

## Vale Brigadier JG (Joe) Hooton CBE



The second officer to command the fledgling 4<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment RAA after its reformation at Wacol, Brisbane passed away peacefully on 14 November 2012. Lieutenant Colonel John Gordon (Joe) Hooton took over command from John Hancock (Jack) Studdert in January 1963 and left the unit in June 1964 to attend the United States Armed Forces Staff College.

John Hooton was born at Grafton, NSW on 26 September 1923. He attended Epping Public and Sydney Grammar Schools before applying for entry to the Royal Military College, Duntroon. Rejected for being too young, he transferred his school cadet commission to 2<sup>nd</sup> Armoured Regiment (Militia) until he turned 17 years of age then went to RMC.

Graduating in December 1943 and allocated to the Royal Australian Artillery, he saw active service in Borneo with 2/6<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment AIF then went with A Field Battery to the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) in Japan. He became a staff captain on Headquarters BCOF before returning to Australia in 1948.

After 18 months as a staff captain in Administration Branch at Army Headquarters, Captain Hooton was selected for a Long Gunnery Staff Course in the United Kingdom. Having married Mona immediately prior to embarking, they spent a most enjoyable two years in England whilst he studied field, anti aircraft and coastal artillery and was then posted for six months as the acting Brigade Major Royal Artillery (BMRA) on Headquarters 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division in Luneburg, Germany.

Returning to the School of Artillery at North Head, Sydney as an Instructor in Gunnery in May 1952, Joe excelled in passing on his overseas knowledge and experiences to two years of Gunner students. Promoted major, he was appointed BMRA on Headquarters RAA 2<sup>nd</sup> Division during 1954 before attending Australian Staff College in 1955. Major Hooton then returned to his 2<sup>nd</sup> Division appointment for another year. His enthusiasm matched that of the keen CMF Gunners and he was well accepted.

The School of Administration and Tactics had been established at Seymour to qualify and instruct on current tactical and administrative doctrine for members of all arms and services. Major John Hooton was posted there as an instructor, but found 'an excessive number of "9 to 5" civilians with too much authority who overruled decisions taken on sound military grounds'.

Promoted lieutenant colonel, Joe returned to Army Headquarters as the General Staff Officer Grade One in the Directorate of Military Training before being appointed commanding officer of 4<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment from January 1963. This was a time of training with the CMF as part of the Pentropic Division and Lieutenant Colonel Hooton was scathing in his honesty regarding capabilities. 'The CMF was not capable of [achieving] three months notice to move because they were being trained by leftovers from WW2'; 'There was a dropping of [Regular soldiers'] interest in military matters because of the time spent on administration'; and on 4<sup>th</sup> Field's battery at seven days' notice to move—'quite incapable though they could have produced something [if required]'.

Joe Hooton was well qualified and experienced to command and held a very tight but happy rein as he endeavoured to bring a fledgling unit up to professional training standards. He had a determination to achieve and 'liked every minute of being a CO'. Joe was

beginning to make headway and lengthy exercises such as Sky High in November 1963 provided a good assessment of progress. However, in 1964, the loss of experienced people to the Australian Army Training Team and to Headquarters Australian Forces Vietnam as Australia's commitment built up severely reduced the unit's capabilities.

At short notice, Joe's command came to an end when he was selected for the United States Armed Forces Staff College which began in June 1964. On completion of this six month course, Lieutenant Colonel Hooton was appointed the Intelligence Officer on the Australian Army Staff (Washington). This was a most enjoyable period of service with plenty of travel around the Americas. He became very enthused with intelligence work which was probably just as well for, on return to Australia in February 1967, Joe was promoted colonel and appointed Director of Military Intelligence.

In November 1970 Colonel Hooton was appointed Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Logistic Support Group at Vung Tau, Vietnam. This was a rather hectic logistics period as Australia began its withdrawal from Vietnam, but with his traditional attention to detail and professionalism, Joe performed well. He was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in September 1972 in recognition of these endeavours.

Return to Australia saw Joe promoted brigadier and appointed Chief of Staff Eastern Command and Commander Royal Artillery 1<sup>st</sup> Division. Brigadier John Gordon Hooton CBE hung up his military spurs in 1972.

Always keen on sailing, Mr Hooton became a mature student at the University of New South Wales and graduated four years later with First Class Honours in Naval Architecture. Joe became a consultant but spent more of his time as a volunteer than earning money from his qualifications. Sadly, the combination of his bad fall down the steps of his flat in Sydney and his wife's increasing incapacity forced Joe's retirement and they moved to the Turramurra House residence.

I had the pleasure of formally interviewing Joe at this time (2003) for my history of the 4<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery. He was then almost 80 years of age and in fair health. Sadly, Mona predeceased him as did his children Meredith, John and Sylvia. On 14 November 2012, Joe Hooton joined his family in Paradise.

Vale Brigadier John Gordon (Joe) Hooton CBE—astute professional Gunner, quality trainer and staff officer, firm and fair commander, and one of the Royal Regiment's last Second World War Duntroon graduates. Gone to the Great Gun Park up above after 89 years of mortal service.

**Arthur Burke OAM**  
**Colonel (Retired)**  
**RAA History Sub Committee**

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