Lavanda Gordon (Ben) Blakeney was born at Dulwich Hill, Sydney or 9 March 1937, the son of aborigines John and Ethel and one of twelve children. He was originally known as Van from the abbreviated Lavanda. During introductions Van was introduced as Ven which was heard as Ben. “From then on I became Ben Blakeney and I never looked back”.

Ben completed his National Service obligation from April 24 to July 30, 1956 and followed on with a stint in the CMF from July 1956 until April 1958. Ben then signed on with the Australian Regular Army at the age of 21 and after completing his recruit training at 1RTB, he was allocated to the Royal Australian Artillery. He was posted to the School of Artillery, North Head in August 1958 and after initial employment training, was subsequently posted to 101 Field Battery in November 1958. The battery was in training for overseas deployment and in October 1959 Ben and the battery deployed to Malaya. Ben spent time at Butterworth and was involved with many deployments with the battery. When the Emergency finished in July 1960, Ben moved to Terendak with the battery to join 26 Field Regiment, Royal Artillery.

On return to Australia on 27 October 1961, Ben was posted to the fledgling 4th Field Regiment at Wacol. Ben stayed with the Regiment until discharge on 10 April 1964.

Ben’s acting career began in 1966 as an extra 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 web site 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 head-dress 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. Ben was promoted to Sergeant while serving in Cyprus. Ben would visit the local school and take his didgeridoo along for the children to try. He wrote of receiving a ‘medal of honour for bravery in the line of duty’ and served with this force until 1984. On 29 March 1985, First Constable Blakeney was awarded the National Medal and on 8 July 1992, Constable Blakeney was awarded the Police Overseas Service Medal with Clasp ‘Cyprus’.

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. Ben was awarded his OAM “for services to the local community in June 1994. 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.

Ben passed away on Sunday 28 December 2003 in Queanbeyan, NSW. So many attended the funeral that people were standing outside to listen to the service. Ben was remembered for his community service, his ability to quickly form good friendships and
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Ben’s honours and awards included:

- Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM)
- AASM (Malaya & Thai-Malay)
- GSM (Malaya)
- ASM (SE Asia)
- Police Overseas Service Medal – Clasp CYPRUS
- National Medal
- Anniversary of National Service Medal
- UNFICYP Medal
- Pinjat Masa Malaysia
- Army Combat Badge

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- Colonel Alan Hutchinson.
- Major General Paul Stevens, AO.
- Canberra Times article of 1 January 2004.
- Jim Ponting.
- Platypus (Australian Federal Police Publication) dated 31 August 2018.
- Peter McDonald National Secretary/Treasurer, United Nations & Overseas Policing Association of Australia (UNOPAA).