

AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

Kenneth William (Ken) MacKenzie

31 May 1937 – 26 September 2017

By Colonel (Retd) Arthur Burke OAM



Kenneth William (Ken) MacKenzie was born in Richmond Victoria on 31 May 1937. Following a long battle with emphysema, he passed away at 80 years of age with his son and daughter by his side on 26 September 2017.

Ken was born in Richmond Victoria and educated at Westgarth Central School and Northcote High School. He left school after Year 10 and joined the Department of Immigration. At school, Ken had been in the Army Cadet Corps and, after being called up for National Service on turning 18 years of age, he joined the Citizen Military Forces to complete his two-year obligation.

Young MacKenzie was a rebel as a teen, sneaking out after family 'lights out' and getting up to mischief with his mates—and being caught and punished. Worst of all though, he was a diehard Collingwood Aussie Rules Football Club supporter! Anyway, serving his Nasho time in 15th Light Regiment RAA and 2nd Field Regiment RAA in Victoria brought out the best in him and he rose quickly to the rank of sergeant.

Ken soon realised that furthering his education would open more career doors so he went back to night school and studied hard. This led to his quitting Immigration and turning to a yearning ambition to join the Regular Army. Against his father's advice, but cunningly timing it just before his 21st birthday, Ken entered the Officer Cadet School Portsea on 10 July 1958. He was no Rhodes Scholar, but punched his weight and graduated in the middle of his class 12 months later.

Allotted to the Royal Australian Artillery, Second Lieutenant MacKenzie was posted to 1st Field Regiment RAA at Holsworthy then joined the 105th Field Battery in the fledgling 4th Field Regiment RAA at Wacol, Brisbane. Retired Lieutenant Colonel MM (Mike) Thompson recalls Ken from that time being 'as keen as mustard ... to learn his trade and then put what he had learnt into practice'. Most second lieutenants served as platoon commanders at a recruit training unit so it was no surprise that Ken was next posted to Kapooka, south-west of Wagga Wagga in NSW. This was his first instructional posting and he took to it like a duck to water. Indeed, after returning to 1st Field Regiment, he answered the call for volunteers in the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam in 1964.

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Promoted temporary captain for his tour in Vietnam, MacKenzie confirmed his instructional and mentoring abilities. This led to his being appointed to the staff at the Jungle Training Centre Canungra on return to Australia. His above average performance in this posting led to selection for a Long Gunnery Staff Course at the Royal School of Artillery, Larkhill, England. This was an 18-month accompanied posting if one was married—and Ken was not. What a proposal he made to Jocelyn Waters: marry me and I'll take you to England! Jocelyn could not resist this suave offer and readily accepted.

So began a fairy tale couple of years—studying and working hard under the British Army's thumb, but playing Bridge and socialising in an environment to which neither Ken nor Jocelyn had been previously exposed. Then there were the weekends spent exploring London and its environs and the term breaks motoring around the British Isles. The icing on Ken's professional cake was an attachment to the British Army on the Rhine's Gunnery Training Establishment at Hohne, Germany for the assessment of British artillery units on a joint exercise.

Though the fairy tale somewhat ended on return to Australia in late 1967, Ken's enthusiasm could hardly be contained when he was posted as an instructor at the School of Artillery, Manly, NSW. For over two years Captain MacKenzie revelled in passing on his knowledge to members of the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery attending courses. This job also included quite an active social life: from regimental dinners with the Young Officers' Courses to Manly Mayoral Balls in the historic surrounds of the School's ballroom, and of course indulging in their passion for playing Bridge.

Promoted major in 1970, Ken was appointed the battery commander of 105th Field Battery at Wacol. However, the thrill of commanding his old battery was cut short after only three months—an accidental wounding in Vietnam led to a juggle of the majors in the extant 4th Field Regiment and Major MacKenzie filled the shortfall as Headquarters battery commander cum operations officer in the commanding officers' tactical headquarters. Jocelyn was heavily pregnant with their first child at this time, but Ken did his duty. Scott was born six days after Ken returned to Vietnam.

