

Vale - Warrant Officer Class Two Alexander John Clayton ('Sandy' 'Bwana') Nall

*Provided by Colonel A.R. Burke
Colonel Commandant Northern Region*

Had this sad missive used Sandy's given names, one might have been excused for not immediately recognising that the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery has lost another of its unique characters.

Alexander John Clayton ('Sandy' and 'Bwana') Nall passed away suddenly on 18th November 2004 from a sudden and massive heart attack. Warrant Officer Class Two Alexander John Clayton Nall was born on 20th May 1940 in Sydney the son of a war correspondent. Sandy and the Nall family moved to Brisbane after the war ended and his father obtained employment with the 'Courier-Mail'. Sandy was well educated and, as with all 18-year-old males of the 1950s, was called up for National Service. He enlisted into Brisbane's 11th National Service Training Battalion at Wacol on 15th August 1958. On completion of his full-time commitment, he was transferred to the Citizen Military Forces (1st Machine Training Troop, Northern Command Signals Unit) at the end of October. Sandy completed his obligation as the 1950s National Service Scheme was being wound up on 30th June 1960.

This military training, camaraderie and challenging way of life changed Sandy's whole lifestyle. He sought an occupation along similar lines and found it - in New Guinea as a crocodile hunter! However, he missed the mateship of the services and, now quite sure that Army life was what he wanted, Sandy enlisted into the Australian Regular Army on 21st September 1964. This was indeed the correct decision for it was 25 years before Warrant Officer Class Two Nall separated from the service on 25th September 1989.

In the Regulars, Sandy was allocated to the Royal Australian Artillery and in February 1965 joined 4th Field Regiment which had taken over his old national service battalion's lines at Wacol. These were turbulent times in South-East Asia and Gunner Nall considered himself very fortunate to be posted to the 105th Field Battery when it was committed to the Vietnam War as Australia's first artillery unit. He served the full tour of duty from September 1965 to September 1966 as a Gun Number on Sergeant Merv Dux's Bravo gun. His detachment mates included Barry Voyzey, Woody Woodward, Val Konias, Lawrie Barker, Geoff Baldwin and Dick Minon. Val described Sandy as 'a character of unusual traits who blended well into the gun detachment. He loved cards, beer and roll-your-own cigarettes, and no job was ever considered too tough for him.' Woody recalls how they nicknamed him 'Bwana' for the tales he told of croc hunting in New Guinea demanded an aura of respect.

The 105th Field Battery returned to 4th Field Regiment's lines at Wacol and the newly promoted Lance Bombardier Sandy Nall moved across to the fledgling 106th Field Battery. He gained his second tape and served a second tour in Vietnam (May 1967 -March 1968) with that unit. His battery commander, (then) Major Evard Cape said, 'We remember his cheery face and efficiency as he worked his gun' and others described Bombardier Nall as a 'steady, reliable, competent bloke with a dry sense of humour'. Always on the lookout for adventure, Sandy next volunteered his hand at bird gunnery with the 110th Light Anti-Aircraft Battery in Malaysia for six months from October 1968. However, his heart lay in field gunnery and on return to Australia he moved to 8th Medium Regiment and the 123rd Training Battery at Holsworthy, NSW. His battery commander (then) Major Barry Hawkins recalls Bombardier Nall as a 'loyal, reliable bloke and a good instructor' and promoted him to sergeant 12 months later.

Sergeant Nall seemed to have an affinity for instruction. Without becoming agitated, Sandy always seemed capable of handling even the most difficult of students with his quiet, persistent, experienced manner which exuded confidence. This talent was obviously recognised, for his next posting was as a sergeant instructor in Regimental Training Wing at the School of Artillery, Manly, NSW. Over the next three years, he moulded young recruits into effective members of gun detachments and then, almost to prove his product, Sergeant Nall rejoined the field force as a gun detachment commander in 1st Field Regiment at Wacol, Brisbane. But the call from the School of Artillery was too strong and Sandy returned on promotion as a Sergeant Major Instructor in Gunnery (SMIG) at the end of 1977. This was again a most enjoyable (and different) posting for, in addition to four months on exchange to the United Kingdom, he was also part of the three-man team from the School which, in September 1982 familiarised Project Hamel civilian engineers and staff on the stripping, assembling and handling of the first 105 mm British Light Guns to arrive in Australia. As the Project Officer at this time I was greatly impressed by Sandy's quiet but firm way of getting his point across to civvies. When all else seemed to fail, he called upon his laconic sense of humour which diffused even the most serious engineer's frustration. The workshop floors of the Ordnance Factories at Maribyrnong and Bendigo well remember both that sense of humour and the yarns he would spin whilst rolling his own cigarettes during breaks in instruction.

In 1983, Sandy accepted a posting as the Range Sergeant Major at the Proof and Experimental Establishment, Port Wakefield, SA. There, he coordinated activities and resources for the unit in his well known friendly, accurate and efficient manner. But again, his love for instruction prevailed and he readily returned to North Head as a SMIG on Field Wing in 1985. It was from this appointment that Warrant Officer Class Two Sandy Nall separated from his military career after 31 years, 25 years of which were as a Regular soldier. Still imbued with the love of adventure and a challenge, Mr Nall bought the general store at Cameron Corner where the borders of Queensland, NSW and South Australia meet. The word soon spread and old Army mates would go out of their way to visit Sandy, share a beer or three, play a round of cards and marvel at this unique character as he rolled his own cigarettes and recounted humorous aspects of his military career non stop. It soon became obvious to him that, with the increasing popularity of four-wheel driving holidays and adventures, there was an opening for a business which catered for recovering novices from the centre of Australia. Sandy set up a spare parts, repair and recovery shop in nearby Tibooburra on the Silver City Highway just short of the southern entrance to the Sturt National Park. Not surprisingly, he was remarkably successful with this enterprise and was able to combine his love of fishing and camping out with the recovery trips. There comes a time in everyone's life, however, when it's time for less work and more play. Sandy Nall retired completely a couple of months ago and was just beginning to settle into his favourite pastimes when he was struck down suddenly by a massive heart attack.

Sandy is survived by two daughters (Cassie and Stella) from his first marriage and his close partner for the last ten or so years, Wanda McDonald. To them on the behalf of all Sandy Nall's Gunner mates and acquaintances, I extend the deepest of condolences on this untimely bereavement. It is planned that a couple of Sandy's old mates led by Chris Reid will perform a last request from this veteran by scattering his ashes at Cameron Corner in about six months' time.

Vale Alexander John Clayton 'Sandy' 'Bwana' Nall, crocodile hunter, old Nasho, loyal, reliable and professional soldier and mate whose unique character was aptly summed up by Val Konias as 'a down to earth, Dinky Di Aussie of the old world'. Taken to that Great Gun Parkup above all too soon at only 64 years of age.

Sandy was fiercely proud of his service with the 105th Field Battery and was a life subscriber to its Association. As the honorary historian of the 105th and a management committee

member of the Association, it has been my privilege to draft this tribute to this true blue character of the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery. I sincerely thank all those who shared memories of Sandy with me so that this vale would record the life of a great Digger. These include Peter Bruce, Chris Reid, Graham Woodward, Val Konias, Barry Hawkins and Merv Dux.

RAAHC