

AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

MICHAEL BERNARD WILLIAMS M.M

6th JANUARY 1945 – 10th JULY 2004

By Ros Williams



First born child to Eric Bernard and Doris {Dot} Williams, Mike was born in Goulburn, NSW whilst Dad Eric was serving in the Medical Corp. Dot was staying with her parents in Goulburn until Eric returned. The family then resettled in their hometown of Cooma NSW. Mike was a student at St Patrick's Primary School in Cooma, then continued his Secondary education at St Patrick's College Goulburn, boarding at the school for five years. After completing school, Mike joined the Monaro County Council in Cooma and was studying Survey Drafting when his birthdate came up in the Ballot. He deferred call-up for 12 months to continue his study. Mike was then required to commence National Service 12 July 1966 at Wagga Wagga NSW.

Mike underwent three months basic Army Training followed by three months Artillery Training, then joined 106 Battery, 4th Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery. In preparation for active service in Vietnam, Mike underwent further training as a Signaller. Mike was delegated duties with the Forward Observation Party led by Captain John Phillips. The Unit arrived in Vietnam 30 April 1967.

As a result of operations in South Vietnam, Mike was awarded the Military Medal. An extract from Mike 's Citation reads *"On 7th February 1968 during Operation Coburg at about 1400 hours Gunner Williams suffered a serious wound to the head but still remained at his post passing fire orders which resulted in most effective artillery fire which was a major factor in ensuring success of the assault Once the position became relatively stable a replacement for Gunner Williams was brought forward, still Gunner Williams remained on duty until he was satisfied the replacement had been fully briefed and communications were still open. Only then did Gunner Williams seek Medical Attention "*.

Comments from Mikes colleagues in the battery included Neville Clark MC, OAM who said *"Mike's courage was unsurpassed in our Unit, he was our Braveheart "*.

After he was wounded, Mike was evacuated to an American Hospital. Emergency surgery was performed before Mike was flown home to undergo further surgery at the Repatriation Hospital in Concord NSW. Following months of convalescence, Mike returned to Cooma briefly then moved to Canberra to live with family and to join the Department of External Affairs, later renamed Department of Foreign Affairs.

Also working in External Affairs was Ros Hardiman, sister of Mike's long-time friend George Hardiman. Mike and Ros became re-acquainted, and were married March 1971 and proceeded on their first posting to Stockholm. Mike and his family went on to serve in Belgrade, Honolulu, Buenos Aires and Washington DC. A comment from Ambassador Malcolm Dan highlights Mike's character: *"Mike came to us with an impressive Army record of Bravery in Vietnam, in private he never once brought up the subject himself. He was rightly proud of his record and his Army compatriots"*.

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One of the many highlights of Mike's career in Foreign Affairs was his invitation and participation in the traditional 'reading of the names' on the Tenth Anniversary of Vietnam Memorial Wall, Washington DC. It was a very cold morning in November 1992 when Australia was so proudly represented.

Always fit and possessing exceptional sporting abilities, Mike played Rugby League Group 19 in Cooma and Rugby Union with the Royals Club in Canberra. Mike received an offer to play League with Balmain, which unfortunately he had to decline. Whilst posted to Hawaii, Mike found time to run the Honolulu Marathon in 1978 & 1979. However, snow skiing was the favourite sport, a sport in which the whole family could participate together in so many different locations around the world.

After retiring Mike formed a weekly bike riding group aptly named 'Greyspokes' with retired colleagues and friends. They can still be seen riding around Canberra in their blue T shirts every Friday on their way to a restaurant to enjoy lunch a few glasses of wine and a long ride home.

First and foremost, Mike's favourite activity was Fly Fishing, a skill he perfected very early in his life. Best of all was fishing in the Snowy Mountains just a short drive from home. For him, this was always most therapeutic, relaxing and just a quiet, reflective time. Bringing home fresh trout to enjoy with family and friends was his absolute pleasure.

Forced into early retirement in 1996, Mike enjoyed seven years of quality life with family and bonus time with his first-born Granddaughter Caitlyn. He was also a passionate supporter of the Brumbies and Wallabies, and retirement gave him the opportunity to attend the Opening of the Rugby World Cup in Sydney in 2003.

Anzac Day was sacred for Mike wherever he was in the world. To be in Canberra for the Dawn Service and the March gave Mike an opportunity to catch up with many friends. Traditional Lunch and then 2-Up at the Hellenic Club completed the long day.

Mike was a devoted, loving, nurturing family man, his motto "Family First Always ". His only enemy was Cancer which took him from us too soon. Mike is survived and very sadly missed by loving family: wife Ros, children Daniel Bernard, Lisa Michele and Justin Mathew, daughter in law Michelle and granddaughter Caitlyn.