Keith Hall had moved from Headquarters Battery to command 107th Field Battery and completed his 12-month tour in February 1971. Ken took over the 107th which now came under the command of 12th Field Regiment RAA. He went home to Townsville with the 107th in May and joined 4th Field where Major NF (Noel) de la Hunty MC was administering command. When Noel deployed his 106th Field Battery to Singapore in late July, Ken took over as the administrative commander till the appointed commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel GM (Gerry) Salom arrived in August.

Captain BF (Brian) Swift recalls being Ken's Headquarters Battery orderly room bombardier in Vietnam where they 'worked side by side for months'. Again, he was also in 107's orderly room on return to Townsville when Ken commanded. Brian admired him, kept in touch over the years, and now feels the loss of this good man.

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Just when Ken thought that he had completed all possible moves on the chess board of postings, he was selected to attend Australian Staff College at Queenscliff, Victoria. A pleasant year of study, sport and socialising was the beginning of another circle of postings—Canungra again, Canberra to Personnel Branch (Army), Holsworthy in command 8th/12th Medium Regiment RAA, Brisbane in charge of Headquarters RAA 1st Division, and then back to Queenscliff on the directing staff.

Command of 8th/12th in 1977–78 was both a highlight and a challenge of Lieutenant Colonel MacKenzie's career. Primarily providing support to the School of Artillery with a disparate unit of field, medium and locating batteries really brought all Ken's training experience to the fore, especially his in-depth knowledge of the School's requirements from his previous posting in Manly. However, to balance, there was a strong family side to this posting with active youngsters Scott and Lynne, and Jocelyn playing the perfect hostess to their many visitors. Again, Bridge was an integral of their social life.

As a youthful officer under Ken's command in Holsworthy, retired Lieutenant Colonel WR (Rick) Vickers remembers him as 'giving wise counsel in dealing with soldiers and a commitment to accuracy in our gunnery'. Retired Brigadier MF (Michael) Paramor AM fondly recalls his time as a subaltern in Brisbane when Ken 'treated us in a wonderfully "playful" manner as does a lieutenant colonel to a group of ill-disciplined and under skilled lieutenants'.

By 1983 with the children coming into their teens, it was time for more stability in life and Ken requested a posting to Brisbane. After a short time at Headquarters 1st Military District, he was put in charge of Army accommodation for Queensland, the appointment from which he finally hung up his spurs on 5 October 1986. This completed a stellar career in the uniform of his country—two years in Cadets, three years in the CMF and 28 years in the Australian Regular Army, rising from school cadet to lieutenant colonel. Mike Thompson sums up succinctly, 'Ken was a contributor to the positive development of many'.

But Ken MacKenzie was not one to remain idle. In Jocelyn's words, 'he stepped out of Army uniform on a Friday and into civilian clothes on the next Monday with the Queensland Electricity Supply Industry Superannuation Board.' He thoroughly enjoyed this appointment and though he gave his all to the job, he also revelled in the stability and new-found free time that it gave him.

Ken had always loved being active, highlighted by his playing hockey against the Olympic Games training squad in 1966. Now he turned his energies to golf, tennis and fell in love with lawn bowls, a passion which he avidly pursued at the St Lucia Club. When he finally retired from the Board in 2001, Ken became a very active member of the Kenmore-Moggill RSL Sub Branch gaining quite a reputation for Legacy badge selling.

Slowly, emphysema took over Ken's life, but never his determination to remain as active as possible. With an oxygen bottle in a shoulder bag and a mask at the ready, he would turn up for Gunner luncheons at Victoria Barracks, Brisbane—an inspiration to those far healthier than he. However, this was a downhill slope with immobility followed by

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confinement to bed and then admission to a nursing home. Jocelyn praised Scott and Lynne's devotion to their father during this sad period and for the strength they gave to herself.

Married for 51 years, Jocelyn eulogised that she had never seen Ken bored nor heard him complain—even throughout his debilitating condition. She pointed out that his flag-emblazoned and sports-figure decorated casket was known as a True Blue, fittingly designed for those who 'gave service to protect others'. In closing, Jocelyn said that this man would always be remembered as a gentleman and a scholar.

Vale Kenneth William MacKenzie—dedicated soldier, trainer extraordinaire, loving family man, caring persona and most of all a gentleman Gunner. Gone to his final posting in the Great Gun Park up above at 80 years of age.