

AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

Leslie Allan Cooper

22 February 1934 – 19 July 2022

By Peter Bruce, OAM



Leslie (Les) Allan Cooper was a special person in so many ways. With family, friends, and Army mates, he was special. He was also special because he accrued three separate service numbers.

Les was a Queenslander, born in Bundaberg in 1934. Les was called up for National Service (NS) in August 1952 and completed his compulsory three months training with 11 National Service Training Battalion at Wacol in Brisbane. At the completion of his NS full time obligation, Les was transferred to the Citizens Military Force, (CMF) and posted firstly to 30 Medium Regiment, and consequently 12 Light Regiment then located at Moorooka in Brisbane. Les remained with that Regiment until a move to 5th Field Regiment then based at Kelvin Grove, in August 1958. Les remained a member of 5th Field Regiment until 25 October 1959 when after taking advice from his Army mentor, Bill

Silverstone, he decided that military life was for him, and he joined the Australian Regular Army (ARA).

The first stop for Les was 1st Recruit Training Battalion (1RTB) at Kapooka in NSW. Even though he had completed his NS training and spent some six years in the CMF he was required to complete the ARA recruit course. On completion of his recruit training in February 1960, Les was posted to the School of Artillery at North Head in Sydney to undertake his basic gunnery training. In May 1961, Les was posted to 4th Field Regiment, then barracked at Wacol in Brisbane. It was becoming obvious that Les had a particular attachment to Southeast Queensland. During his time with 4th Field Regiment, Les completed training in survey, command post duties and forward observer duties and by 1967 had been promoted to Sergeant.



Sergeant Les Cooper deployed to South Vietnam with 108th Field Battery as part of 4th Field Regiment on HMAS Sydney on 19 May 1967. They arrived in Vung Tau harbour and were transferred to Nui Dat by Chinook Helicopters on 30 May. Les was employed as a Forward Observers Assistant (FO Ack) and the Battery Commanders Assistant (BCs Ack) under then Major Jock Jenvey working with the headquarters of 2nd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (2RAR). (See photo) Unfortunately, Les was medically evacuated back to Australia in November 1967 suffering from severe back injuries. (Les and Jock remained very close friends).

During his recovery in Australia, Les was posted in a holding position with 5th Field Regiment in Ipswich before a promotion to Warrant Officer Class Two (WO2)

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and a posting to 3rd Field Regiment in Perth, Western Australia. Les remained in Perth from July 1968 until May 1969 when he was posted back to the School of Artillery at North Head where he was an instructor on Field Wing.

In December 1971, Les was posted to 28 ANZUK Field Regiment in Singapore. Australia's 106th Field Battery, and the Royal Artillery's 1st Light Battery (The Blazers) formed the main two batteries of the combined Australia, New Zealand and United Kingdom (ANZUK) Regiment. The third battery from New Zealand was 161 Field Battery which deployed with the Regiment on an irregular basis. Elements of all countries made up the Regimental Headquarters of the Regiment and Les was employed as the Sergeant Major Instructor Gunnery (SMIG) with the Regiment. This posting was an accompanied posting and Les's family joined in the social life of Australian and UK families in Singapore. Les always spoke fondly of the time he and his family spent in Singapore, they made many friends and enjoyed the work and social time they spent in Singapore.

Les and his family returned to Australia in December 1973 with Les taking up an instructor posting at the Royal Military College (RMC) Duntroon in Canberra. He remained at RMC until December 1975 when he was posted on promotion to Warrant Officer Class One (WO1) as the Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) of 7th Field Regiment in Sydney. His final posting was to Headquarters Field Force Command in Sydney as Regimental Master Gunner. Les was most proud of this appointment, and he cherished the time he served under Brigadier Bill Silverstone. They remained friends for life.

Les elected discharge after 20 years and four months service with the ARA on 20 February 1980.

Les Cooper's Honours and Awards include:

- Australian Active Service Medal 1945-75 with Clasp Vietnam
- Vietnam Medal
- Australian Service Medal 1945-75 with Clasp SE Asia
- Defence Force Service Medal with First Clasp
- National Medal
- Australian Defence Medal
- Anniversary of National Service 1951-1972 Medal
- Returned from Active Service Badge.

