

AN ADDRESS BY GARRY SWAN - RYE HOTEL - 15 JUNE 2023

OCS PORTSEA - CLASS OF JUNE 1963 - 60th REUNION

Well classmates it has been 60 years since our graduation from the Officer Cadet School and 61 years since we entered the school to trained as Infantry Platoon Commanders and to develop our leadership potential. We were strapping young men, many still teenagers, including one impeccably dressed in a stylish suit complemented with a feathered pork pie hat. It doesn't seem that long ago but looking around at how some of us move now, we had better believe it. Even so, it is great to see you here tonight, some with your lovely ladies and I want to thank you John Scully for your initiative in organising this reunion which most of us feel will surely be our last.

So tonight I thought I would reflect on some of the more humorous and maybe not so humorous events that occurred during our 12 months at the school and while I'm at it, mention our progress post OCS. I title this address 'Memories of an Officer Cadet in the early sixties':

- We could not forget our arrival on the OCS buses direct from our assembly at the Army Club in St Kilda, being met by the RSM Paddy Brennan and immediately being ordered in an authoritative Irish brogue to move quickly off the buses, form ranks and double up directly to the lawn in front of the Dining Hall with heavy suitcases in hand, being constantly harassed by Paddy while stumbling all the way. A startling realisation of what our next 12 months was to become.
- Then that first night in the Ante Room of the Dining Hall where the senior class took it upon themselves to purposely demean certain of us by demanding we sing, recite a poem or tell a joke, harassing us while performing then shaming the performer to sit down mid performance. It was embarrassing for us all.
- For the first time we saw the definition of leadership hung conspicuously on the Ante Room wall. We were required to memorise this, and any member of the senior class would then ask us to recite the definition at any time. Trouble ensued if we couldn't. How many of us can recite that now? I know I can't.
- Next day we saw the senior class put through their paces on the parade ground to show what would be expected of us during the course. It was such an impressive performance superbly led by their CSM Eru Manuera.
- We were soon to discover what Internal Economy was. It meant our class, the junior class, equipping ourselves with shovels, rakes, brooms, and anything else that would tidy the lawns, roads, and gardens with our labour on a Saturday morning, suitably supervised by an Engineer officer, Captain Lake.
- We learnt very quickly the term 'Extra Drill' or ED, which was awarded by any instructor or assistant instructor for even a minor indiscretion on our part and was

taken immediately after reveille. The simple call was "Take one or take two". Defaulters were required to be on the parade ground in battle order within ten minutes for thirty minutes of drill, sometimes in the morning dark. It was hell in winter, but we soon learnt to slip quietly out of bed prior to reveille, dressing in the dark, then hopping back into bed fully clothed waiting for the bugle call.

- As well we discovered the OCS meaning of a 'leap'. It was an order on parade to change into a new uniform, dismiss and report back on parade within five minutes. Extra drills were awarded for late arrivals and improper or untidy dress. We dreaded such calls as they usually ended in extra drills.
- We were forbidden to wear watches on parade, so we feared a call by Paddy Brennan on morning parade "Prove those wearing watches". We wore long sleeved shirts, so usually there was no response nor movement as we attempted to sense our wrists. But we knew then that someone was in for extra drills. Then Paddy would say "Brandon, what's that on your left wrist"? Then Brandon in a nervous voice "A watch sir". "Take two Brandon". Paddy knew the answer well beforehand as his practice was to quietly peruse us assembling before marching on parade, but we did not know that then. We wondered how he managed to see watches from a distance in front of and into our ranks.
- Our more prominent assistant instructor Jock Richardson was known to mispronounce names in his broad Scots accent, perhaps purposely. When on parade he said, "Did you shave this morning Kinspel"? "Yes sir, the name is Knispel sir". The quick response from Jock "Are you arguing with me Kinspel"? Then again, "Stand still Zaggin". "The name is Zagon sir" said Steve, and so it goes. Now a few more of Jock's classic words "You're so smug Wickham".
- There was that frustrated verbal outburst from Paddy in total disbelief, when one of our senior class unfurled the national flag upside down on the morning parade. Not one of us dared to make the same mistake when it was our turn to raise and unfurl the flag.
- The school received a lecture from our Commandant Colonel Coleman on morning parade the day after Kevin Plew, another of our senior class, while in the presence of the Commandant and laying prostrate on the ground in a state of complete exhaustion following a failed attempt at the two mile run in 16 minutes, told him in no uncertain terms where to stick his OCS if that's what you have to do to become an officer. Kevin fully expected to be cut from the course, but he graduated with the rest of his class thanks to the Commandant who had told us he didn't mind, as the run was all about character building.
- How tough was the two-mile run? It took years of training and failures for Roger Bannister and John Landy to break the four-minute mile and that was done in running shoes, singlet and shorts on a flat athletic track. They both finally

