

Lieutenant Colonel R.J. Copley

Colonel Arthur Burke, OAM (Retd)



Retired Lieutenant Colonel Robert John (Bob) Copley passed away on 17th September 2009 from an insidious blood condition which he had suffered for some three years.

Born to a professional fisherman at Manly, Brisbane on 9th March 1940, Bob grew up on the water. Sadly, his father passed away when Bob was only seven years of age and, being the eldest of three boys, he became the man of the house. Educated at Brisbane's Villanova College, his leadership qualities and people skills were acknowledged by his appointment as College Captain in 1958.

The next year, he entered the Royal Military College, Duntroon with such other notables as Peter Arnison, Geoff Carter, Iain Macinnes, Brian Mitchell and Phil Ratcliff. Bob graduated into the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery (RAA) and spent his formative years in 101st Field Battery at the fledgling 4th Field Regiment, Wacol, Brisbane. During this time, he courted Anita and married her on 30th March 1964. They lived happily in a flat near his family at Manly.

The year 1965 brought Bob Junior into the world and a family posting to Papua New Guinea which included promotion to captain on the headquarters' staff. This life of the Raj agreed with them and, happily settled within Murray Barracks at Port Moresby, Bob and Anita were blessed with the arrival of Mark in 1966.

Returning to Wacol in 1967, the family barely had time to set up house before Bob's 106th Field Battery departed for 12 months' service in Vietnam with 4th Field Regiment. He spent all of this period as a forward observer with the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment. Professional, diligent and cool under enemy fire,

Captain Copley's personal courage and prompt, accurate, close fire support with V Company in January 1968 and C Company the next month earned him a Mention in Despatches.

Though posted to 19th Composite (later 8th Medium) Regiment at Holsworthy, Bob spent six months working for the School of Artillery and one month in the USA as trials officer for the 105-mm gun replacement. He was then placed on higher duties in the appointment of training officer at the School in July 1969. Bob was promoted major a year later and moved to Developments Wing. This provided a good grounding for being sent to the Royal Military College of Science at Shrivenham in the UK for 15 months' technical tertiary training commencing in September 1970. The British system of working hard but playing just as hard made this a very enjoyable period which included considerable travel with Anita and the two boys.

The end of the course was rather hectic with Belinda's birth in January 1972 and then returning to Australia with a new babe in arms. Bob was posted to the Defence Materiel Organisation, Melbourne and moved with the reorganisation of Defence to Canberra in May. Just when the family thought it was settled in the suburb of Holt, Major Copley was notified that he had been selected to attend the Army Staff College at Queenscliff, Victoria in 1974. This was another year of hard work, hard play and renewing acquaintances with his peers at the many Staff College social functions.

Then it was back to Canberra and an Army Operations Branch appointment in surveillance. Family stability now appeared likely, for promoted lieutenant colonel in 1977, Bob was appointed to the Defence Establishments Branch. He transited to organisational studies during the next year. Always seeking knowledge, Lieutenant Colonel Copley undertook tertiary studies at this time achieving a Bachelor of Arts (Military Studies) in mid 1980.

Before this, however, Bob was selected to attend the United States Armed Forces Staff College in 1979. This allowed a couple of happy family days in Honolulu and at Disneyland en route to Washington. The six-month joint services staff level course was a challenge which was accepted, acquitted and led to Lieutenant Colonel Copley being appointed the Principal Standardisation Officer on the Australian Army Staff in Washington. This was a 30 month posting which included considerable travel, but allowed for some quality family time in the United States.

Bob returned to a project coordinator's appointment in the Army's Materiel Branch in Canberra in mid 1982. His strong beliefs in soldiers having a say saw him at this time become a very active foundation member of the Armed Forces Federation of Australia. Bob was heading for a section head colonel's job at the end of 1985 but decided that it was time to pursue challenges outside the Army and transferred to the Active Army Reserve on 9th February 1986.

The next decade saw Bob as an executive with the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries in Canberra. During this time, he made a significant contribution to the Australian car manufacturing industry. The experience led him to write his first book—*The Urge to Score*—about business management. Bob then went on to become an accomplished author and poet and established his own e-book publishing business writing on leadership and management, fiction and short stories. More recently, his love for poetry took over and, in the words of Bob Junior, 'he wrote with

a touch of controversy and a bit of larrikinism, but always challenging and thought provoking.'

The Australian Information Industry Association conducts a prestigious event, the iAwards, which recognises the best Australian information and communications technology innovations each year. Aetherbook Publishing, Bob's business received an iAward in 2007 along with other such household names as Foxtel. What an incredibly talented man!

Sport had always played a large part in Bob's life and he was a regular member of Dads' Army, the retired Army officers' golfing group which met at the Royal Canberra Golf Club each Monday. His tennis prowess was matched only by the high standard of his personally manicured grass tennis court which was probably the last of its kind in Canberra.

But Bob Copley was also a devoted family man. Previous brief mentions of family stability, travelling and Disneyland illustrate this. When his children married, their spouses were warmly welcomed into the family and the subsequent grandchildren refocussed Bob and Anita's lives. Bob would spend hours with them—reading, talking, watching them play sport and just being there for the young ones. Above all, he was always very patient with them and continually emphasised the importance of self-belief.

He was gentle, kind and thoughtful and his multiple random acts of kindness to friends, family and strangers continued even after his wife Anita passed away from breast cancer on Anzac Day 2007. In her final hours, Bob told Anita that she would never be lonely where she was going and that he would one day catch up with her again. During his final week, he completely entranced the nursing staff by always thanking them for their attentions and asking how they were.

Vale Robert John Copley—officer, gentleman, Gunner, author, poet, publisher and loving family man. Taken to the Great Gun Park up above at only 69 years young. My thanks to Dr Bob Copley Jnr for extracts from his eulogy to assist with this tribute.