

## AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

### Edward Barry Bessey

24 December 1940 – 5 November 2020

By Peter Bruce, OAM

Edward Barry (Eddie) Bessey was a Sydney lad. He was born the day before Christmas in 1940, the youngest of five children to Cyril and Clara Bessey. Eddie had a happy childhood, but like many families during and after WWII, money was short, and Eddie helped them out with a paper run. He was a keen young sportsman, enjoying soccer, rugby league and cricket. He also managed to spend quite a bit of time at the local snooker parlours and these early acquired skills treated him well in later life.

Eddie left school at age 14 and obtained an apprenticeship as an upholster. This didn't suit him, so he tried his hand as a shop assistant. This too proved to be going nowhere for Eddie so at the age of 19 he decided to join the Australian Army.

Eddie's Army career started with the usual recruit training at Kapooka. He had chosen and was selected to be allocated to the RAA. Following initial employment training on the guns, Eddie was posted to 1st Field Regiment which at the time was barracked at Holsworthy in western Sydney. In 1964, Eddie was posted to 111 Light Anti-Aircraft (LAA) Battery. The Battery had been warned out for a six-month unaccompanied deployment to Malaya. Air defence of the air base at Butterworth was a prime concern and the Battery arrived in Penang on 16 June 1964. The posting was extended to a two-year posting and families were able to join the members of the Battery.

Eddie returned to Australia in June 1966 and was posted to the staff of 1st Recruit Training Battalion (1RTB) at Kapooka. Eddie was promoted to Sergeant and John Wilson tells the story of how he talked one of the Army girls in the Head Quarters Orderly Room into sewing his new stripes on his uniform. Wendy Kerr was the young lady, and this was to be the start of a lasting relationship.



Eddie and Wendy were married on 4th January 1969 and Eddie deployed to Vietnam with 1st Field Regiment on 25th February the same year. Eddie was employed as Signals Supervisor with the Regiment with promotion to Staff Sergeant.

On his return to Australia on 11th March 1970, Eddie was posted to the School of Artillery, North Head and employed as a Signals Instructor on Regimental Training Wing (RTW). He fitted into School life very well and managed to stay there for nearly five years. Eddie then fell back into the two-year posting cycles with postings to 1st Field Regiment at Wacol in Brisbane, 7th Field Regiment in Sydney, 4th Field Regiment in Townsville and then back to 7th Field Regiment. During this time Eddie had changed streams to 'Q' and eventual promotion to Warrant Officer Class 1.

In January 1981, Eddie accepted a Prescribed Service Officer (PSO) Commission and a position with the rank of Captain. Then followed postings to 8th/12th Medium Regiment at Holsworthy, 7th Field Regiment as their Quartermaster and finally District Support Unit

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(DSU) Townsville. In 1983 Eddie was nominated as the Logistics Supervisor for the Westfield Ultra Marathon Run from Sydney to Melbourne. Cliff Young was the eventual winner of the event. In 1986, XXXX Australia hosted an around Australia relay marathon raising funds for Cancer Research. With his previous experience in such events, Eddie was asked to again be the Logistics Supervisor for that event. Several Australian Defence Force members were involved in the event.

In October 1985 Eddie elected discharge from the Army. However, he could not get the Army out of his system and enlisted with the Army Reserve from January 1988 until December 1989.

Eddie's Honours and Awards include: Australian Active Service Medal 1945-75 with Clasps Malaysia and Vietnam; General Service Medal 1962 with Clasp Malay Peninsula; Vietnam Medal, Australian Service Medal 1945-75 with Clasp South East Asia; Defence Force Service Medal with First and Second Clasps; National Medal; Australian Defence Medal; Vietnamese Campaign Medal; Pingat Jasa Malaysia and Returned from Active Service Badge.

Eddie performed his duty, wore the uniform, and served his country with absolute pride, honour, integrity, and dignity. In 2003 he was one of the founding members of the Carlyle Gardens RSL Sub-branch. Eddie was a tower of strength in an unassuming way – totally unflappable with a dry sense of humour. When there was a need for fundraising, selling badges or Poppies, at local shopping centres, Eddie was one the first to raise his hand. For several years he controlled the conduct of the annual Rotary Art Union at Carlyle Gardens and was always first to don the apron at social barbecues. In fact, his bulk cooking skills were often put to the test including when the village lost power after Cyclone Yasi and Eddie and the social group catered for around 80 Carlyle Gardens residents. He was part of the Carlyle Gardens Disaster Management Group.

Eddie and Wendy travelled extensively in their caravan and he enjoyed his games of golf. They also enjoyed their time cruising. Eddie's health deteriorated in his final years and he finally succumbed on 5 November 2020.

### **Acknowledgements:**

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