

AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

Major Rodney Graeme Althaus (RL)

By Brian Armour



Brisbane

Rod Althaus was born on 17 Aug 1932 in Toowoomba Qld. He was educated Toowoomba Grammar and joined the School Cadet Unit and achieved the rank of Cadet Under Officer. He was a committed Presbyterian and learned to play the organ and piano, a skill which served him well throughout his later Army career

Rod joined the Citizens Military Forces (CMF) on 30 Aug 1950. It is not clear, but one assumes he served in the Darling Downs Regiment, and he was subsequently commissioned as a Lieutenant. Ian Darlington recalls his first meeting Rod at Sydney Central Station in transit to Melbourne/Portsea when the Queensland contingent arrived from

Rod had been accepted into OCS in Jul 1955 and graduated into the RAA in Jun 1956.

Rod was in a small OCS Class of 19 which included five fellow Gunners in Graham Annear, John Browne, Ian Darlington and Brian Johnson.

He married Marcia in Sorrento Victoria the day after his graduation. Details of his early career after Portsea are not clear. Ian advised that they proceeded immediately to their YO's Course at North Head in July 1956 which was unusual for mid-year graduates in later years; he put this down to the relatively large number of Gunner graduates in the Class. Post YO's course, Ian believes Rod would have been posted to 12 National Service Training Battalion in Queensland as that seemed the universal fate of OCS graduates at that time.

In these early family years Rod and Marcia had two children: Stuart born in 1960 and Fiona in 1963.

Stuart Althaus made the comment in his Eulogy that Rod was well known for his dry wit and humour (and many of his former colleagues have similar recollections). This suitably matches my first encounter with Rod early in 1964. I was at North Head as a newly commissioned officer and attending my YO's Course. Rod was a Captain serving with 131 Divisional Locating Battery who were based at North Head at that time. We were eating our breakfast when Rod entered the dining

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room and had a plate with a fair bit of offal on board and a glass of tomato juice. He announced to all present "I don't mind guts for breakfast, but I can't stand blood". We all thought this was a rather an unusual chap to be holding the exalted rank of Captain.

A year later in Jan 1965, a number of officers on the same course found ourselves in A Field Battery with Rod at Holsworthy and preparing to proceed to Malacca, Malaysia later that year. Rod was a Troop Commander in the early years later becoming the Battery Captain.

On our arrival in Malaysia later in 1965, the majority of the married Officers in the Battery lived on a leased British Army housing Estate in Jalan Tay Boon Seng which was halfway between the Malacca Town and the 28th Commonwealth Infantry Brigade garrison at Camp Terendak.

Rod and Marcia embraced the local community and exposed the culturally retiring Lieutenants out of our comfort zone. Marcia, through her earlier background with Scouts and Cubs made many local contacts. Among many others, we were introduced to the local satay seller Rahman who was a progressive Muslim who sold pork satay. We had many happy Sunday nights at Rahman's stall on the Malacca Padang eating satay at 2.5 cents per stick washed down by copious drafts of Tiger beer. It was tough on Active Service!

While in Malaysia, Rod was detached to 1st Field Regiment in South Vietnam from 21 Mar -24 Apr 1967. I have recently learnt from discussions with Barry Campbell that Rod was detached among others to boost FO support for Operation Portsea which took place in the above time frame. Operation Portsea was conducted in the Long Green and was intended to disrupt the operations of 275 VC Regiment. It involved 6RAR, elements of 5RAR and 3 Cav Regt and 11 ACR. Such comings and goings were commonplace in our service, but I had totally missed it at the time

On return to Holsworthy Camp in Australia in Oct 1967, most of the Battery was posted into 12th Field Regiment who were due to depart for South Vietnam early in 1968. Rod and I remained as the only two Officers left in the Battery; Rod was promoted to Major, and I became the Battery Commander while I was promoted to Captain and became the Battery Captain. Rod went off to the School of Artillery early in 1968 to attend his Battery Commander's Course and I commanded the Battery in his absence. Once he returned, I was frequently absent preparing to go to South Vietnam later that year. I served with Rod for almost four years which is a long time in Army practice. He was one of nature's characters and the source of many Army legends and improbable stories but always a respected colleague and a man of absolute integrity.

I only saw Rod twice after that time. Marcia died in 1970 and I visited Rod and his new wife Ellen at Mount Gravatt in the mid 1970's when he was CO I Army Recruiting Unit in Brisbane. Sometime along the way he also commanded 2 Army Recruiting Unit in Sydney; but the dates are not clear. Sometime before this, he

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was 2IC of the Tropical Trials Establishment (TTE) at Innisfail from 1972 to 1974. A photo of Rod leading the TTE at an Anzac Day Ceremony has been provided by Paul Asbury who served with Rod at that time.



ANZAC DAY - 1973 - INNISFAIL
Lt Col DAVID WISE, ROB ALTHAUS Paul Asbury, RSM VON KURZE, TREV DIXON GREG BLITZER

Rod left the Army on 21 Jul 78 after 25 years' service

Rod later married a childhood friend in Margaret in 1989 and we met at a Battery Reunion in Sydney in 2010. They settled in Southport Qld in their retirement.

I lost contact with Rod after that but a call for information on the Gunner Net for details of missing Battery Commanders of A Field Battery for the 150th

Anniversary a few months ago led me back to Rod. He had been in ill health in a Nursing Home in Southport but living close to Margaret who has her own issues. We communicated regularly over the past 6 months or so; an opportunity I value very much in retrospect.

I (among many others) have a rich store of anecdotes: suffice to say he was a character very much valued and admired by all who knew him.

I acknowledge the contributions of Stuart Althaus, Paul Asbury, Barry Campbell and Ian Darlington in compiling this Obituary for Rod.