

## AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

### **Peter Kenneth Sharp, MID**

**25 February 1942 – 18 August 2019**

**By Lieutenant Colonel Brian Armour (Retd)**



Peter Sharp passed away on Sunday 18 August 2019 after a battle with lung cancer and COPD.

He was a valued friend and colleague for well over 56 years which included our time together in the Army and in our subsequent civilian roles going through to our retirement.

Peter was born in Adelaide on 25 Feb 42 to Ken and Audrey Sharp. He had a younger sister, Moira who lives in Canberra. He grew up in Adelaide, but I know he spent most of his early holidays on the Yorke Peninsula (he knew a fair bit about things rural). He was educated at St. Ignatius College, then at Norwood in Adelaide. He was a revered School Captain and participated in every available sport while at school.

He entered the Royal Military College at Duntroon in Jan 60 and graduated in Dec 63. I first met Peter at Duntroon in Mar 63. I was in the Senior Class at the Officer Cadet School at Portsea and we travelled to Canberra to be part of a parade at Manuka Oval of cadets from the RAN College, RMC, OCS and the RAAF Academy for The Queen on her second visit to Australia.

Preparations and rehearsals took about 10 days and we were billeted in rustic huts at Duntroon and ate in the Cadets Mess. The Mess routine was a bit of a culture shock to the OCS lads but fortunately I was assigned to Sergeant Sharp's table which was a model of polite civility compared to the antics going on all around us. I realised at that early stage that Peter Sharp was "different".

Quite by chance we were both commissioned into the Royal Australian Artillery and we attended the Young Officers (YO) Course at North Head for three months in early 1964. Peter's ticket in the gene pool was such that he looked a lot older than a 21-year-old; his fellow RMC classmates constantly referred to him as the "Old Bugger" which he endured with no problem at all. He was also referred to as "Slack Sharp"; to be fair he was always laid back and relaxed and didn't sweat the "small stuff" which was not the required form for dynamic Young Officers (more on that later). During the YO's Course Peter married Beverley Hughson and after the course he joined 4 Field Regiment at Wacol in Queensland.

We were to meet again in 1965 when he was posted to Holsworthy to join A Field Battery to proceed to Malaysia later in 1965. I had been at Holsworthy since Jul 63 and had also been nominated to go with A Battery.

We went to Malacca in Oct 65 and remained there until Oct 67 serving under command of 45 Light Regiment RA and then 6 Light Regiment RA. Most of us were newlywed and proceeding on a big adventure. The majority of the Battery Officers (Rod and Marcia Althaus, Peter and Beverley, Bob and Lea Maher, Des and Gwen Mueller and me and my

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good wife Sharon) lived in a compact housing estate at Jalan Tay Boon Seng which was halfway between Malacca town and the Garrison at Camp Terendak. We socialised, worked hard and car-pooled enjoying each other's Company; particularly copious satay sticks and Tiger beer at the Malacca Padang on Sunday nights. Peter and Beverley gave birth to Khan in Jun 65 just before we left and Rogan in Jan 67 while we were in Malaysia.

We returned to Australia and found ourselves back at Holsworthy posted to 12 Field Regiment which was proceeding to South Vietnam early in 1968. Peter was posted to 104 Field Battery as a Forward Observer (FO) Captain; under the command of Mick Crawford.

I remained with A Battery which eventually came under command of the newly formed 19 Composite Regiment. Peter left with 104 Battery in May 68 and spent his initial time as an FO with D Company 4 RAR.

A few months later Peter became the Battery Captain which put him in command of the Gun Position. He had a good reputation for getting things done quickly and with a minimum of fuss which was essential in the circumstances of the time. The Gunners were particularly enamoured of the Roy Orbison song "Workin' for the Man" during this period; the song remained as a personal favourite of Peter for many years thereafter.

I joined 104 Battery in Nov 68 as a mid-term replacement, so we served together for another 6 months until the Battery returned to Australia.

For his service in South Vietnam, Peter was Mentioned in Despatches (MID).

On return to Australia the Sharp's were posted to the School of Artillery where Peter took up the mantle of being a Gunnery Instructor. Following the trend, we joined them when I came back from Vietnam to be the Adjutant of the School in Dec 69. Selene was born in Feb 70 while they were at North Head.

After this Peter was posted back to Holsworthy as Battery Commander 102 Field Battery and after that the Sharp's headed off to England where Peter was the Exchange Instructor at the School of Artillery at Larkhill on Salisbury Plain. They returned to Australia and Peter was posted as the SO2 (Personnel and Training) at the Directorate of Artillery in Canberra.

I took over this job from Peter in 1976 and I was very impressed by the vision he had for the future development of Artillery officers. I was able to put his plans into effect and provide a quantum leap in terms of how we managed our people. This was a glimpse of the later talent and vision for organizational reform which was to surface as Peter's later career in the APS would evidence.

Peter went off to Staff College at Queenscliff in 1976 and in Jan 77 returned to Canberra where he was a Member of a team to review the direction of Officer training in the Australian Army; the Regular Officer Development Committee (RODC). Gillian was born in Canberra in Mar 77.

