

AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

Leon Edward Russell Pullen

2 February 1930 – 24 July 2015

**Supplied by Loris Pullen to
Colonel Arthur Burke, OAM (Retd)**



Leon Edward Russell Pullen was born in Adelaide on the 2nd of February 1930 to Bill and Elfrieda Pullen (nee Russell). It was deep depression times, but his family was determined to give Leon a good basic education. Early Primary at Pulteney Grammar, then Black Forest Primary and Unley High School. Leon described himself as “most unsettled” as a teenager – some would say a problem child.

Leon, his Mother and Brother John were living with his Grandparents at Clarence Park, as his Father who was serving in the 2nd AIF and was captured in Crete during the withdrawal from Greece and was a Prisoner in Germany. His Mother worked in munitions factories at Hendon and Penfield.

One day Leon was given a bike, so he promptly ran away and rode as far as Mt Barker. It became dark, cold and scary, so he turned himself in at the Mt Barker Police Station; his Mother paid five pounds - more than a weeks-wages to retrieve him in a taxi. He was definitely in trouble! On another occasion he was sent on a short errand to the corner shop with ten shillings to collect some groceries. Instead, he ran away to sea on a BHP vessel plying between Whyalla and Newcastle – remember there could be mines in the shipping lanes. He was put to work as a Trimmer, feeding coal down a chute to the engine room. On arriving home much wiser some weeks later, in an Auro-Anson Airplane to Parafield, with his first wages in his pocket, he returned home and said, “Here’s your ten bob Mum.”

Leon had enough of the sea and joined the Royal Australian Air-Force in 1948. He married Shirley June Rohan in 1949, and two Sons, Russell, and Linden, were born to the marriage. Taking his discharge from the RAAF in Brisbane in 1950, Leon re-enlisted in the Australian Regular Army in 1953. He did his recruit training at 5 Recruit Training Company Brisbane, then on to the School of Artillery. Leon later topped the Junior NCO’s course, and was posted back to Brisbane as a Junior Instructor for the first National Service training program. He was then posted to 1 Field Regiment Royal Australian Artillery, as a Sgt in 1957.

In 1958 while on a Warrant Officer’s course, his wife Shirley sadly suffered a ruptured aneurism and died of a cerebral haemorrhage. Leon took a compassionate posting to Adelaide so he and his children could receive help from his Parents, who did everything they could with limited means, to provide a sense of stability and purpose in the care of the boys. Once the boys were settled with their Grand-Parents, Leon was posted to his first War Service in Malaya with his Regiment in 1959. He returned in 1961 and was posted to 13 Field Regiment Royal Australian Artillery at Keswick SA. In 1963 he met Loris and in his own words “The love of his life”. Loris had a brief earlier marriage and a baby boy named Randolph. In 1965 Leon and Loris were married at Warradale Lutheran Church by Pastor Colin Henschke, followed by a weekend honeymoon - with visits from the children.

Meanwhile duty called. The Nation was concerned about the Indonesian Confrontation and the Communist infiltration of a small mostly unheard of country to our north, called South Vietnam. One month later Leon was posted as Company Sergeant Major D-company, 2 Recruit Training Battalion Puckapunyal. To prepare for the new National Service intake beginning in July 1965, the blended Pullen family moved into married quarters at Seymour, and into the routine of having a

AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

Husband and Father in the Services. Leon and Loris longed for a daughter, and by the miracle of adoption Andrea, a very special 20-day old baby girl became the fourth child in the Pullen family in 1967. She was spoilt and considered an angel from heaven by all the family.

In 1968 Leon was called back to his Regiment in preparation for embarkation to Vietnam. He had an allergic reaction to the inoculations, and a false start, but when his Regiment was involved in the Battle of Coral in Vietnam, he was rushed there as a reinforcement. He served with 1 Field Regiment, and then as Battery Sergeant Major HQ Battery with 12 Field Regiment in Vietnam. After his return to Australia and more training courses, Leon was commissioned as Lieutenant, and soon promoted to Captain. He was posted as Range Control Officer Holsworthy small arms and artillery range, which at that time consisted of 54,000 acres and was the biggest small arms range complex in Australia. In 1972 Leon was posted as Commander 23 Cadet Battalion Ballarat Victoria, and Loris and family again joined him. A Miner's cottage on a small property at Scarsdale, 12 miles from Ballarat became home.

