

AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

Dara Madden

By Wayne Stuart

Dara was born in Dublin in December 1966 and in December 1970 moved to Sydney where his father had got a job as Lecturer in Architecture at what is now the University of Technology, Sydney. He and his older brother Alex both attended Double Bay Primary School. Dara attended Woollahra Demonstration School, a selective State school, then joined Alex at Sydney Boys High. Both were good sportsmen and joined the Rowing and Rugby teams. In 1984 Dara was a member of the Sydney Boys High First VIII crew that competed in major State Championships and in the GPS Head of the River Rowing Regatta.

Dara was a keen Scout (in the Double Bay troupe) and went on to become a Venturer. He did well at school and became a Prefect, but he was particularly keen on Cadets and this determined him to choose a career in the ADF. After school he moved to ADFA at Duntroon and it was in Canberra that he met Kate.

Dara's mother, Aedeon, has told me that Dara was a kind and loving son and was a great support to both of his parents when their marriage broke up in 1983. He then got on well with his step-parents and step-brothers. He was fun to talk to, well-informed with wide interests and a dry sense of humour. He had some very funny stories about army life, but they needed to be told by him!

At Duntroon, Dara was known for always having immaculate presentation of his uniform - to the envy of his cohort. In 1987 he and a group of cadets and instructors walked the Kokoda Trail....before it became a tourist attraction. In 1988 Dara graduated from Duntroon, 8th in his class, and was awarded the Artillery prize.

His first military posting was to A Field Battery of the 8th/12th Medium Regiment at Holsworthy Barracks. In 1989 Dara undertook parachute training as the guns he was in charge of were part of the airborne artillery. Some of his happiest moments in life were spent directing gunfire and traipsing about the bush with his Forward Observer party. He just loved the mateship, and of course, blowing things up. He was well respected by both common soldier and fellow officers.

Dara and Kate were married on April 6 1991.

In 1991 he was transferred to Headquarters 1 Brigade as the Liaison Officer to the Commanding Officer. This is where Dara's communication and diplomacy skills really came to the fore. He had two joint training stints with the Americans in Hawaii in 1991 and 1992.

In 1994 he was posted to Townsville, to the 107th field battery of the 4th field regiment at Lavarack Barracks. In March of that year Kate and Dara's first child, Brendan was born. Townsville was a hard place to enjoy. Dara spent many weeks out on exercise and was always kept busy at the Barracks. Being so far from friends and family was very hard on both Dara and Kate. They were grateful for his posting to Brisbane in January 1996.

However, being attached to a non field regiment was not really Dara's thing. Brisbane proved unsatisfactory and rather unfulfilling and so in May of 1996 they moved to Yass. Dara took a long leave and then finally resigned from fulltime duties in August of that

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year. He did stay enlisted on the Ready Reserve but after one very poorly run exercise with them he vowed he could never do it again.

He did, not, however give up his love of the military, memorabilia, interminable war documentaries and the compulsion to polish boots and brass, to have perfect creases in trousers, to have beautifully starched shirts. When he left the house for work, he was always immaculate. He hated clutter.

Kate and Dara's daughter Louise was born in 1997 and youngest son Cameron came along in 1999.

He was, reportedly, a scoundrel when it came to Scrabble. If he couldn't use a triple word-score himself he would make sure he blocked it for all others. And if a word could not be found in his ancient copy of the Concise Oxford....then it wasn't a word.

Dara loved War documentaries. Most evenings Dara could be found in the spare room with the chair positioned just so in front of the TV watching either a war doco (which he had probably already seen) or a history doco (another of his passions). He would usually be found with a book on his lap (he had been working his way through a three volume set of the American Civil War by Shelby Foote - a favourite author- for what seemed like an eternity. He had announced not long ago that he was almost at Gettysburg...to which there was much jubilation around the dinner table).

He was a loving and dedicated father. He often said that his greatest achievements in life were his children and they were worth more to him than anything else. He loved living in the small Yass community. He loved feeling a part of it.

After the Army, Dara had a number of senior positions in the Public Service in Canberra including with COMCARE, the Australian Safety and Compensation Council and the Department of Resources and Energy.

My own contact with Dara came just after he took that long leave from the Army. He joined the Australian Maritime Safety Authority and undertook, as part of a small team, a full facilities and equipment review and audit of the nation's oil spill response equipment, which at the time were stored at some 38 locations around our 37,000km coastline. He was vigorous, meticulous and a very good team member in this work and we wanted to keep him.

Since coming back to Yass to work, Dara has managed the Yass District Hospital modernising project which will create a one-stop health hub after garnering \$1.5 million for major refurbishment work. This project will involve construction of separate public and ambulance entries at the hospital, upgraded triage and patient waiting areas, and a suite of purpose-built consulting rooms for community health professionals, including dietitians, occupational and speech therapists, child safety and drug and alcohol counsellors, dental and mental health teams.

Dara was also a DJ on Yass FM. He played mostly eighties music with one or two modern tunes that took his fancy thrown into the mix.

Another point of my contact with Dara came when he joined the Yass Valley Men's Shed in February 2011. His son Cameron is also a member - we are wondering what is keeping Brendan? He was soon elected to the Committee and then took on the difficult

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and necessary task of being the Grants Coordinator. He really shone in this role and managed to obtain grants for the Shed totalling more than \$30,000 for the NSW Coalition Government, one of the Murdoch Family foundations and Bendigo Bank as well as a number of smaller grants from Council and other community donors.

Shed members have determined that we will honour Dara's memory by naming an extension to our facilities recently funded by one of the \$10,000 NSW Government grants he obtained for us, "the Dara Madden Annexe".

When we heard of Dara's death, one of our members wrote this for circulating to members who had been shocked and saddened by the news:

"Death is always difficult to comprehend especially when it is unexpected. Typically one experiences feelings of disbelief and bewilderment when advised of the passing. As social creatures we tend to look for rationale that will help our understanding and acceptance of the situation. The reality is that this is part of our own grieving process and is quite natural and normal. We cannot undo what has occurred. We can only take satisfaction and reconciliation from the knowledge of the personal good that person delivered and portrayed during life."

Dara was a quiet and private but extremely able and talented man who affected many people and communities for good. He will be mourned and missed for a very long time.