

## AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

### Major Arthur John Bretherton, OAM (Retd)

26 April 1937 – 23 November 2023

By Peter Bruce, OAM

The distinguished military career of Arthur Bretherton started just after his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Arthur arrived at the 1<sup>st</sup> Recruit Training Battalion (1RTB) Kapooka on 17 May 1955 and completed his recruit training before being allocated to Artillery and posted to the School of Artillery at North Head. His potential may have come to the fore here, as in May 1956, he was posted to the training staff of 14 National Service Training Battalion at Puckapunyal in Victoria. He was also promoted to Bombardier. The National Service Scheme was in full swing and required all males aged 18 to sign up for 176 days of standard recruit training followed by five years of follow up training in Reserves. The following year, in May 1957, Arthur moved to 20 National Service Training Battalion, also in the Puckapunyal area and continued his employment as an instructor and clerk.

As the National Service Scheme was winding down, Arthur was moved to the Unallotted List of Southern Command before the first of three postings to the Royal Military College, (RMC) Duntroon in August 1960. He was posted as Drill Sergeant and by all accounts, was an excellent role model for both other staff and the cadets. This posting perhaps set the scene for later postings to RMC. By March 1964 it was time for Arthur to return to a RAA unit with a posting to 1<sup>st</sup> Field Regiment, then based at Holsworthy. He was employed as the Command Post Sergeant in 103<sup>rd</sup> Field Battery which had just returned from duty in Malaya. In 1965, Arthur was selected to attend a Long Gunnery Staff (Air Defence) Course at the Royal School of Anti-Aircraft Artillery at Manorbier, South Wales in the UK. Arthur had at this stage been promoted to Warrant Officer Class 2. This course introduced Arthur to the Air Defence missile system, Rapier, to be introduced in Royal Artillery in the 1970s. He was later attached to one of the RA Air Defence Units with the British Army on the Rhine, (BAOR) in Germany.

Arthur returned to Australia in January 1967 and was posted as an Assistant Instructor Gunnery, Air Defence Wing, at the School of Artillery, North Head. He became the "go to" man for dealings with the Rapier Missile system which had been introduced into the RAA.

The war in Vietnam for Australians was, at this stage, winding down. 4<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment had deployed there in February 1970 and was due to return home in February 1971. 12<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment was the next Regiment scheduled to deploy. Arthur was posted to that regiment in October 1969 to prepare for deployment to Vietnam. He was posted as Battery Sergeant Major (BSM) of 'A' Field Battery, one of the subunits of 12<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment. This was significant change for Arthur as his service to date had been mainly with Air Defence.

Arthur deployed to Vietnam with "A" Battery in February 1971 as their BSM. Their tour was cut short with the withdrawal of Australian Forces later that year and Arthur returned home in November 1971. A practice observed by many headquarters was to name various Fire Support Bases after the name of a wife or relative of a unit member. Fire Support Base 'Shirley' was so named and was home to 'A' Battery during operations in the Xuyen Moc area.

On return to Australia, Arthur was posted on promotion to Warrant Officer Class One (WO1) and appointed Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) of 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Regiment, an Army Reserve unit based in Batman Avenue, Melbourne. Arthur was subsequently appointed RSM of 12<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment at Holsworthy in July 1972. 12<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment and 8<sup>th</sup> Medium Regiment were linked in November 1973 and Arthur became the first RSM of the

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now linked 8<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> Medium Regiment. He remained there until February 1974 when he was posted to the Royal New Zealand School of Artillery as an exchange instructor. This posting was to last for nearly three years and was a most enjoyable time for Arthur and his family.

In December 1976 the Bretherton's returned to Canberra with a posting for Arthur to Army Office in Operations Branch. Here, he worked with the Director of Artillery, then Colonel J S Humphrey, in career management for Other Ranks in the RAA. His next posting, in November 1977, ensured a further stay in Canberra when he was appointed RSM of The Royal Military College, Duntroon (RMC). Traditionally, this appointment had been given to Infantry Warrant Officers, and there were many in attendance at his first major parade to see how this Artillery Warrant Officer handled things. He passed with flying colours and went on to establish an excellent reputation as one of the College's more noteworthy RSMs. On Australia Day, 1980, Arthur was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia, (OAM) in recognition of his services as RSM of the RMC. During 1979, Arthur and a fellow WO1, Geoff Annett were tasked with hosting the RSM of the New Zealand Army while on a visit to Australia.

In January 1981, Arthur accepted a Prescribed Service Officer (PSO) Commission to Captain. He remained in Canberra with a posting as Staff Officer Grade 3 (SO3) Ceremonial with Personnel Branch at Army Office. In August 1982 he moved to Operations Branch as the Career Advisor Artillery, working with the then Director of Artillery, Colonel R V McEvoy. Arthur then returned to RMC in a staff appointment in January 1987. After his third posting to RMC and being such a role model for staff and students alike, a street in the RMC village was named "Bretherton Street".

Arthur's final posting in the Army was on promotion to Major to the Soldier Career Management Agency (SCMA) in Melbourne. Arthur had served several postings in the personnel area and his appointment as a SO2 at SCMA was a fitting end to a distinguished career. Arthur discharged from the Army on 29 September 1992 after over 37 years' service including active service in Vietnam and deployments to the United Kingdom and New Zealand.



Arthur and Shirl, who he had married in 1960, settled in Wangaratta in Northeast Victoria after discharging from the Army. Arthur joined the local Legacy Group in January 1993 and was an active Legatee with the group until August 2022.

Arthur died suddenly on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2023. A Requiem mass was held for him, with a eulogy given by long time friend and associate, Colonel Bob McEvoy, MBE (Retd). Arthur is survived by his wife Shirl, children John and Jen and her son Harri.

Arthur's Honours and Awards include:

- Medal of the Order of Australia
- Australian Active Service Medal 1945 – 1975 with Clasp Vietnam
- Vietnam Medal

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- Defence Force Service Medal with First, Second, Third and Forth Clasps
- Australian Defence Medal
- Long Service and Good Conduct Medal
- Vietnamese Campaign Medal
- Unit Citation of the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm
- Returned from Active Service Medal

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- Geoff Annett
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