achieved it to world acclaim in 1954, only 8 years before we were required to run two miles in 16 minutes on an undulating bitumen road, fully clothed, in full battle order with gaiters, boots AB, full water bottle, metal helmet and a heavy rifle. Could Bannister and Landy have run two miles in 8 minutes then? Absolutely not. They were as exhausted as Kevin Plew at the end of their one mile run and could not have run on for another mile.

- Doug Byers will recall that he and I ran the last half mile of the run together, with Neville Smethurst dressed in running gear and sandshoes hot on our heels urging us on. We crossed the line totally exhausted with just seconds to spare on our first attempt. The thought of consequent supervised training runs around Jarman Oval in preparation for another attempt was too much for us to bear.
- Well etched in my mind is the timed run or scramble up and down the sand covered Agony Hill, only to have Ray Keane announce with a wry smile “Nice try Armour - FAIL”. Thankfully we did it in sports gear, but having passed the test did not mean you would not be called upon to do it again in the future.
- Also exhaustive was the 15 mile forced march in full battle order with weapons along the roadside from Dromana around Balcombe, Mount Martha and Safety Beach back to Dromana. Foot blisters were many and painful for days after.
- Truck exits were spectacular. In full battle order with rifle, we were required to take a running leap off the back of a 4x4 high set truck travelling at 20 mph. Those who ran and leapt with purpose remained upright on hitting the ground, but those who hesitated ended up flat on the ground following a bone jarring awkward backwards roll. Thankfully we did it on the grass of Jarman Oval.
- While on the OCS bus travelling to a TEWT in October 1962, we pulled over on the roadside outside of Dromana to listen to a transistor radio broadcast by President Kennedy concerning the Cuba Missile Crisis. Our instructors then discussed the seriousness of the situation and the potential for Australian involvement. Thankfully it was sensibly defused.
- We attended a swimming carnival at Flinders Naval Depot HMAS Cerberus in our senior term and were amazed to see Roger Wickham set some freestyle records in the pool. To our surprise our Commandant came second to Roger in each event with Tony Poole third. What we didn't know was that Roger, as a member of the Kirra Surf Life Saving Club, was an Australian Champion freestyle swimmer. At the Australian Surf Lifesaving Championships in 1959 he won the individual Under 18 Junior Surf Belt Championship, came third in a junior team event that same year and came second in a senior team event in 1961. Little wonder then that he swam so well in a flat pool with no crashing waves, without a large canvas belt around his waist and towing a lengthy rope behind. No doubt

his records in the pool have since been broken, but in retrospect it was an insight into where his daughter Tracey Wickham gained her record - breaking talent.

- There were open showers at Cerberus but not too many of them. I was rinsing off under a cold shower when I felt a warm stream on my legs. On turning I saw Wickham urinating on my legs. I leapt out of the shower voicing my concern with expletives, then noticing who was in the next shower. It was Colonel Coleman with a quizzical look on his face, but not a word. Wickham laughing, advised it was an old surf club trick to move others out of the few showers.
- We looked forward to the Friday night dancing classes arranged by Mrs Hockings. When there were not enough young ladies to be bussed in from local areas to be partners, we had to dance with other cadets who could dance. I well remember learning the foxtrot and quickstep dancing with Roger Wickham.
- Dare I mention a few nicknames that were relevant at the time. First 'Stan the man' Coleman, then some instructors apart from Paddy and wee Jock already mentioned. There was Barney Rubble aka Captain Hubble. Rusty Vaille aka Captain Vaille, Blue Keldie aka Captain Keldie, Teeth Donaghue aka Captain Donaghue, Johnnie Walker aka Captain Walker and Blue Lake aka Captain Lake. Then classmates Broady Broadribb, Gopher Moore, Splinter Maughan, Mobat Byers, Tanks Armour, Joffa Brandon, Gus Sibson, Braces Bracey, Dibhole Dibble, Percy Swan and Alfred E Neuman "What me worry"? Simpson.
- During our studies we read and absorbed books such as the new series of Army textbooks 'The Pentropic Division in Battle', 'Shenandoah Valley', 'A Message to Garcia' and discussed them at length. We memorised unit organisation charts and their weapons. We learnt the phonetic alphabet and became conversant with radio voice procedure words such as wilco, locstat, sitrep, repeat all before, words words twice twice, figures one niner, sunray, sheldrake, holdfast, bluebell and roger out. We learnt to 'Appreciate the Situation', not to 'Situat the Appreciation' and issue orders utilising the acronym SMEAC.
- We developed weapon proficiency with and learnt how to maintain the recently introduced 7.62 mm SLR and GPMG M60. Also the 9 mm F1 Owen sub machine gun and Browning pistol. As well we dug trenches at the Target Range in Harrison's Bowl to install the new Austfire electrically operated target system. We fired the 20 pounder gun of the Centurian Tank at Puckapunyal and nervously dived for cover when the mortar demonstration resulted in a 'cook off', with the bomb landing only 20 yards in front of us. Luckily it failed to detonate.
- There was abseiling over the cliffs at Mt Martha, the river crossing using coracles and rafts made of local trees and twenty litre plastic jerrycans with shovels for paddles in murky Balcombe Creek, unarmed combat training and jumping into Port Phillip Bay from the OCS pier to swim ashore fully clothed with sandshoes.

