

# *Gunner of Renown*



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

## **Warrant Officer Class 2 Edwin Francis BUXTON**

**(1929-1989)**

Frank Buxton was born in Wolverhampton, UK, on 19 May 1929, the son of Mrs E. Wakefield. He came to Australia under the auspices of the Fairbridge Farm Movement, in August 1940, and worked on the land in the Molong district, NSW until 1946. He joined the Interim Army on 19 May 1947. He transferred to the Australian Regular Army in November 1947 and his first posting was to 53<sup>rd</sup> Battery as gunner. He subsequently served in Korea as a corporal with 1RAR from April 1952 to March 1953.

Buxton possessed average intellectual abilities and was just below par on mechanical and clerical aptitude. He was a temporary bombardier in February 1952 and after his Korean tour he was back with the guns and was promoted temporary sergeant in 1955. He was a signals enthusiast, and scored a creditable 80%+ in operator training. For his Warrant Officer Gunnery course, the Chief Instructor noted 'he started with limited knowledge and experience, but made up for it with hard work and practical application', passing out sixth of 21. In 1963, he was a gun sergeant with 102nd Battery where his Battery Commander, Major Brien Forward, noted that he had known him for 12 years and wrote: 'I believe he is one of the most capable Regimental NCOs I have seen'. The battery served in Malaysia 1963-65.

During Indonesia's 'Confrontation' of Malaysia (1963-66) 102nd Battery was deployed to Borneo from April to August 1965 and Buxton commanded a single gun position at Pang Amo until he was seconded to another battery of the 45th Field Regiment, RA, that took over coastal patrols from the Royal Marine Commando No.3 Small Boat Section. The Commandos had been patrolling the waters of the western end of Sarawak, and Battery Headquarters and B Echelon of the 176th (Abu Klea) Light Battery took their place. Lieutenant Antony Choat, RA, was placed in command. Buxton's slight 'Pommy' accent and direct style were considered an asset. He joined a crash course in boat handling under the watchful gaze of a Royal Marine lieutenant and thereafter the gunners were left to the mercy of the sea, faulty radios, and temperamental outboard motors. They often had to land on rocky outcrops to establish observation posts, often at night and in huge swells that lasted for several days.

Frank Buxton was of average height, solid, good at sport and very fit. He had a no-nonsense 'do it or else' style, and was noted for being a stickler for the rules. His battery commanders in Vietnam remembered him as a very good BSM and a fellow who saved his and other BCs many hours of administrative tedium by his 'direct' style. Buxton had a penchant for knowledge and during his service he ensured he knew more about the guns he commanded than the remainder of the detachment. During his career he mastered the 25 pounder, 5.5 inch, 105 M2A2, the 14.5 inch trainer at the School of Artillery, and 4.2 inch mortar. He became Battery Guide with 103rd Field Battery, and served with most regiments and batteries

of that era. In between times, he undertook an Army Education Course and worked hard at it to get its highest grade without neglecting his other responsibilities.

He flew into Vung Tau in September 1966 and as Battery Sergeant Major of 101st Field Battery was based at Nui Dat until 8 May 1967. From 1969, he was on 'Special Service' with Australian Forces Overseas Fund, as the RSL Representative, responsible for distributing the largesse of several RSL clubs in Australia. They were the RSL Clubs that had unequivocally accepted Vietnam era National Servicemen as full members.

Buxton was discharged from the army on 17 October 1969 and from the reserves on 3 August 1972. While he was known as 'Cranky Frankie', underneath it all he was a 'softie', whose unspoken dictum was 'you had to be hard to be kind'. He was generous with advice and coached his teams well. From the Army he joined the NSW RSL State administration retiring as Assistant Secretary and had the trust and admiration of all those who dealt with him.

On 23 November 1977 Buxton married Lynette Cummins at 'The Swifts', Darling Point, Sydney with Catholic rites. They had three sons and lived at Baulkham Hills. He died from lung cancer on 1 December 1989 and was cremated at Castlebrook Lawn Cemetery. His widow and three sons Timothy, Sean and Rory all survived him.

Note:

The Fairbridge Farm Movement brought British children 'at risk' (orphans and those born out of wedlock) to Australia to begin a 'better' life.

*Sources:* Alan H Smith. NAA, Series B2458, Dossier, 21448 E. F. Buxton; Mrs Lynette Brown; Colonel D. Quinn, RAA (Retd); DVA telecon May/October 2006; emails 'Paddy' Durnford; Lieut Colonel Nick Marshall, RAA (Retd) and Colonel Arthur Burke (Retd); AWM Defence Dept. Photo records FO 3672 16 mm silent film (9 mins) of Sgt Buxton of 102 Battery at Pang Amo, DPR/TV/266.