter's legacy however is more than the sum of these achievements.

It was Peter, his ideas that led to the proposal to plan the RSL Towers, which is still on the drawing board. It was and remains a matter of conflict and unbridled criticism of the State Branch of the RSL that it denied the sub-branch approval for the project. Peter never forgave or forgot.

It was Peter's ideas and drive that envisaged an open RSL Club where people could feel welcomed, all service and ex-service personnel, their families and friends and the citizens of Cairns.

Peter's particular emphasis was the support and welfare of the men and women of the ADF as they transitioned into civilian life. The very successful efforts of the Cairns Sub Branch PAWS office are in no small part due to his commitment and foresight.

About a two years ago Peter started talking about 'going south', a long trip, buy a caravan and a big vehicle to pull it all. This he did and sought out the many friends he had made along his life's journey. We received photos of he and the van parked beside a creek, a river or in a forest. We began to suspect that it was the same creek, the same river, the same forest and indeed that he was simply down the road. Unfortunately the journey was to

come to an end as he became ill, lost a kidney and then sold the caravan and vehicle and settled back into Cairns.

Peter's journey became a struggle from then on. He would join us for coffee, along with Baz, and remained positive. Baz remained the magnet for all and sundry in the various coffee shops Peter and all met in. Rusty from the Wild Bean is with us as Baz was a favourite there. The OGWG was originally old guys only but wives gradually crept into the walks and they were referred to as +1s. Baz became recognised as Peter's +1.

His final illness was sudden, trip to Brisbane to remove a growth and be back Monday he said. That was not to be so David Clifton, Merv Hains, Peter Sibree and I flew down there to have a final beer, present him with his RSL Life Members tie and say 'Good bye'. Murray Blake who lives in Brisbane was there within a hour of being advised of Peter's condition and also spent some time with his former radio operator. But as Merv Hains said the other day, 'the bugger came back to Cairns'. He was adamant he was returning to Cairns despite the protestations of all the medical advice.

His final days were spent in Cairns Private where again he shared final visits with his mates. As David Clifton writes Peter croaked that *“he’d love a James Squire 150 Lashes and a good yarn”*. On Thursday evening the beer and the yarn were duly provided and enjoyed. Peter then quietly faded away from consciousness

David Clifton wrote to me yesterday that he was in Bathurst in preparation for the Big Race. He said; *“that Peter would have said that he would be a fool to miss the Bathurst 1000 rather than attend the Memorial Service”*.

David writes; *“that while there while there are men around like Peter we’ll be okay”*.

I will leave the final word to Carmel Martin who had an interesting working relationship with Peter, both strong willed individuals who wanted the best for the Cairns RSL Sub-Branch and Club. She says that, *“Peter was an ideas man and a good bloke”*.

I, we are happy to call him a friend, a mate and a good man.

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