



Vale **John Henry 'Ken' Buhmann**

Sadly, John Henry (Ken) Buhmann, another of our well-liked and much respected members of the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery passed away on 26 October 2006.

Ken's record of service received from the Central Army Records Office was rather simplistic and lacked key dates and postings. In fleshing out these bare bones, I am truly grateful to the following people for their assistance: Peter Tedder, Tom Banfield, Ron Haskard, John Pollock, Rex Taylor, 'Skeeta' Wills, George Salmon, John Humphrey, Don Quinn, Vern Mullins, Maurie Maguire and Paul Feeney.

At the mature age of 23 years, Ken Buhmann enlisted in the Australian Regular Army planning to 'do his bit for Queen and country' by serving in Korea. However, by the time he had completed recruit training, was allotted to the 1st Battalion The Royal Australian Regiment (1 RAR) as a gunner rifleman, and arrived in Korea, it was 31 March 1954 and the Armistice had been signed. Private Buhmann served on with 1 RAR in Japan and by September had earned his first stripe - lance corporal. The battalion returned to Australia in June 1955, Ken went back to the Gunners and three months later he was promoted to bombardier.

It would then appear that Ken then went to the Recruit Training Battalion at Puckapunyal. From 1958 onwards, then Sergeant NE 'Skeeta' Wills got to know Bombardier Buhmann well and describes him as 'well liked by all and an excellent instructor'.

Ken Buhmann was one of the early members to join the fledgling 4th Field Regiment RAA at Wacol in 1960. On promotion to sergeant in 1961, he became a gun detachment commander. Ken was never a loud sergeant, but accomplished much with his quiet approach which was respected by his Diggers. In the words of a fellow gun sergeant, retired WO1 RP (Rex) Taylor, 'He was an absolutely marvellous Number One [of his gun].' He then became the D Troop TARA (Technical Assistant Royal Artillery) sergeant. Brigadier G T (George) Salmon AM (Retd) was the GPO (gun position officer) at the time and recalls, 'Ken was one of my best gun sergeants, but then [TARA sergeant] Jim Neal took him under his wing and "bred him" as his very competent successor.'

When 105th Field Battery was warned for service in 1965 as the first RAA unit to be deployed to Vietnam, Ken was the battery commander's assistant. Running a BC's party under operational conditions was a significant task, but Sergeant Buhmann took this all in his stride. The BC, later Lieutenant Colonel P N O (Peter) Tedder (RL) said, 'I never had any real problems with the BC's party. Ken did not throw his weight around - he handled all matters quietly and firmly. I felt comfortable leaving both administration and operations matters in his capable hands. He combined well with [Captain M C (Mal)] Peck's mortar party in the battalion command post. I had a great deal of affection for him and his first wife and believed that he was obviously RSM material.'

On return to Australia Ken was promoted to Warrant Officer Class Two and became an AIG (assistant instructor in gunnery) at the School of Artillery. George Salmon was an IG (instructor in gunnery) at the time and recalls, 'WO2 Buhmann was a very competent AIG' who was confident in his work and handled students particularly well.

Battery Sergeant Major (BSM) at 13th Field Regiment RAA (CMF) in Adelaide was Ken's next challenge. This was the perfect foundation for then moving back to Wacol as the BSM of his old 105th Field Battery. This was 1971 and a very busy time as 1st Field Regiment RAA was working up to return to Vietnam. Suddenly Australia's commitment to that war came to an end and the unit somewhat lost direction. Ken was posted to a local CMF unit, 5th Field Regiment RAA as a BSM and the unit's 2IC, later Colonel V W (Vern) Mullins RFD ED (Retd) remembers him for being 'very knowledgeable and 'getting on very well with both officers and soldiers'. Across Brisbane at 1st Field Regiment, the RSM was detached and Ken took his place on promotion. The commanding officer of the time, later Colonel J H (John) Humphrey (Retd) remembers Ken as 'good at anything . . . he ran the Sergeants' Mess well . . . [and] was very quiet but got the job done very well'. Colonel D (Don) Quinn AM (Retd) was the next CO and describes Ken as 'a great RSM . . . tremendous . . . he had the welfare of his Diggers in his heart . . . [and] was quiet and competent'.

In 1976, WO1 Ken Buhmann was appointed the 1st Division Artillery Sergeant Major, the senior non commissioned posting within the division. This was an emerging time for the divisional artillery as it increasingly took over control of Gunner units from the task force / brigade headquarters. Ken's quiet approach in dealing with his peers across the division earned him respect and firmly re-established the role of the DASM.

Having become very settled in southeast Queensland, but still wanting to serve on, Ken accepted the appointment as QM of the fledgling Army Reserve 5th/11th Field Regiment RAA at Annerley in Brisbane for his final two years in the Army. The CO he served at this time, Lieutenant Colonel P J (Paul) Feeney RFD (Retd) and the ARes RSM, retired WO1 M (Maurie) McGuire OAM remember him as a very experienced senior soldier who blended well with the Army Reserve all ranks and just 'got the job done'.

Ken was discharged from the Army on 8 March 1980 after 27 years of dedicated service. Always one for mixing well with people, he kept in continued as a taxi driver until his final retirement. John Humphrey recalls passing the local taxi rank on this morning walk in the Clayfield area and often receiving a cheery wave from and having chats with Ken awaiting a fare in his taxi.

Ken Buhmann enjoyed retirement. He had remarried, to Dawn and they were enjoying the twilight years together. He was a strong supporter of the 105th Battery Association after it was raised in the early 1990s. Well groomed and with his signature razor straight part in his greying hair, he brought an old world influence amongst the younger Vietnam veterans. Quiet of nature as always, he still had the respect of all ranks at the reunions. Sadly, dementia crept into his life and Dawn was obliged to have Ken accommodated in a nursing home. Old mates visited him until his condition prevented recognition and Dawn pulled an appropriate and protective curtain around him. Soon after, he passed away with quiet dignity.

Ken's final parade was held at the Gregson & White Chapel, Nambour on Tuesday 31 October 2006. The strong cross section of all Gunner ranks attending bore testimony to the esteem in which Ken was held.

Vale Warrant Officer Class One John Henry 'Ken' Buhmann - an old breed truly professional Gunner, a quiet achiever and a highly respected member of the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery. Gone to that Great Gun Park up above at 76 years of age.

On behalf of the Royal Regiment, a letter of condolence has been sent to Ken's widow, Dawn Buhmann, 67 Albatross Place, 171 David Low Way, Bli Bli, Q 4560.

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