

Warrant Officer Class One William John (Bill) Degenaro, OAM

Major D.T. (Terry) Brennan
Various Sources

The funeral service for Warrant Officer Class One Bill Degenaro, who died on 27th August 2011, was held at the Anzac Memorial Chapel of Saint Paul at the Royal Military College Duntroon on 6th September 2011.

Major General Gerard Fogarty, Head People Capability, delivered the eulogy. People in attendance included Chief of the Defence Force General David Hurley, Regimental Sergeant Major - Army Warrant Officer Stephen Ward and senior Regimental Sergeant Majors from across Army. An honour guard was provided by 1st Regiment RAA in recognition of his 37 years of service to the Royal Regiment.

Major General Paul Symon, Deputy Chief of Army, observed that as a junior artillery officer, I was influenced by a number of outstanding non-commissioned officers - Bill being one from the top shelf. He had a smirk with junior officers. It said on the one hand 'you've got a lot to learn', but it was done in a spirit of friendliness and a desire to make us all as good as we could be. In the command post, his technical skills were outstanding. He made us learn through example and there was never any ego involved. He was self-assured and very widely respected by all ranks. Of course, the Army saw his qualities and, hence, his rise to the most senior soldier rank, and a range of very demanding appointments. His courage, these past few years, has been an inspiration to us all. His pride in his family and in the Army was evident to the last. Bill will want us all to smile; to remember him as a man of integrity, a great soldier, a firm friend too many, and the proudest family man.

The Regimental Gunner, Warrant Officer Class One Paul Washford on behalf of all ranks of the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery extended condolences to Bill's family and friends. Bill was an exceptional soldier who always gave his all and because of that he was able to influence many officers and soldiers over his 36 year career. His passion, spirit and humour will be sorely missed by all those who knew him.

He added Bill and I crossed paths on numerous occasions over the years either working together or on courses, including being members of the same section on our Regimental Sergeant Major course. Over those years I learnt a lot from Bill and valued all the advice and insights he gave me, especially his views on Aussie Rules over Rugby.

Warrant Officer Class One Bill Degenaro enlisted into the Army on 28th January 1975 and was allocated to the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery on completion of recruit training. He was employed in various junior positions in gun batteries as a gun number and signaller predominantly in 8th/12th Medium Regiment and 4th Field Regiment during the years 1975 to 1989.

Robert Young a fellow Gunner who served with Bill in 103 Medium Battery in the late 1970's made the comment '... ya've gone to that great gun park - at least there will be no safari suits like the one's we bought in Malaya in 1977'.

Bill was promoted to Lance Bombardier in 1978, Bombardier in 1979 and Sergeant in 1982. In October 1989 he was promoted to warrant officer class two in 8th/12th Medium Regiment and completed further postings in that rank with 10th Medium Regiment, the Australian Defence Force Academy as an instructor and Squadron Sergeant Major and lastly Battery Sergeant Major in 4th Field Regiment.

Major Ian Cossart said Bill or as I used to call him back in days of PT runs, 'Puffing Billy'. I learnt so much from him. The posting cycle led us on different paths however I will remember a man of respect, integrity and commitment.

Bill was promoted to warrant officer class one in January 1996 and then posted to the Proof and Experimental Establishment, Port Wakefield as the Master Gunner. He completed Regimental Sergeant Major appointments within the School of Artillery and 8th/12th Medium Regiment and was subsequently posted to the Soldier Career Management Agency, Queenscliff as Career Manager, Royal Australian Artillery.

His former Commanding Officer / Chief Instructor, Colonel Steve Goltz said Bill and I got to know each other as RSM to CO/CI at Puckapunyal and quickly established mutual respect and friendship. He had a wicked sense of humour but protected his troops in private when I needed advice and guidance on all soldier issues. This friendship extended well past the posting cycle and I was always pleased to catch up with Bill as time and geography allowed.

He had postings as Regimental Sergeant Major Ceremonial, Australian Defence Force as part of the Directorate of Protocol and Visits. He was appointed as Regimental Sergeant Major of the 7th Brigade on 16th January 2006.

His former Brigade Commander Brigadier Andrew Smith commented there are so many great things to remember about Bill that we won't capture them all, but I can offer a few. Bill and I met late in both our careers, when he was the Regimental Sergeant Major of the Seventh Brigade in Brisbane in 2006. He had to leave to focus on fighting his illness when he was only about six months into the job, but in that time he impressed everyone with his experience, professionalism and calm approach to any task - and we had some strange ones, starting the year off with a couple of months in Melbourne supporting the Commonwealth Games. One of his early achievements was helping us find a source of much-needed funds (legally) - I remember his explanation starting 'I met this bloke in a pub last night...' One of my fondest memories is of him tipping me a cheeky wink as he marched past the Saluting Base in Adelaide Street, Brisbane, on ANZAC Day 2006. That was the first time the whole Brigade had marched through the city for some years - another thing that Bill got organised. I am very privileged to have served with Bill, and lucky to have had his support and advice as my RSM.

Due to his illness Bill was posted to Canberra and employed within the Retention Team-Army at Army Headquarters. Whilst in the Canberra he completed a short term posting to France in which he co-ordinated the ceremonial activities for the first ANZAC Day Dawn Service at Villers-Bretonneux. On 16th January 2009 he was appointed Regimental Sergeant Major Ceremonial - Army.

Bills career highlights included deployments as part of a Rifle Company Butterworth and the Multinational Force and Observers, Sinai; participation in the Army Tattoo '88; and attendance at the 90th Anniversary of ANZAC Day at Gallipoli, as part of the Australian Defence Force Contingent in 2005.

Warrant Officer Class One William John Degenaro was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in June 2006. This was for meritorious performance of duty as a Master Gunner, Regimental Sergeant Major, Soldier Career Adviser within the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery, and Regimental Sergeant Major Ceremonial at Defence Headquarters. His citation stated:

Warrant Officer Degenaro's service as a Master Gunner, Regimental Sergeant Major, Soldier Career Adviser within the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery, and Regimental Sergeant Major Ceremonial at Defence Headquarters has been an inspiration to all ranks. He has consistently displayed superior leadership, outstanding administrative skills and has contributed significantly to the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery and the Australian Defence Force. His meritorious performance of duty has brought great credit to himself and the Australian Army.

Bill was married to Heather and was devoted father to his three daughters - Katherine, Sarah and Amy. He enjoyed most sports and liked to participate in cricket, tennis and squash. He was a very keen Adelaide Crows supporter. He is sadly missed by all who knew him.