

## AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

2411144 (214055) Michael Francis O'Sullivan, MID

(3 June 1932 – 30 August 2013)

By Peter Bruce, OAM

Some may ask why an Infantryman turned caterer would appear on these pages. Michael Francis O'Sullivan was as much a gunner as he was a cook, serving many of his military years with RAA units.

Michael was born in Limerick, Ireland on the 3rd of June 1931. He was one of 11 children and was born into hard times. Michael worked in England and Ireland from the age of 14 and in 1947 at the age of 16 took the opportunity for a better life and jumped on a ship bound for Australia. He originally went cane cutting in North Queensland where he and a mate saw an advertisement to join the Army. Michael consequently joined the Australian Army on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1958.

Originally allocated to Infantry, Michael served with 4 Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment. He also had service with 2 Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment in the Malayan Emergency from October 1961 until July 1963. Michael had also met the love of his life, Josie from the small town of Inverell and they were married there on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1961. Their daughter Sharon was born in Malaysia and Joanne the youngest was born back in Brisbane. It was during this time that Michael 'got the taste' for cooking and eventually trained and was transferred to the Australian Army Catering Corps.

After completing his Catering Corps training at the Northern Command Trade Training Centre, Michael was posted to 4<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment in Wacol and although initially working with 108 Battery soon found his niche with 106 Battery. He deployed to South Vietnam with 106 Battery in May 1967. John Hauck recalls that "*Mick was a legend with the spatula and what he couldn't do with a rat pack was never known*".

Michael stayed with 4<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment on return to Australia and moved to Townsville with the Regiment in 1968. During his time in Townsville, Don Donkin tells the story of Michael buying a half share in a race horse, much to the dismay of his wife Josie.

In February 1970, Michael again deployed to South Vietnam with 4 Field Regiment again staying with 106 Field Battery. Jack Lunney recalls: "*my fondest memory of him was when he got the mess hall built at the Horseshoe and he would give the key to the fridges to the sig who was doing the dog watch from midnight to dawn. When he gave them to me the first time I asked him why and he replied*" – "*cause you are the guys doing the heavy duty around here*".

Michael was passionate about looking after his diggers and his expertise in turning ration packs into gourmet feasts were legendary. Ian McNaughton stated "*what a true gentleman he was, and a great bloke, and one of the best cooks I have ever come across in my 23 years service*".

Jed Taheny also spoke very highly of Michael. "*If an Army marches on its stomach, then we were in the best hands possible. I can still see some of those incredible spreads Mick and his crew put on after an Op. Where and how he got his hands on the food probably no one knows as no one would have wanted to know!!! Mike Berriman, I reckon you could tell a story or two! No doubt he will reunite with his "Acquisition Assistant" at the*

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*Horseshoe Lindsay "Woody" Wood and heaven help those controlling stock inventories where ever these two are now; and all done with a smile on their faces and a laugh. Feel privileged to have known him and grateful for his contribution to the great morale of the Battery".*

For his service to the Regiment and in particular 106 Field Battery, Michael was Mentioned in Dispatches.

Returning to Australia in February 1971, Michael stayed with the Regiment and commenced training with the rest of 106 Field Battery for deployment to Singapore. The Battery spent week after week training at High Range and Michael was always there to feed the diggers. The Battery deployed to Singapore in November 1971 and Michael and his family settled into life close to the barracks with a married quarter in Nee Soon. Michael's fondness for golf saw him playing at Royal Singapore several times during his time in Singapore. He was responsible for putting on fantastic buffets for many of the Battery functions. PJ Smith described him as "one of the great characters indeed and commenting that he could never recall seeing Michael without a smile on his face. During the tour, 106 Battery twice deployed to Butterworth Air Force Base as the base security company. Michael was always ready to help the diggers and Barny Barnard recalls getting Michael to find some fresh chooks to cook for the Battery Funds raffles. Cooked chooks were popular with the diggers as prizes as they could share and scoff them down on the spot. Michael came back one day with 'fresh' chooks; in fact they had just been killed and dressed at a local market and were still warm. "That fresh enough for you" asked Michael of Barny.

After Singapore, Michael was posted to another Infantry unit, this time 6 Battalion. He managed to get another trip back to Malaysia for a three month stint and eventually discharged in March 1978. Michael did serve with the RAA again with 5/11 Field Regiment from February 1982 to April 1984.

Post military, Michael worked as a caterer at the Kallangur Hotel, The Royal Brisbane Hospital and The Prince Charles Hospital where he retired at age 64.

Mike Berriman recounts a story about Michael. "About ten years ago (circa 2003) several of us were in Queensland for a small reunion and we decided to call on Mick O'Sullivan. We phoned his wife and were told he was busy in the local pub selling raffle tickets. We arrived and took up position at the bar and were approached by Mick who asked "you lads" to buy a few tickets. Mick did not recognise us and when we spilled the beans he was all taken aback with emotion. He invited us home and we met his wife and then Mick in his generosity cooked us a BBQ with trimmings. He gradually recognised our names and some faces and then to cap it all off he called his sister in Ireland and put each one of us on the phone to say a few words. Mick was loving the evening and with great reluctance we left him. There was not a dry eye in the house when we said goodbye".

In his later years, Michael enjoyed gardening, taking pride in his potatoes, watching his footy, having a bet, golfing and catching up with his Army buddies at reunions. He was a great influence on his six grandchildren and three great grandchildren who all thought the world of him. The care he gave to his wife Josie was relentless until her passing in 2007. Michael's own health started to deteriorate over the last two years but he still remained in his own home to the end which was his wish.

Don Donkin talks of the Loyalty of Michael, in particular to his diggers. Michael always considered himself as part of the Regiment, despite wearing a Catering Corps badge. He will be sadly missed by his loving family, special friend Sue and all who knew him.

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Members of the Pine Rivers RSL Club conducted a Poppy Service for Michael at Our Lady of the Way Catholic Church, Petrie and Michael was interned at Caboolture Lawn Cemetery.

### **Acknowledgements.**

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