The Whitlam Government came to power, reduced the size of the Army, offering incentives to retire, and so Leon retired from the Army on 1st April 1974 and the family returned to Adelaide. Leon loved his food. The Soldier became a Restaurateur in July 1974, and the Premier of SA officially opened "The Courtyard Restaurant" at Marden where Leon charmed the public and held court with business and Political leaders for the next 4 years. Leon was a parking attendant as a fill in for a while. Now anyone who drove with Leon knows he was not the person to leave the Mercedes or Jaguar with, but he would park them door handle to door handle with no bother. The next restaurant was at Greenock named "Die Heimat". On moving to Greenock Leon immersed himself into the local community and soon found himself chairman of the Greenock Park Committee and started the very successful "Highland Band Competition". On moving to Tanunda, Leon ran a B& B "Norma's Place" for several years before moving to Bethany on 5 acres, with his prize flock of geese – Leon loved birds. He initiated a Youth training scheme for unemployed young men to learn a work ethic and self-esteem and obtained a grant to restore the former Tanunda Railway Station (now Triple BFM) that had been vandalised. Two of his Trainees went on to find permanent work.

Leon was never restrained by committees. They either worked with him or he worked without him. Either way there was always a successful outcome. Leon would persist until successful. He became assistant Treasurer of St John's Lutheran Church Tanunda in the early nineties, then Chairman from 1993 – 2000. Leon Joined the Tanunda RSL Sub-Branch in 1964 and continued that membership through. He was Vice-President in 2002- 2005. President in 1997-1999, again in 2001, and from 2006-2009. He was presented with Life Membership of the RSL in 2014 in recognition of his commitment to the RSL and the wider community. Leon was elected to the Barossa Council in 1997 and remained on Council until 2003, reviving the tradition of prayer before the commencement of Council.

Grass did not grow under his feet. Leon threw himself into Council committee work. He formed and chaired the Tanunda Recreation Park Committee and was Chairman for many years of the Tanunda Recreation and Leisure Centre committee (now the Rex). He was on the Hall committee, Disability Access committee and many more. All benefitted from his fund-raising and cooking skills. He had a commercial gas stove on wheels that he would cart about in the old white van and wheel up the road, producing hamburgers, pies, sausages etc raising many thousands of dollars for the community. In 2004 Leon re-vitalised the tradition of the Tanunda Band Competition. He organised "The Freedom of the Towns of Barossa, with 292 Squadron RAAF, and marched 200 service personnel and bands up the main street of Tanunda, with the Governor General, Major General Michael Jefferies taking the salute. Yet he was just as happy to meet with school children, to pass on the Spirit of Anzac history, prior to ANZAC Day each year.

AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

Leon was proud to meet the Queen and have lunch with her in 2002. He was a member of the Barossa Regional Economic Development for 3 years and then a Board member of the Barossa Wine and Tourist Association for 6 years. Being concerned about the condition of the Tanunda Show-hall, and with no money in the maintenance budget, Leon organised a fund raising concert in the Show-hall, filling it to capacity with paying guests including Marjorie Jackson-Nelson, then Governor of SA, and entertaining them with bands and professional artists. After deducting the expenses, a handsome profit had been made for Hall repairs.

Leon travelled widely with Loris in later years, beginning with Europe, United Kingdom and Ireland in 2000. They travelled across the United States of America and Lower Canada in 2005, some of the way in a huge mobile home. They travelled to New Zealand in 2009, cruised to Vanuatu in 2012, and enjoyed the European River cruise from Amsterdam to Budapest in 2013. One of Leon's favourite trips was flying over Lake Eyre when it was full of water in 2012. Leon was particularly proud of his wife Loris's achievements as a kitchen designer and her many awards, both State and National. He patiently lived through various home renovations and extensions, as Loris practised her design skills, still managing to cook gourmet meals, and enjoying the challenge, under the most adverse conditions at times. He was thrilled to be able to celebrate fifty years of marriage with Loris in January 2015. Leon & Loris share 9 Grandchildren, and 3 Great-grand-children.

In June 2015 Leon was diagnosed with stomach cancer, and spent three weeks in Calvary hospital in Adelaide, then two weeks in Tanunda hospital, enjoying home visits daily, spending precious time with family and friends, reminiscing, and also giving instructions on what to do when he was gone. The day before his death, at great personal cost and effort, Leon insisted on being driven to the Jewellers at Gawler, where he selected a twin heart gold locket for Loris's birthday which was a few days away, knowing he would not be there, to celebrate with her. He asked his friend and neighbour Michael Sawyer to prepare a birthday dinner on the day, inviting family and close friends, and supplying the meat, and instructions on how to cook it – knowing he would be there only in spirit. On coming to terms with his illness Leon said "I have lived a full life and I can be thankful for that. I hope the world is a better place for me having been here."

Leon passed away peacefully at 5.10 pm on the afternoon of July 24, 2015 aged 85 years. His burial was at St John's Lutheran cemetery Tanunda on July 29, 2015.

Acknowledgements:

- Loris Pullen for her recollections of Leon.
- David Troedel for his input.