

One of the Men who Guided Us – ‘Rocky’ Massingham (Gary Barker, O1/72)

In early 1972 at the Officer Training Unit, Scheyville, a WO2 who I only knew as 'Sir' then, took a somewhat paternal interest in me that I have never forgotten. If the class was marching along a road we would hear Rocky yell, 'Get your head up,' and I always knew what name was going to follow, 'Barker'. I don't know why it was, as my only claim to fame was that I was the shortest in the class, but he certainly guided me.

Our Portsea class was the first one to go through Scheyville and Rocky, a member of the Advanced Field Training Wing, was one of the few staff assigned to us while on exercise. He could kick backsides with the best of them, but professionally guided us in the real world of leadership as opposed to what the ‘Pam’ waffled on about. Rocky and Captain Neil Turner (also RAINF) spent many days out bush with us, including running us ragged for about 36 hours seeing who would break. None did, which is a testament to both men on how they trained us.

After I graduated at the end of ‘72, I lost contact with Rocky - not sure he ever forgave me for joining Royal Australian Engineers - but I did track him down to Murray Bridge in late 2007 (where he was a JP). When the phone answered I stated, "I am looking for Rocky Massingham, who was an instructor at Scheyville." I will never ever forget the reply, 'You've found him, what do you want?' As he was coming to the Canberra region with a mate for a civilian association meeting, we organised a reunion at the Murrumbateman Pub in early 2008. This was where I met his wife Carol and we also arranged for Neil Turner to attend. It was a most enjoyable evening and allowed us to thank two men who had given us their best many years ago.

That was the last time I saw Rocky and while I did try to locate him again via ‘White Pages’ I had no success. However, his name is about to be mentioned in the Scheyvillian Newsletter and follows from an oral history interview I did with Neil Turner. I was trying to find Rocky one last time to let him know, when I found that he had passed on 20 October 2021. The AATTV has also lost a member, who was ‘Wounded in Action’ but served on and was professional to the end.

The SA Branch of the AATTV Association advised that Rocky's second wife, Carol, passed away two years ago. For Rocky, Dementia was the start and he went rapidly, passing after a few days in palliative care.

From ADF Records: Albert Charles ‘Rocky’ was born in Sydney on 15 October 1939. He joined the ARA Special Reserve on 16 September 1958 and commenced Recruit Training at 1 RTB, Kapooka. On 15 January 1959 Rocky joined 4 RAR. He transferred to the ARA on 21 July 1959. Rocky served with 1 RAR, 3 RAR and then 2 RAR before being posted to the Officer Cadet School, Portsea, on 17 July 1964. Returning to 4 RAR, Rocky was then posted to the AATTV as a WO2 on 16 March 1968. As stated, he was ‘Wounded in Action’ and returned to Australia on 9 December 1968. Following a posting to 9 RAR, Rocky arrived at OTU on 8 February 1972 just after the first OCS/OTU Class has commenced. On 21 November he was posted to the Australian Defence Assistance Group, PNG, returning to Australia by 2 March 1976. Before retiring from the ARA Rocky was living in SA and had a posting at The Adelaide University Regiment. He transferred to the Army Reserve with HQ 4MD in Adelaide. Rocky’s final posting was as a Regimental Sergeant Major. He retired from the Army on 5 October 1983 with the Rank of WO1. Rocky Massingham was a Justice of the Peace in Murray Bridge in his later years.