



The Scheyvillian

Prepared on behalf of the OTU Association National Committee

OTU Association National Newsletter, No. 3, 2019

Officer Training Unit, Scheyville, NSW 1965-1973
A Newsletter for all Scheyvillians



Timothy Andrew 'Tim' Fischer AC, 3 May 1946 – 29 August 2019
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Vale Tim Fischer (3/66)- Army Officer (Peter Whitelaw, 3/66)

Much has been written about Tim since his death on the 29 August 2019. Many journalists and TV programs have covered his long and distinguished career and ALL of the commentary has been favourable. Therefore, this article is only about Tim's career as an Army Officer.

Tim's birthdate of 3 May 1946 was drawn in the National Service ballot and he reported at Wagga in July 1966 where he "got on a bus for 1RTB at Kapooka where all the yelling started". It snowed at Kapooka the next day.

As Recruit Training commenced the opportunity to apply for Officer Training appealed to Tim. He applied and was successful in the challenging selection process. Selection Board reports included "tall lean farm boy", "should make a sound officer" and "will worry".



On arrival at Scheyville and stepping off the bus, he experienced, as did the rest of us (Class 3/66), the loud directive voice of RSM Larry Moon giving him an inkling of what was to occur at OTU. No need to explain to us Officer Cadets what happened during the 22 weeks that followed. We all know that we were stretched to the limit – and beyond – with training, field exercises, sports, lectures and discipline. Sixteen hours a day for 6 days a week with very few leave opportunities.

A few classmates had observed Tim's 'country' style; one said "Tim seemed to have two left feet and was square-gaiting", another said he walked like a farmer; "he lifted his feet too high, like he was walking through wet grass", and yet another (not to be named) said; "he was bumbling, shy and gawky". I have a recollection of showing Tim how to lace his boots the army way instead of farmer style.

Commandant Colonel Geddes observed that Tim; "has a quiet personality and tended to handle subordinates with persuasion", perhaps a portent of a future politician. Others observed that Tim "came out of his shell and became more gregarious".



Eighty-two young men commenced as Class 3 of 1966 and 56 graduated as Second Lieutenants in December, Tim graduated 8th in the class and was awarded the Gordon Sharp Memorial Prize for showing the greatest improvement in fieldwork. Gordon Sharp was the first OTU graduate to be killed in action at the Battle of Long Tan on 18 August 1966. His death was conveyed to us during our training and was a salutary message about the seriousness of our future roles.

In early 1967, Tim was posted to 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment and spent the next 9 months at Holsworthy Barracks. He was keen to serve in Vietnam, but he was told he would have to extend his service for 9 months if he was to go. His parents hit the roof, but he did it.

He landed in Vietnam in March 1968 as Transport Officer for 1RAR and into the heat and dust. A few weeks after settling into 1ATF the Task Force began establishing Fire Support Base Coral north of Saigon on the 12 May 1968. About 400 North Vietnamese troops attacked with rockets, mortars and small arms, killing five Australians and wounding eight. 2Lt Fischer was sent the next day as a reinforcement to command a section of the perimeter and to oversee resupply. Tim was digging in when the enemy

attacked again on the 16 May with mortars and an assault, killing another five Australians. Tim's hootchie was only a few metres from the ammunition supply dump that the enemy were targeting. Tim looked over the edge of his pit and a piece of shrapnel pierced his right shoulder and small pieces hit his chest and forehead. Bleeding, he was told by his Signaller to "pull his head in before he got it shot off". Tim was medevaced out by helicopter to Bien Hoa and stitched up.

While convalescing he took an Iroquois flight destined for Vung Tau, but it was diverted well into enemy territory to pick up a wounded American GI. The chopper crew were engaged in an intense fire fight with Tim on board without a weapon. He said it was his most frightening experience in Vietnam. Years later Tim repeatedly recalled that battle with a shiver of fear and called it a "cacophony of experience".

He had some R&R and was then made Platoon Commander of 7 Platoon, Charlie Company. They conducted patrol operations from Nui Dat with frequent enemy contacts with a number of casualties. His men liked Tim. They said he was always concerned about his soldiers, he got up first and went to bed last and made sure they were all looked after. In October 1968 Tim was hospitalised with malaria. You may have seen the TV clip where he wished the folks back home a happy Christmas.

After nearly a year in Vietnam Tim was shipped back to Australia and was demobbed in March 1969. He then pursued his long interest in politics.



In 1992, Tim spoke at one of our OTU lunches and said "On reflection, the truth of the matter is that for all the severe hardships endured, for all the other aspects of Scheyville, good and bad - but mostly good - the OTU graduate emerged with a sense of determination and unity of purpose, a sense of motivation which might be loosely summarised as the Spirit of Scheyville. So far as I am personally concerned, I place on record that undoubtedly my Scheyville experience was a key factor which has caused me to rise to become federal Leader of the National Party and one of four federal parliamentary party leaders in Australia today. It caused me to strive for additional goals and make that extra effort and commitment."

Tim never forgot his Scheyville experience and wore his OTU badge on most public occasions. We are saddened to lose Tim and we offer our condolences to Judy, Dominic and Harrison. (Some content drawn from "The Boy from Boree Creek" by Peter Rees)

Fellow Platoon Commander at 1 RAR, John Salter, wrote, in answer to the question:

So, confirming that Tim was actually the 1 RAR Transport Officer and was at Coral during the first few days of the attack from 12th until wounded on 16th?

No, as Transport Officer he was not at Coral on the 12th but came up later to assist in resupply etc. Not sure of exact date of arrival but probably 13 or 14th. He was there for the second attack on the night 15/16 and was wounded early on the 16th. He was Medivaced initially to Bien Hoa, stitched up and then to the Australian Hospital Vung Tau for 2 weeks to recuperate. He then went to 7 Pl C Coy as Pl Comd and stayed with that Pl until the Bn returned to Australia on HMAS Sydney in Feb 69 and was discharged Mar 69. He had extended his time to stay with the Bn.

Post-Army

In 1970, post-National Service, Tim was elected to the NSW Parliament at the age of 24, then in 1984 he won the Federal seat of Farrer in Southern NSW and six years later became the Leader of the National Party, a position he held for nine years.

Among his achievements was arguing the case for the government's gun control laws, particularly among rural voters, that followed the 1996 Port Arthur massacre.

After resigning from politics in 2001, Tim worked for various charities connected to autism and veteran's affairs. He was appointed Australia's Ambassador to the Holy See in Rome in 2008.

Tim is survived by his wife Judy and sons Harrison and Dominic.

Tim was a great supporter of the OTU-A and was regularly seen wearing his OTU badge at non-military events.

Funeral



Following his passion for trains, Tim's casket was transported on a train to Albury for his funeral. He was met by a contingent of Scheyvillians with an OTU Flag. The State Funeral for Tim Fischer AC was held at the Albury Entertainment Centre, Swift Street, Albury on Thursday 29 March at 1.00pm. After the service Scheyvillians met at the Board Room at the SS&A in Albury, a short distance from the service site, for afternoon tea. There were 17 attendees were from the OTU-A and a number of veterans from the FSB Coral battle.



Scheyvillians at Tim Fischer's post-funeral gathering
Robin Hunt (3/69), Terry Earle (3/66), Paul Ford (2/71), Peter Whitelaw (3/66), Brian Cooper (3/69), Frank Miller (4/67), Gerry Pels (4/71), Don McNaught (4/69), Noel Osborne (4/66), Les Myers (2/65), Wal Hall (2/68), Bruce Selleck (2/70) and Nick Israel (2/70).