- On overnight exercises in Wilson's Folly it was always comical to see Wally Campbell jump up and down on our weapon pits to test the strength of the 18 inches of overhead cover we were required to place over the pits to protect us from artillery and mortar fire. Jock Stewart did the same, but with a stick of gelignite. Wally also had the happy knack of bringing rain with him whenever he attended such exercises. He would simply twitch his fingers with a broad unwelcome smile and down it came, much to our disappointment.
- During our first term in August 1962, the bulldozers and builders arrived to build number 3 Accommodation Block and the Assembly Hall. Both were completed within five months, ready for the January 1963 entry. We did not realise then that the Australian component of our junior class would be significantly higher in number than that of our class, in fact 60% higher. Then in our senior term in March 1963, with a large cloth model of the terrain laid out on the floor of the Assembly Hall and a recorded introduction by a historic ABC radio news report of the time, we studied the siege and ultimate defeat of the French Indochina Forces in Vietnam by the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, only nine years earlier. This was the first time such study had been conducted at OCS and in retrospect we did not appreciate the underlying significance of it. So we were the first graduating class to have our thoughts directed towards the then divided Vietnam as a theatre of war and to understand the tactics of the Viet Minh. It later became clear that our government knew in early 1962 that a US led war in South Vietnam was proposed to deny a communist North Vietnamese intent to reunify the country under their rule and that Australia was likely to become heavily involved due to a belief in the so called 'Domino Theory'. Little did we know that in just two years some of us would be fighting a war in South Vietnam.
- On the 10th of February 1963 Graeme Maughan celebrated his 21st birthday. He and some of his better drinking mates decided to slip into Sorrento to celebrate at Aunty Grace's Continental Hotel. It was a Sunday. Time got away from them and they didn't arrive back into camp until after lights out, whereupon they were met by the duty officer. In the aftermath sergeants and corporals were stripped of their rank and others given extra drills. Oddly Graeme received no punishment. Asked why much later, he simply offered that he had friends in high places. The duty officer was Lt Hockings, the Quartermaster and previous school RSM, but more importantly an avid tennis player who enjoyed competing with Graeme.
- There was that most uncomfortable return trip by hired coaches with rather ordinary seats, from Portsea to Canberra to parade with combined military colleges on Manuka Oval for the Queen's visit in March 1963. We bunked in with RMC staff cadets for the week and weren't we surprised at some of their antics.
- Along the way we found we had our share of sports stars. There was the fleet of foot Denis Pegg in the 440 yards dash, Brian Gore and George Kereama in the

one mile and cross country run, Roger Wickham in swimming, Graeme Maughan and Jeff Brandon in tennis, Ron Irwin in rugby union and Bill Kaine in gymnastics.

