

AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

Colonel Michael Croom Crawford, MBE (Retired)

25th August 1937 – 22nd July 2015

By Lieutenant Colonel R J (Rob) Crawford



A pall of sadness hangs over the Crawford family at the passing of Michael, our loving husband, father, father-in-law, grandpa, brother, uncle and friend.

News of his death has moved quickly amongst family and friends. Thanks to so many who have helped pass the sad message and provided words of condolence.

Michael Crawford was born in Mayfield near Newcastle, NSW. Very early in his life his family moved to Mosman in Sydney, where he grew up. He always spoke fondly about Mosman and loved showing his two sons where he had adventures as a boy, during family visits to grandparents and aunts. He attended North Sydney Boys High School and in 1954 was selected for the Royal Military

College Duntroon.

Army Life

He entered Duntroon in January 1955, where he became Mick or Cruff, names that were to stay with him during his 30 years in the Army (and beyond). Duntroon brought Mick the same rigors of any cadet's life and of course so many stories, ranging from motor-cycle training on a freezing Majura Road to the sadness of losing classmates in the well-known sailing tragedy on Lake George. It is at Duntroon that his dry sense of humour emerged and is something for which he will always be remembered. He was a Colour Sergeant for most of his senior year and part of the Colour Party on his graduation parade in December 1958.

Mick was allocated to the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery. Over the next two and a half decades he was a "Field Gunner" and also became a husband and father. The highlights of those 26 years as an officer were:

- Meeting Janice Campbell in 1960, at the engagement party of a school friend.
- Serving in Malaya in the early 60s as a lieutenant and then captain in 103 Field Battery (in the Commonwealth Brigade) and his attachment to 20 Regiment, Royal Artillery, as the Survey Officer. He formed friendships with Aussies and Brits that were to endure the rest of his life. He became engaged to Janice in 1962, when she visited him in Malaya.
- His marriage to Janice in March 1964.

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- His attendance at Gunnery Staff Course Number 3 at Larkhill in the UK in 1966 and building friendships with his fellow students and rekindling those from Malaya.
- The birth of Robert in December 1966.
- Commanding 104 Field Battery, including its tour of South Vietnam in 1968-69, for which he was awarded the MBE. He was always thankful that every member of the Battery came home alive.
- The birth of Lachlan in September 1972.
- Two tremendous years as the Commanding Officer / Chief Instructor of the School of Artillery 1976-77 and living at North Head.
- Moving the Crawford family into their own home in Balgowlah, Sydney, in 1979.
- In the early 1980s, as a Colonel, he was the Commander Field Force Artillery, which in those days was “double hatted” as the Commander 1st Division Artillery.

Mick’s final posting in the Army was the Colonel Administration, Field Force Command, which combined the logistics and personnel functions of the contemporary Forces Command. He was dined-out of the Army at North Head in January 1985.

Civilian Life

After Army service he reverted to introducing himself as Mike, something from his school days. It was always amusing to watch a conversation between a person who knew him as Mick and someone who had met him as Mike...those “furrowed brow” pauses in chat wondering if they were actually talking about the same bloke.

Mike spent a decade in a second career as the Administrator of the Northholm Grammar School to the north-west of Sydney. The 40 km drive each morning and again in the afternoon were made easier by the reward he felt contributing to the education of young Australians and the esteem with which he was held by the Principal and staff. To students with locker problems he was the “dude with the keys” and by the school board highly valued for his organisational skills, including a million dollar fund raising plan for school building.

It is almost impossible to get the Army out of your blood after 30 years, so Mike jumped at the offer to be the Honorary Colonel of the Australian Army Cadets in the early 90s. He relished the opportunity to participate in youth development, through the cadets, parallel with his work at Northholm.

He retired in 1995 and with Jan re-embraced their love of travel and set about seeing Australia and the world, much of the east coast with a camper trailer in tow. In late 1999 they made the “sea-change” to Smiths Lake near Forster-Tuncurry.

In sea-side life Mike kept busy and became involved in the community, in particular with the local Coastal Patrol unit as a volunteer radio operator. In time Mike took on the responsibility for coordinating radio training for the unit, which later combined with the Marine Rescue NSW organisation. He was involved in Marine Rescue for over a decade and found his contribution to maritime safety deeply satisfying.

He became Grandpa in July 2003 and drew much personal energy from his three grandchildren. He loved getting out on Smiths Lake in his “tinny” with his two granddaughters, sharing his love of

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birdlife with them and learning a little about how girls think. He and Jan have taken every opportunity to be involved in the life of their young grandson. During the late stages of Mike's illness the vitality of his grandson was always a welcome distraction and tonic for his morale.

In 16 years of living on the coast and in the bush Mike connected with his creative side. He and Jan divided their time between garden club, art classes and Probus. Mike's sketchbook was always close at hand when they travelled, including capturing aspects of Vietnam on a holiday in 2011. In early June 2015 Mike sold a painting at a local exhibition. It was the first and only piece he was able to send to an exhibition.

Many will know of Mike's love of wine. He always wanted to be involved in wine beyond just drinking it. He nurtured 50 Shiraz vines (later 100) at Lachlan's house and delivered small vintages from 2010 to this a year. Each vintage was a year-round project with tending the vines, weeding, picking and pressing the grapes and bottling. Unfortunately due to illness, Mike had to leave the final production of this year's vintage to a Smiths Lake friend.

Remembering

As it has transpired his adult life was almost evenly divided between 30 years in the Army and then another 30 as a civilian. Michael, Mike, Mick, Cruff, Dad or Grandpa died comfortably in his sleep after cancer overtook him.

Michael had the gift of being able to engage with people no matter their rank, status, age or background, by tactfully injecting humour into a conversation and being sincerely interested in what they had to say. This never left him, warmly chatting with the nursing staff that provided his care over the last three months.

Quoting the year-book *Mission in Vietnam* compiled by 4 RAR, with a chapter dedicated to 104 Field Battery, his "*warmth and humour emerged when he was talking to the soldiers*". Similar sentiment has been echoed by his RMC classmates, friends and colleagues who have described him as a loyal friend, first-class soldier and honest gentleman. He had a genuine sense of community and was a marvellous role-model.

He will be dearly missed by so many family and friends.

Acknowledgements:

- Rob Crawford for his tribute to his father.
- Terry Jobson for providing links to the family.