

## AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

### **John Maurice (Jack) Summers**

**5 December 1939 – 7 April 2020**

**By Peter Bruce**

The RAA lost another real character with the death on 7 April 2020 of John Maurice (Jack) Summers. Typically, very few would have known his real name as he was Jack to everyone. Born in Corowa, Victoria on 5 December 1939, Jack joined the Citizens Military Forces (CMF – now the Army Reserve) in August 1958. He was 19 at the time and his first posting was to 59th Infantry Battalion in Shepparton. In 1960, that Battalion was absorbed into the 2nd Battalion, Royal Victorian Regiment. Jack must have enjoyed his time in the CMF for in September 1961 he joined the Australian Regular Army and headed up to 1st Recruit Training Battalion (1RTB) at Kapooka to complete his recruit training.

Despite his infantry background with the CMF, Jack was allotted to artillery and spent Christmas 1961 at the School of Artillery, North Head and completed his initial gun course. In March 1962 Jack was posted across to Holsworthy to join 1st Field Regiment. By August the following year, he had moved to 102nd Field Battery which had been warned out for duty in Malaysia. Jack deployed to Malaysia with other members of the battery and under command of Battery Commander Major Brien Forward. Amongst those keeping Jack company on the way over were Kevin Chester, George Mason, Tony Locke, and Lindsay Elgar. Singapore travel restrictions for soldiers in uniform meant they had to wear civilian shirt and tie with Army poly trousers on the stopover at Singapore airport. 102nd Field Battery became part of 45th British Light Regiment and although the Emergency was officially over, the battery continued training and began supporting anti-terrorist operations on the Thai-Malay border early in 1964.

There are many stories of Jack and others in their off-duty time in Malaya however a very popular one is while on a Battery parade one day, Jack was complimented by the BC on his uniform greens. "So I should be" replied Jack, "they're your greens sir!" replied Jack who was BC Forward's batman. In late April/early May 1965, 102nd Field Battery deployed to Sarawak (Borneo) to support the operations of three battalions. The 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR), the 1st Scots Guards and the 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment (UK). The Battery at this stage were using L5 Pack Howitzers and were deployed in individual gun platforms in order to support such a large area of operations. Jack and the battery returned to Malaysia in August 1965 and eventually returned to Australia in October 1965. 102nd Field Battery had returned to Holsworthy with Jack in tow.

By 1965 the situation in Vietnam was dragging more and more forces into combat situations. By March 1966, the Australian Government had agreed to increase the Task Force commitment to two infantry battalions with supporting troops. 105th Field Battery had deployed to Vietnam in September 1965 and in May 1966 1st Field Regiment arrived in country with 103rd Field Battery and in September 1966, 101st Field Battery deployed to replace the 105th. Jack joined the Regiment in Vietnam in October 1966. It was during this tour of duty that the 103rd fired in support of 11 Platoon, D Company of 6th Battalion in what was to become known as the Battle of Long Tan. Jack eventually returned to Australia with 103rd Field Battery in May 1967 and stayed with the Battery on their return to Holsworthy.

While 4th Field Regiment had replaced 1st Regiment in Vietnam, 12th Field Regiment was in training and preparing to replace the 4th. Jack was keen to get back to Vietnam and by

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the end of 1967, Jack was back in 102nd Field Battery. In March 1968, the 102nd Field Battery replaced the 106th in Vietnam and Jack was there with them. He was employed as signaller in a Forward Observer (FO) party working with 1st Battalion.

Jack returned to Australia in February 1969 and accepted a posting to Townsville where 4th Field Regiment had recently moved from Wacol in Brisbane. 108th Field Battery had returned home from Vietnam in May 1968 and were due to replace the 107th in Malaya. Jack jumped at the chance to return to South East Asia and joined the 108th in September 1969. Jack was now back in Singapore as the Australian force had been withdrawn from Malaya and were now based in Singapore at Selarang Barracks.

It was while in Singapore that Jack met his wife Marina. Marina was born in Indonesia and Jack was forced to go to great lengths after his return to Australia in May 1972 to get Marina to Australia. Meanwhile in Singapore, Jack stayed on when the remainder of the 108th returned to Australia. Jack joined 106th Field Battery who arrived in December 1971. He eventually returned to Townsville to 4th Field Regiment in May 1972.

Jack stayed on in Townsville for just under ten years. He stayed with 108th for most of that time from 1974 to 1976 was the Battery Clerk. Once promoted to Sergeant, he became the Movements Sergeant for the regiment and according to Paddy Durnford: *"Jack was a highly educated person and an excellent typist making no mistakes. He also had his senior certificate and could have had any career that he wished for but chose the Army for Aussie Rules and mateship; he was a true mate."*

To say Jack liked a beer is an understatement and there are numerous stories around that tell of tall tales and true of Jack's life. While attempting to raise enough funds to move his wife Marina to Australia, Jack was able to resist the 1630 swill at the canteen by joining the diggers on Confined to Barracks (CB) punishment and volunteered to sweep the gutters. It was this sort of thing that made him a legend and he finally achieved his aim of getting Marina to Townsville. Jack finally discharged from the Army on 17 September 1982 after 21 years in the ARA. Of those 21 years, Jack spent just over six years overseas including two tours of Vietnam.

Jack and Marina stayed on in Townsville for some years and built a house in Kelso, a then outer suburb of Townsville. Doug Hill recalls: *"As a postie I delivered Jacks mail from time to time from 1990 to 2011. I was with Jack in Singapore and again in Townsville when Paddy was our BSM. His yard was always well kept with trees, shrubs, fruit trees, pot plants, vegetables and herbal gardens. The house was a typical tropical highset on concrete slab with breeze block around the perimeter. It had a single garage on the left and a small laundry to the rear. The rest of under his house was his brewery, bar and entertainment lounge. His pride and joy. He had three beer vessels fermenting at any given time with different recipes. He capped beer in tall bottles, stubbies and in beer kegs too. He was proud to show his latest brew and share his tips on brewing anytime I visited him. He was mindful of his health and he used to get up at 5am and go for a walk/jog. Jack did office work on casual/part time arrangement. Jack and Marina had a takeaway Asian food shop opposite my house on Thuringowa Drive around early 1980s. My father in law loved Marina's cooking. If Jack was around when I delivered his mail I would stop for a yarn."*

Paddy Durnford also recalls: *"Marina was a good gardener and she also smoked. To save on the cost of tailor-made cigarettes, hidden away out the back of her garden was a couple*

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*of tobacco plants. She dried her own leaf and rolled her own fags - smart lady. Rolling her own and with Jack making home brew, they certainly kept their costs down."*

Jack's health was becoming an issue and he had several stents put in to keep his old heart functioning. By 2012, Jack decided it was time to move south closer to family. He eventually sold their house in Townsville and moved to Sunbury in Victoria. Marina died a couple of years before Jack and after her death Jack moved into a nursing home in Sunbury. Jack finally succumbed on 7 April 2020. He had recently earned his OBE – Over Bloody Eighty – badge.

Jack lived a full life and stories of his escapades abound, but most are best kept for the times old mates get together and talk of mates who have passed. We will always have a place in our hearts and a story to tell about Jack Summers.

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