- I was lucky enough to be allocated a room in the new number 3 block in January 1963 as a section corporal. Doug Byers was my 2ic. One morning at reveille with only weeks to graduation, as usual we all leapt out of bed as the duty officer swept through to ensure we were up and about, but Doug decided it was too cold out as winter was approaching, so slipped back into bed. Soon after, the duty officer appeared at Doug's door and found him fast asleep. "Take two Byers", was the response. It was one last hurrah for Doug.
- At the end of each term, we endured an excursion away to Camp Training in a State Forest where over a two - week period we developed our leadership talent and practiced our understanding of platoon minor tactics in the field using fellow officer cadets as troops. The training and testing was continuous and therefore exhausting, but we gained much practical experience which had so much to do with whether we graduated as officers or were cut from the course.
- Our class graduated 45 officers as 2nd Lieutenants on Friday the 14th of June 1963, 37 Australians and 8 New Zealanders, with our top student Colour Sergeant Ron Cross being awarded the Governor General's Medal. Following the Graduation Parade we enjoyed a colourful Graduation Ball in the new Assembly Hall with our family or partners pinning on our 'pips' at midnight on the Friday night, farewell drinks in the Officers' Mess on the Saturday morning, then away to some well-earned leave prior to reporting to our allocated Corps establishments for further training in our intended roles.
- The 8 New Zealanders in class were John Bain, Graham Bennett, Alec Bracey, Ron Cross, Bill Flanagan, Brian Gore, George Kereama and Warren Moore.
- We were fortunate in having first class instructional staff, from our charismatic Commandant, very professional Senior Instructor Major Phil Bennett, an astute while entertaining RSM, to the experienced, likeable instructors and assistant instructors, with particular emphasis on Jock Richardson. Thank you all.
- It is appropriate now that I take time to mention those classmates who have earned honours and awards during their subsequent military careers and to describe their actions which took place very soon after graduation:
 - Doug Byers was awarded the Military Cross "for his gallant service" as an Infantry Platoon Commander in 3 RAR, for his much-publicised copybook ambush and subsequent defeat of a significantly larger Indonesian Insurgent force in Sarawak Borneo on the 15th of June 1965 during 'Konfrontasi' against our ally Malaysia. His citation reads in part: "The manner in which the ambush was laid, the patient control exercised during the waiting period of three days and the final successful contact with the

enemy, was due to the outstanding ability, resourcefulness, leadership, control and initiative shown by 2nd Lt Byers. Although heavily outnumbered, he coolly and in complete control of the situation, planned the evacuation of the wounded and the withdrawal of the ambush force to the patrol base". In the initial contact, then calling in his artillery fire support, Doug accounted for many enemy KIA with his only casualties being two of his platoon wounded. A very professional result for a young subaltern.

- Adrian Roberts was awarded the Medal for Gallantry, which replaced the Military Cross, for his actions in South Vietnam as the Commander of 3 Troop 1 APC Squadron, in leading the armoured cavalry assault with reinforcements aboard, that finally forced the enemy withdrawal from the Battle of Long Tan on the 18th of August 1966. In his after action report the CO of 6 RAR wrote; "The surprise achieved by the APCs of 3 Troop 1 APC Sqn which broke up the movement of an estimated two companies of VC to the rear of Delta Company undoubtedly saved the day. Lt Roberts deserves the highest praise for individual gallantry".
- Bill Flanagan was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions in South Vietnam as a helicopter pilot with 161 [Independent] Recce Flight. His citation reads in part "On the 16th of November 1969 Captain Flanagan located an occupied enemy bunker system. He maintained close surveillance of the bunkers flying at tree top level for six hours while being continually engaged by enemy fire, directing artillery fire and three air strikes onto the system until all enemy opposition ceased. On the night of the 3rd of December 1969, he volunteered to search for a missing unit aircraft shot down at night by enemy ground fire. He located the crash site facilitated by aerial flares and hovered his helicopter in known enemy territory without regard for his own safety, to ascertain the fate of the crew".
- Graeme Maughan was awarded a Queen's Commendation for "Valuable Services in the Air" by the RAAF for his service as Army Liaison Officer and Flying Instructor at No 1 Flying Training School Point Cook during 1969 and 1970. In the Queen's Birthday List of 1977 Graeme, as Senior Instructor Advanced Flying Training Wing at the School of Army Aviation Oakey and qualified as both a fixed and rotary wing pilot, was the first Army Aviator to be awarded the RAAF Air Force Cross. His citation for "Outstanding Service to Army Aviation" reads in part "The enviable flying safety record of the School of Army Aviation is the direct result of his influence on the standards and attitudes of the staff and students he commanded and trained. Major Maughan has shown himself to be an Army Aviator of outstanding skill and knowledge whose achievements reflect great credit on himself, his Corps and the Army".

