



Brothers in arms – Bill, Matty and Mick

G'day, my name is Bill and I'm a sniper with MTF-3.

As I write this, it has just been a few days since I lost my good mate and No. 2 to an IED. This short article is about my experience, my first patrol after the IED strike that claimed my mate. And it's about my own coping mechanisms since.

I'm jotting this down just to let you all know what it's like to go through something like this. Hopefully it will never happen again, but for anyone who may have to experience something like this, they may be able to draw a few tips from what happened to me and the mistakes I made coping with that first patrol back out.

To set the scene, Matty and I have been mates for a while. We did our basic sniper course together. We both had a cool-off period after our course, which we spent in Timor. Unfortunately, we were posted to different companies, but we still saw each other every now and then.

After Timor, I was fortunate enough to find a home in the sniper cell. Matty had to mark time for a little longer until he got his run, but eventually a spot opened up and across he came.

In the year before Matty got into the cell, I was panelled for sniper team leader. After completing team leader's in Singo, I came back to battalion and we ran a basic course. Matty was pulled across to wet his feet in the cell whilst helping out on the course. As soon as he came across, we all agreed we wanted him in the cell and I got him as my opo, my No. 2.

We pretty much spent every hour at work from then on within earshot of each other. The year from then on was flat out in preparation for the Afghan deployment, and we probably spent more time together than we did with our missus' (which definitely pissed them both off, especially when we'd come back from bush and the very next weekend be around at each others places painting kit or building rigs or any other nature of gear-queering that we thought to be imperative). Anyway, we were close.

Fast forward to 22 August. We were out on what would be called 'A' directly mentored joint patrol in the Khas Uruzgan area. We had already patrolled over a massive yama and across the green. It was dark. Not pitch black though. There was a fair amount of illumination even though the moon was waning. We were looking up at the imposing feature that was to be our OP. Matty was searching us in, scouting the patrol up a hill that would have eventually put us higher than Mt Kosciuszko.

And then the unthinkable – that earsplitting explosion.



Private Matthew Lambert field-firing a 7.62mm HK417 marksman's rifle. Matty was killed by an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan less than a week after this photo was taken.

.....Mick also hears the ominous squeal of the mine lab. He looks at me and I signal him to stop, although he's already taken a knee. I sweep the mine lab over it again, this time in a flower pattern, just like the engineers showed me to, and its singing like a bird.

It takes what seems to be an age for me to get my wits back, but in reality it would have only been a few seconds – and then the training kicks in.

'Search your way out' – the voice in my head says. I turn north and begin to sweep. No sound. Six, maybe seven paces and nothing – and my heart starts to slow.

I drop an IR cylume on the ground and signal the rest of the lads to walk to the left of it. The last bloke in our quad will pick the cylume up so as not leave any discardable sign.

We keep pressing on, it's only a few more metres and I'll have searched through this VP and we can start heading up the bloody steep feature in front of us.

Five more paces, swinging the mine lab, look up, look back, good to hook. Another five and we're out of here.



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