After retiring from the Army, Les and Gloria purchased 10 acres of land at Springbrook behind the Gold Coast, Queensland. They built up a successful avocado property and they enjoyed many years there until his damaged back forced them to sell up and move to Arundel, Gold Coast. After leaving the property he enjoyed success with other various employment and finally retired fully when purchasing land at Glass House Mountains and built a new home. They moved again some years later to the Kawana Island, Sunshine Coast and enjoyed catching up with many Army mates from time to time. Their last move was back to the Gold Coast to Seachange at Arundel.

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Les with Keith Cossart at the National Gunner Dinner in Canberra, May 2011.

Les and Gloria celebrated 65 years of marriage in 2022. They travelled to the USA numerous times to stay and visit their eldest

son Allan, his wife Shawn and grand-daughter Kelly. Allan has resided in the USA for the past 35 years. Les and Gloria adore their grand-daughter Kelly and her husband Jacob, and Les loved the time he got to spend with her over the years, both in the USA and on trips she made to Australia. Les and Gloria loved and cherished their trips to the USA to spend time with Allan and his family.

Their youngest son Ross and his wife Fran have been married for 34 years and live on the Gold Coast. Les and Gloria spent a lot of time with them over these years, and always cherished this time with them both. Les was very proud of his sons and loved Gloria very deeply.

In recent years apart from the severe back injury Les suffered from constantly, he also suffered from dementia with short term memory loss, but he was still able to fondly remember his army days and his mates. His family and friends would listen to Les repeat the stories of his army life over and over again, sometimes 5 mins after telling them. But as they say it just showed how proud he was of his time in the army and those who worked with him. It gave him so much joy to remember those times.

Les peacefully passed away at the Gold Coast Hospital from pneumonia and complications from his dementia. As per Les's wishes he was privately cremated and there was no service.

Les's death was announced to the Gunner community and some responses appear below.

Bill Silverstone said of Les: "I had the good fortune to know and serve with Master Gunner Les Cooper at the real beginning of his military career at the Ipswich battery, 12 Light Regiment in 1956 and at the end of it at Field Force Artillery in 1978-80. He was an enthusiastic member of the Regiment with exceptional experience and knowledge. He was one of the best trainers of men I have ever met. He had a presence and always carried himself with dignity and pride. He presented as a hard man and was intolerant of people, junior and senior, who did not try to measure up to his standards. This hardness, while real, was countered by a concealed generosity of spirit and an innate kindness. I have seen examples of this in the field when assessing the proficiency of Artillery Units. He was an inspiration to many, particularly young ambitious non-commissioned-officers. His family was the only thing he ever put before the requirements of his military profession. Over the years we became good friends and I share his family's sadness and offer my condolences to Gloria and their two sons.

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Keith Hall recalls of Les: "Les was a marvellous technical NCO. I first knew him in 101 Battery at 4th Field Regiment in the early 60's. He was a great mentor to a young officer, at times not kind, but such a man."

George Salmon recalls of Les: "I knew Les well from my time as Gun Position Officer (GPO) D Troop and later its Troop Commander in 105 Battery, 4th Field Regiment at Wacol in 1962-64, when he was the Forward Observer Assistant (FO Ack) in "C" Troop. We crossed paths many times in later years. He was, indeed, well respected."

Garry Jones recalls of Les: "He was our SMIG on detachment commanders' course at 28 ANZUK Regiment in Singapore. A great instructor and a true gentleman."

John McPherson recalls of Les: "Les was my FO Ack and ran our small team most effectively and efficiently. I admired his loyalty to me and the regiment. He stood tall in his later appointments and will be remembered for his outstanding dress and deportment, and a forthright, no-nonsense approach to his work."

Ken (Spud) Murphy recalls of Les: "I had the pleasure of knowing and serving with Les over many years. A man with strong opinions, not afraid to voice them, but always a straight shooter."

Acknowledgements:

- John Wells
- Warren Barnard
- Bill Silverstone
- George Salmon
- Ross Cooper (Les and Gloria's youngest son)
- Garry Jones
- Keith Hall
- Ken Murphy
- John McPherson