During his earlier career in South Vietnam as an Artillery Officer and Section Commander in 105 Field Battery, due to an urgent and unexpected call for a Regimental Fire Mission, Graeme was immediately required to step up to act as Gun Position Officer and take control of the fire of all six guns of his Battery in support of Delta Company 6RAR during the Battle of Long Tan. Over a period of three hours in a tropical downpour, fading light and a sickening fog of cordite, the Regiment which included 103 Field Battery and the NZ 161 Field Battery, delivered 3,198 rounds onto the battlefield with a supporting US Medium Battery delivering 242 rounds. Such rapid, accurate and sustained fire was later stated as being responsible for the slowing of the enemy attacks and the breaking up of their formations, thus preventing Delta Company from being overrun and making possible their gallantly earned victory. Indeed, Graeme and his gunners had contributed significantly to that victory. Regrettably such professionalism displayed by the gunners went unrewarded following the battle. Except on return to Nui Dat, Sgt Bob Buick of 11 Platoon Delta Company, his Platoon Commander being KIA in the initial contact, shook the hand of a 105 Field Battery gunner and simply said 'Thanks mate'.

That said it all. In his book 'The Battle of Long Tan', Peter Fitzsimons wrote "It was an injustice that no medals were awarded to the artillery".

- As well Dave Jamison has been appointed a Member of the Order of Australia [AM] and Adrian Roberts awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia [OAM]. We can be justly proud of the professional performances of these classmates and I feel sure that over the ensuing years there have been less heralded instances of derring-do by other members of our class. One incident I can recall is a classmate being amused by a radio 3UZ 'Nicest Listener Award', when in April 1973 as a depositor on a pay day lunch break from Army Headquarters Albert Park Barracks, he personally assailed, disarmed and apprehended a man with a rifle in the act of robbing the St Kilda Branch of the State Savings Bank of Victoria. Ironically it was the classmate who got the cash. He received a \$1,000 bank reward, a very helpful sum in those days and a substantial bank housing loan without first having to qualify for it.
- During their careers certain classmates were posted back to OCS as instructors; namely Ed Simpson, Bob Ivey, Phil Wailes, John Moller, Dave Jamison and Adrian Roberts. Then in 1971 following his stint at Point Cook, Graeme Maughan as an Army Aviator found himself teaching Peace Administration and Military Law at RMC Duntroon. However the staff cadets chose to refer to him respectfully as "feathers", an epithet he found amusing.
- As well I believe most if not all have seen active service in South Vietnam, some in other theatres such as Malaysia including Borneo, and many enjoyed overseas

postings or colleges, schools and courses in places such as the UK, USA, Indonesia, Canada, Singapore, PNG and earned many accolades along the way. Surely our class has served both the Australian and New Zealand Armies well.

- No doubt our resident spook and international man of mystery, Steve Zagon's career has been more interesting and exciting than many of ours. I recall a concerned Steve noticing a car tailing him home from the city after work. It was me, as I had seen him pass slowly by at a traffic light. He drove into his driveway and sat pensively in his car. I parked on the other side of the road, purposely walked over to his car and rapped on his closed window. Only then recognising me, winding down his window he said "Jesus Perce, I nearly shot you". I only wanted to invite him to our 30th reunion dinner at the Military Club.
- While none of us attained the lofty heights of General or Brigadier rank, we did have Colonels, Lt Colonels and Majors. In fact many could have reached higher rank but for their decision to resign their appointment to the Regular Army for family stability or to accept offers from industry they simply could not refuse.
- It is appropriate now to acknowledge those classmates who sadly are no longer with us. They are John Bain - Jeff Brandon - Lloyd Cooper - Peter Edwards - Ron Irwin - Mel Knispel - Graeme Leslie - John Moller - Vin Noonan - Adrian Roberts and our CSM and Military Board Prize winner Ed Simpson.
- As well, we must remember that one of our instructors Bruce McQualter as Major, OC B Coy 5 RAR, on the 5th of March 1967 died of wounds sustained as the result of a 'Jumping Jack' mine incident while on active service in South Vietnam. May they each rest in peace.
- Our training was tough, very tough, but it instilled in us a sense of duty, honour, loyalty, discipline, endurance and respect for others. It is these values that we relied upon as officers and which have shaped us into the men we are today. Demonstrated by both application and achievements since graduation, our class of June 1963 has surely honoured the school motto 'Loyalty and Service'.

In closing, I want to say that our classmates are the best bunch of blokes I have ever had the good fortune to meet and serve with and I cherish those years. I have had only two jobs in my lifetime and for each enjoyable career I owe much to the Army, as I am sure most of us do. First the Australian Army for 22 years then the Shell Company of Australia, a large multinational company with an interesting culture, where John Scully and I worked in management with many other colleagues for almost as long as we spent in the Army. However, my Army mates remain my true mates. So I leave you with memories of mates and events of a wonderful time in a very different era, and personally say; thanks for the memories, every one of you.