In Apr 79, Peter and Beverley experienced some marital difficulties which were in progress when we left Canberra in Jun 79 to proceed to Canada on a posting. We lost touch with the Sharp's for a few years, but Lesley and Khan have provided much of the background from this point. They eventually separated and Beverley went to Melbourne in 1980 with all four children remaining in Canberra with Peter during 1980-81.

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His last army posting was in Canberra from 1978-81 as Staff Officer Secretariat in the Industrial Division of the Department of Defence. After 6 years of part time attendance, Peter was awarded a BA (Hons) in Political Science in Apr 81. He resigned from the Army in Jul 81 in the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, though he joined the Army Reserve for a time after his discharge attaining the rank of Colonel.

Selene and Gillian moved to Melbourne to live with Beverley in Jan 82 while Khan and Rogan remained in Canberra with Peter in 1982-83; though Khan later moved to Melbourne in 1984 to attend University. Peter and Beverley were formally divorced in Mar 84.

Peter had joined the APS after leaving the Army and worked in the SEA and Pacific area of Defence Strategic and International Policy Division (SIP) from 1981-88. Lesley Fisk returned to Canberra in 1983 and worked in SIP with Peter. They became friends (then partners) and Lesley moved into the Sharp Canberra home in Weetangera in early 1985. We reconnected with Peter in 1984 and became friends with Lesley from their earliest days together.

Peter's abilities as a visionary reformer were no doubt recognised when he became Defence Regional Secretary in Queensland and then Victoria from 1989-93 which heralded a decade of reforming Defence Corporate Services and support. Both Peter and Lesley spent 3 months in Sydney in 1994 when Rogan became critically ill for a period (now well recovered). This also brought the family closer together and Beverley became a regular and treasured attendee at many family functions over the years in Canberra and Melbourne.

From 1993-95, Peter was the Assistant Secretary for the DSTO in Canberra delivering Corporate Services while reforming that organization. In 1996-97, he was the Inspector General for Defence also in Canberra and busied himself with Program Evaluation, prioritising Audit targets, ethics awareness, fraud investigation and management change.

From 1997-2001 as Head of Defence Corporate Support he managed all Defence Corporate Services being responsible for 5000 staff and a budget of \$900 million. He restructured extensively, saving some \$200 million in overheads and set up Industry-based contracts for base support worth \$1.2 billion. For these achievements, he was awarded the Centenary Medal.

In 2001-02 he was appointed by the CDF and the Secretary of Defence as the Head of the Defence Strategic Workforce Planning Review with the formal report delivered in Sep 02.

His final appointment in the APS was FAS Personnel in Defence which he held from 2003-06. In this role, he worked successfully with the Unions to ensure that Defence civilians won a leading-edge Agreement earning the great respect of the Union Representatives, Employees and Senior Management. Peter was a great mentor and used these skills to great effect with the Senior Leadership Cohort while continuing his commitment to workforce planning and the total workforce concept. He fostered strong relationships between Personnel and Finance as well as the Defence community Organization that supported family support in the event of emergencies and tragedies.

He formally retired in Jun 06 thus ending 46 years of service in a wide variety of Defence related roles.

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Perhaps, not surprisingly, Peter had an active retirement. He had been appointed as the Defence nominee to the Australian Bravery Decorations Council in 2001 and remained on the Council until 2016. He was appointed as a Director on the Board of the Defence Housing Authority heading the Audit and Property Committee until 2013. He was also a Specialist Associate with Aadi Defence Pty. Ltd which provides specialist advice in new technologies and complex project management. Peter had a keen interest in racehorses being a breeder, owner and racegoer and was on the Board of the Queanbeyan Racing Club; one of the feature races of the Year is the Audrey Sharp Memorial Handicap. The Sharp's in general were pretty handy on the tennis court. When we were in Malacca, Peter and a young National Service Officer, John Austin won the Malacca State Doubles Title. John had joined us in mid 1966 and had been the Australian Junior Singles holder which was a bit of a bonus. Peter was an active tennis player until late in his life and became the President of the Forrest Tennis Club.

On their return to Canberra in 1993, Peter and Lesley purchased a heritage Government bungalow in Barton and extended it to create a large family home where (due in no small part to Lesley's culinary skills) they entertained frequently. In 1994, Peter and Lesley purchased a beach house at Potato Point on the NSW South Coast where Peter could pursue his passion for beach fishing. The house was always available to family and friends and was a holiday haven for Peter's children and their twelve grandchildren. Lesley's support to Peter and his extended family and friends over the years they spent together cannot be underestimated.

His MID and Centenary Medal have been mentioned but he was also awarded the Vietnam Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, AASM (SVN and Malaysia), ASM (SE Asia), DFSM, ADM. NM and the Pinjat Jasa Malaysia

Peter was one of my closer friends from the Army; we had similar views on many issues, served together more than was usual given the intermittent nature of Service life and we kept in close touch in retirement until his final days. We remain close friends with Beverley and Lesley and their respective families and have experienced the pleasure of our children growing up together. He will be seriously missed as the years we have left roll on.

I am grateful for the advice and inputs I received from Lesley and Khan in putting this tribute to Peter's life on the record.