

Gunner of Renown



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

Colonel Timothy Angelo RODRIGUEZ, MVO, MBE, MC

(1908-2004)

Tim Rodriguez was born in Perth on 5 May 1908, the son of a pearl diver who worked out of Broome. He was educated at Christian Brothers College and studied medicine at Perth and Melbourne Universities but did not complete the course. During this period he also undertook compulsory military training in the 11th Battalion and the Melbourne University Rifles. During the Great Depression he studied metallurgy at the School of Mines, Kalgoorlie, while working in the gold mines.

He enlisted in the 2/3rd Field Regiment at the outbreak of WWII and after initial training at the Holsworthy School of Artillery (Field Wing) he was posted to 2/7th Field Regiment at Northam, Western Australia. During this time, he attended Junior Staff School as a student and was commissioned on 1 July 1940. The regiment sailed for the Middle East on the HMT *Stratheden* in November 1940. Rodriguez was a command post officer in 14th Battery for the next two years.

The regiment had a reputation for technical excellence as Depot Regiment at Al Maza. Rodriguez also had a spell as Regimental Survey Officer and attended an air-photo mapping course in Cairo. His regiment just missed the Siege of Tobruk but thereafter undertook rigorous training with the 9th Division in the prelude to the Battle of El Alamein.

During the Battle, on 25 October 1942, Rodriguez was near Trig 29 directing fire standing in the open behind his Bren Gun Carrier OP when the Germans engaged his carrier with 88mm airburst. The regimental historian recorded that: '....the airburst nearby tore his pocket and sweater, grazed his Vol.III, split a fifty acker note in his wallet, took the eye shields from his binoculars before clanging into the carrier side\ He was awarded the Military Cross for his actions in this battle.

Back in Australia, his regiment deployed to Queensland for jungle warfare training, and Rodriguez attended the AMF Staff School at Ashgrove, Queensland, for two months before being posted to Headquarter Quarters Royal Australian Artillery 7th Division as Brigade Major Royal Artillery (BMRA) (Learner) and served with the division in the Nazdab - Ramu Valley campaign in New Guinea. He subsequently joined the staff of the Commander Corps Royal Artillery I Australian Corps for six months and had four months in Canberra at Staff College. He was then appointed BMRA HQ 9th Division and early in 1945 he went to Morotai with the advanced party of the division for the detailed planning of the amphibious landings at Tarakan and Labuan. At war's end Major Rodriguez was awarded the MBE.

Post-war, he joined the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) in Japan as Battery Commander A Field Battery, part of 34th Brigade. The battery, comprising 9 Officers and 94 ORs, was a mixed bag of Staff Corps, PMF, Militia and AIF but it was soon welded into a cohesive team. The battery had some unusual tasks - firing 21 gun salutes on the occasion of Princess Elizabeth's

marriage to Prince Philip in 1948, and a year later, again for the birth of their first child, Prince Charles, the latter on the plaza before the Imperial Palace in Tokyo.

At Nipponbara artillery range, A Battery made AMF history when it fired the first shots in peace time in a foreign land. Towards the end of his appointment Tim was seconded to the RMC Wing at Miyajima to instruct and assess students for Regular Army commissions. From 1948 to 1950, as a lieutenant colonel, he commanded BCOF HQ in Tokyo. His duties included Liaison Officer for the C-in-C BCOF to the American Supreme Command.

On his return to Australia in February 1950 he was appointed to the Directing Staff of the Australian Staff College, Queenscliff. In 1952, he became CO 1st Field Regiment at Georges Heights which then comprised a field battery, a heavy anti-aircraft battery and a locating battery. In 1953, he was sent to Britain to study proof and experimental work under the Chief Superintendent of Proof Ranges.

He returned in 1955 to become Proof Officer for the Australian Services. This posting was known by more ribald gunners as the Corp's "Chief Cordite Sniffer". Based in Melbourne he had Port Wakefield and Mitchelton as his main stamping grounds. He was actively involved with proof firings of the 4.5 inch naval ordnance, proximity fuzes, and small arms munitions at Bendigo and the Williamstown ordnance facilities. It was interesting and steady work, and under his supervision there were no mishaps, a tribute to the safety precautions in place at that time.

In 1957, Lieutenant General Sir Henry "Bomber" Wells, CGS, called him and said: 'The Governor General wants a Comptroller General for Yarralumla. He has to be a half colonel and single. You are the only one we have got available'. So for the next 12 years he controlled the house and ground staff that serviced and maintained the Residence. He recalled that at that time of widespread prosperity it was difficult to attract staff. 'Few people realised how continuous an operation it was', Tim recalled. 'Most weeks there would be at least two official dining/reception functions and the internal staff worked long hours.' He prided himself on persuading the Prime Minister's Department to improve staff conditions and retired in 1969. He served and outlived five governors general - Viscount Slim, Lords Dunrossil, de Lisle and Casey and Sir Paul Hasluck. He was promoted colonel on retirement and became a Member of the Victorian Order. Throughout his military service his personal reports only recorded "fight to get" or excellent.

On his retirement he settled in Edgecliff in Sydney's eastern suburbs and became Executive Director of the Outward Bound Scheme for four years. He was active in Legacy and married a widow, Enid McKellar, an artist and sister-in-law of Australia's best known poet, at All Saints Anglican Church, Woolhara, on 3 March 1973. She painted a portrait of him (in mess dress) which was hung at the School of Artillery Officer's Mess, but now hangs at the RAAHC North Fort Artillery Hall. She predeceased him in 1990.

Golf was his only sporting passion and he played at the Royal Sydney Golf Club until 1989. He marched on ANZAC Day until the year of his death in 2004.

Sources: Army Lists; Margaret Woodcock letter (8 May 2004); Alan H. Smith.