

## Vale - Ben Blakeney OAM

*Provided by Colonel Arthur Burke  
Colonel Commandant - Northern Region*

The following is an amalgam of several messages from Colonel Alan Hutchinson, Major General Paul Stevens AO, our Representative Colonel Commandant, an article from the 'Canberra Times' on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004 forwarded by Jim Ponting and a little bit of research.

Lavanda G. Blakeney was born at Dulwich Hill, Sydney on 9th March 1937, the son of Aborigines John and Ethel and one of twelve children. However, had I headed this message under his born name, many of you would have 'bished' it before reading. Widely and affectionately known throughout the Regiment as 'Black Ben', this Gunner endeared himself to many with his forthright manner and rough diamond appeal. Ben served with the 101st Field Battery in Malaya (1959-1961) then returned to the fledgling 4th Field Regiment at Wacol. He then spent time in Air Defence before seeking discharge after eight years' of service.

His acting career began in 1966 as an extra drinking at the bar in the film 'They're a Weird Mob'. Ben's brother Eddie also recalls his appearing in the television series 'Homicide' and 'Skippy' and as a tracker in the 1970 film 'Ned Kelly' with Mick Jagger. But the climax of his acting career was undoubtedly the portrayal of the spirit of the famous Aborigine, Bennelong atop the Sydney Opera House at its opening in 1973. On his website, [www.wollondilly.com/bennelong.htm](http://www.wollondilly.com/bennelong.htm), Ben wrote of 'the day the nation looked up to me when I said, 'I am Bennelong!'. Eddie reports that Ben said afterwards he 'met the Queen in his headdress and was invited for cups of tea and cucumber sandwiches or whatever'.

Ben was the first Aborigine to join the Commonwealth Police in 1977 and was selected for the Cyprus peacekeeping force in 1979, the year in which the Australian Federal Police was formed. He wrote of receiving a 'medal of honour for bravery in the line of duty' and served with this force until 1984.

Ben then made boomerangs from his home in Queanbeyan and was much in demand from schools to demonstrate the art of boomerang throwing. He was also reportedly quite active in supporting Aboriginal causes and affairs. Ben's webmaster writes, 'Ben is a modest man. The first he knew of his nomination [for the OAM] was, when making boomerangs, a neighbour said 'Have you seen the paper? You've been awarded the Order of Australia Medal'. Ben replied, 'Gosh' and kept making his boomerangs but was eventually drawn into speculation and acknowledged it was probably because of his service to the community as a whole.

Ben Blakeney never forgot his Gunner beginnings and was a regular attendee at Royal Australian Artillery Association functions in the ACT. His rough diamond appeal demanded attention and his rather dry sense of humour was always there to illustrate a point with a good yarn.

Vale 'Black Ben' Blakeney - aborigine, gunner, actor and one of the characters of the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery.