

## AUSTRALIAN GUNNER OBITUARY RESOURCE

### Major Philip Neil Steen, ED

**23 May 1935 – 18 March 2018**

**By Peter Bruce, OAM**

Phil Steen was one of those rare individuals who served as a National Serviceman, Citizens Military Force (CMF) soldier both part time and full-time duty and as a Regular Army Officer.

Phil was born in Leeton NSW on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 1935. During his schooling at Manly Boys High School, he became a Cadet Under Officer. He was called up for National Service in April 1955 and on completion of his National Service commitment, he transferred to the CMF in August 1955. Phil completed his initial training with 12 National Service Training Battalion in Holsworthy. He graduated as Lieutenant. His first CMF posting was to 16 Heavy Anti Aircraft Regiment (16 HAA Regt) at Dee Why on Sydney's north shore. 9 HAA Regt at Haberfield and 16 HAA Regt at Dee Why were amalgamated in 1960 as part of the Army's Pentropic Division reorganisation. Regimental Headquarters (RHQ), P Battery and the Light Aid Detachment (LAD) were located at Haberfield and Q Battery was located at Dee Why. R Battery became a recruit training Battery with E Troop at Haberfield and F Troop at Dee Why. However, in 1962, the 3.7inch guns were declared obsolete and the unit was redesignated 9 Light Anti Aircraft (LAA) Regiment and re-armed with 40mm AA No 12 Bofors guns.

In June 1970, then Captain Phil Steen was posted on Full Rime Duty to 4<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment which was operating in South Vietnam. Phil was detached to Task Force Headquarters. He was eventually posted to 1 Australian Task Force in January 1971 before returning to Australia on 13 May 1971. Phil returned to his old unit, 9LAA Regiment at Dee Why. After a taste of full-time duty, Phil transferred to the ARA on 6 September 1971 and in April 1972 was posted to 16 Air Defence Regiment at Woodside in South Australia. In December 1974, Phil was posted to the Australian Defence Assistance Group Papua New Guinea. Phil was responsible for the Force's individual training and was based at Murray Barracks in Port Moresby. In January 1976 the Australians in New Guinea came under a revamped organisation known as the Papua New Guinea Defence Force Australian Defence Cooperation Group. During his time in New Guinea, Phil was a keen fisherman and lawn bowler.

On return to Australia in January 1977, Phil was posted to the School of Artillery at North Head filling an administrative role. It was during this posting that Phil became a member of the RAA Association NSW and joined the Executive Committee as Secretary in March 1980. He remained a member until his death. Phil's final posting was to Headquarters Training Command at Middle Head prior to discharge on 28 February 1984. Phil had more than a passing interest in the development of the RAA Historical Society, that later became the RAA Historical Company. He worked with National Parks and Wildlife Service in the 1980s in the development of the Sydney Harbour National Park. A friend of Major Peter Badcoe VC, Phil was the driving force behind the re-naming of the road and dedication of the Badcoe Memorial Park within the road reserve at Cromer. When Don Tait took on the role of developing the North Fort Artillery Museum, he asked Phil to take on the administration of the museum. Phil relished the task and was a major influence on what became a high standard military museum.

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In his eulogy, Don Tait said of Phil: "In a war, the person I would want beside me would be Phil. He was a good leader of soldiers and much respected by all ranks in both his Reserve and Regular Army postings over the years".

Phil's Honours and Awards include:

- Australian Active Service Medal 1945-75 with Vietnam clasp;
- Vietnam Medal;
- Australian Service Medal 1945-75 with clasp PNG;
- Defence Force Service Medal;
- National Medal;
- Australian Defence Medal;
- Efficiency Decoration;
- Anniversary of National Service 1951-1972 Medal;
- Vietnamese Campaign Medal, and
- Returned from Active Service Badge

### **Acknowledgements:**

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- 9HAA and LAA Regiments' Association.