

Major Richard Newell Wickenden

Colonel Arthur Burke, OAM (Retd)



Major Richard Newell (Dick) Wickenden (Retired) passed away on 6th April 2010 following a short battle with a terminal condition of his pancreas.

Dick was born Herbert Newell Wickenden in Casino NSW on 6th September 1940. His four brothers didn't like the name Herbert so called him Dick. This nickname stuck and he became so used to it that he formally changed his name from Herbert to Richard after his mother passed away. He attended school to Intermediate level then moved to Brisbane in search of work. He was prepared to do anything for an income and in turn tried his hand in a department store, the Arnott's biscuit factory producing Iced VoVos, then as a jackeroo in western Queensland.

However, it wasn't till 1958 when Dick joined the Army that he really found his niche. Between the School of Artillery then 1st Field Regiment young Gunner Wickenden was very active on the Sydney scene. As an indication of his becoming settled, he met Evelyn Ellis, their relationship flourished and they were married in Brisbane on 8th August 1959. They honeymooned on the Gold Coast—with two of Dick's four brothers—but that is another story.

This was all orchestrated by the fact that Gunner Wickenden's 101st Field Battery was about to deploy to Malaysia for two years and what could be a better way to start a married life than an overseas posting with the last of the British Raj?—right down to a married quarter with a housekeeper and houseboy. In September, they sailed on the MV *Flaminia* for a new life together in this idyllic environment. It is interesting to note that Dick was, in fact, the youngest soldier in the battery at that time. Happily settled working as a line signaller with D Troop, it was with great joy that he and Eve welcomed the arrival of their son, Richard Jnr a year later.

The 101st Battery returned to Australia and became part of 4th Field Regiment at Wacol in 1961. Dick's Army career was blossoming and in January 1963 he entered the Officer Cadet School at Portsea, Victoria where he became mates with blokes like Juergen Raasch and Barrie Winsor who turned out to be lifelong friends.

Second Lieutenant Wickenden had a fairly typical Gunner career over the next five years—back to 4th Field in Brisbane, 130th Gun Locating Battery in Sydney then on promotion to captain back to Brisbane with 1st Field Regiment as the adjutant of this unit which had been

warned for active service in Vietnam in 1969. He was a loyal and firm, but fair and understanding adjutant and became firm friends with other officers who had also come up through the ranks—Denis Casey and Greg West to name a couple. On the family side, daughter Jennifer arrived in 1967 to complete a pigeon pair for the Wickendens.

On 4th March 1969, Dick arrived in Vietnam and began his war of fighting paperwork by day and artillery operations by night as a duty officer the Artillery Tactical Headquarters at Nui Dat. Commanding officer Craig Beck recognised Captain Wickenden's solid dependability and planned that he would have a rounded experience whilst on active service. As such, when an injury led to a forward observer vacancy in 105th Field Battery, Dick was posted to this position. He took this in his stride and an unflappable, confident voice could always be heard on the radio net, no matter how hot the situation was at the 'sharp end'.

A staff posting on the 3rd Task Force / North Queensland Area Headquarters in Townsville was next on the list and this began Dick and Eve's love affair with the Far North of Australia. Unfortunately, they had only really settled in when Holsworthy called him back as the battery captain of 102nd Field Battery. This positioned him nicely for his return to the locating world on promotion to major and appointed the battery commander of the 131st Divisional Locating Battery which was then in the same 8th/12th Medium Regiment.

Stepping through Headquarters Royal Australian Artillery 2nd Division to round off his experience, Dick arrived in the USA for two wonderful years at the School of Artillery, Fort Sill, Oklahoma as the Australian exchange instructor in gunnery. This was a wonderful reward for his years of going wherever he was told and performing as an above average dedicated officer. Tripping around the States with his family during the vacation periods made this the most enjoyable posting since 20 years ago in Malaysia. In recognition of his exemplary performance in this appointment, Dick was awarded the Ancient Order of Saint Barbara (USA) by the Americans.

However, the payback for this posting to Eden was an appointment on return to Australia in the Office of the Chief of the General Staff in the Directorate of Coordination—the 'adjutants' of Army Headquarters. At this stage in his career, Dick had completed more than 20 years' service, had enjoyed three overseas postings and realised that his love for North Queensland was far stronger than life in Fort Fumble in Canberra—even if it meant forgoing promotion.

Major Wickenden bit the bullet and was granted a posting with 11th Training Group in Townsville. There, his dedication and professionalism with the Army Reserve was recognised and he was granted a subsequent posting to Headquarters 11th Field Force Group. This was an ideal time to exit full-time service as he realised that there were a number of positions available within the Reserve that could be filled by someone with his experience—and there was no risk of being posted out of Townsville. So, on 22nd March 1984, Dick transferred to the Australian Army Reserve.

True to his word, Dick continued his service with the 11th Field Force Group, 11th Brigade and the Defence Support Group North Queensland. Ken Borgges who worked opposite Dick in the personnel area recalls him as quiet, competent and never being ruffled. Finally, after more than 33 years of uniformed service to his country, Major Wickenden hung up his spurs and retired on 5th September 1991.

Retirement from the Army, however, did not bring an end to Dick's service and now he directed his energies even more towards the local community—including the Coast Guard, the Community Information Centres and the RSL. He had always been a keen fisherman and

now he was able to spend even more time following this passion as a member of the Ross Island Amateur Angling Club. His spirit was not diminished by heart surgery and he bounced back to become a devoted rehabilitation councillor to others as they recovered from their heart surgery.

Dick never forgot his Gunner roots. He was a most supportive member of the RAA Association of North Queensland and had an ongoing connection with 4th Field Regiment whenever the Association was invited to an occasion. More recently, he will be remembered for being the secretary of the Townsville committee responsible for the handover of the original gun fort, Kissing Point barracks from Defence to the local council.

Suddenly, pancreatic problems caused Dick to be admitted to the Mater Hospital where, after a relatively short time, he passed away with his loving family by his side. He is survived by his widow Evelyn, children Richard Jnr and Jennifer, three grandchildren and one great grandchild.

Vale Richard Newell (Dick) Wickenden—dedicated professional soldier, officer and one who devoted himself to a life of service to community and country. Taken to that Great Gun Park up above at only 69 years of age.

RAAHC