

Lieutenant Colonel Donald Charles Blanksby
RFD ED ADM (Retd)
24 March 1940 – 15 February 2019

On the 16th of February Don Blanksby passed away very suddenly from a suspected heart attack at the age of 78.

Around 250 family, friends and associates attended his Memorial Wake at the Beachcomber Restaurant in St Kilda. Don's family conducted the most memorable ceremony in which Don's achievements in relation to his family, his various work endeavours, business, sailing and his service to the Army and Army Associations for more than 60 years were touched upon.



Don commenced his long association with the Army in August 1958 with 20 National Service Training Battalion and on completion of his full time training was posted to the Victorian Scottish Regiment where he was in due course promoted to corporal. With the absorption of the Melbourne-based infantry units into 1 Battalion, Royal Victoria Regiment (Pentropic) in July 1960 Don had postings as a sergeant in B Company (Hawthorn) and Support Company (Surrey Hills).

Don attended Colonel George Warfe's Potential Officers Course in 1963 and was commissioned in 1964. When the Pentropic battalions were disbanded in 1965 and the Standard Battalions were re-raised, Don remained with the new 1RVR. His no-nonsense, practical approach to soldiering was well regarded by all. In typical, now Captain Blanksby style, early in 1967 when challenged with the responsibility to establish a Regimental Band to support the Presentation of Colours Parade to be held in November that year. Don being the practical officer he was, recruited the complete Essendon Municipal Band and while there were a few recruiting issues in relation to appropriate ranks etc., the Band supported unit activities prior to the November Colours Parade.

In April 1968 Don deployed to Vietnam as part of the CMF Officer Familiarization Programme where he was attached to 3RAR. In September 1974 Don was posted to Command and Staff Training Unit (CSTU) as a student and the following year he was posted to Headquarters CSTU, 3 Training Group as an Instructor. Between 1978 and 1981 Don had two postings with Headquarters 3 Division Field Force Group as the SO2 Infantry. The tasks here were to write and conduct the Infantry TEWT, advise on Infantry Officer appointments and other duties as directed by the COL Inf. The very laconic Vin Musgrave who was the SO1, together with Don's easy style and good humour, made the work bearable and some good outcomes were attained.

In June 1979 Don, having completed the TAC 5 course, was posted as 2IC 1RVR. In August 1980 he was posted back to Headquarters 3 Division Field Force Group and then in June 1981 he was appointed CO 1RVR.

In August 1982 he was posted to HQ 3 Division Field force Group that subsequently became HQ 3Div. It was during this time that Don was instrumental in the establishment of the 3Div Battle School at Puckapunyal. During this time he also wrote the staff paper proposing the raising of 5/6RVR which subsequently came to pass.

In August 1985 Don was appointed as Chief Instructor Officer Cadet Training Unit, 3 Training Group. In July 1987 he was posted to Reserve Command and Staff college as an Instructor and in February 1989 he was appointed as Senior Instructor, Regimental Wing, 3 Training Group. In January 1990 he was posted to HQ 3 Training Group and he retired on 23 March 1990.

Throughout his military career Don was passionate about the training afforded to soldiers and officers and this flowed over into his civilian career. While he always maintained a serious attitude to the many positions, postings and responsibilities he held, he never ever took himself too seriously. To work with him was often demanding but always enjoyable and rewarding. In relaxed mode Don was always fun to be around. He was the master of the “not PC” quip or comment and enjoyed a good time any time. There is no doubt that both Don and Bev Blanksby made a significant contribution to the advancement of the Army Reserve cause during their time in service, and for that we are most grateful.

Following his retirement he maintained a strong interest in Army matters through the various unit and Regimental associations. He was the foundation President of the RVR Association and in the early days all of the Association business was run out of his business offices in St Kilda. Don was an active member of the 5Bn VSR Association and until his passing he was the President of the 58/32 Inf Bn Association. He was a marshal for the ANZAC Day March in Melbourne for almost 20 years.

Don was involved in the Pipes and Drums Association from its beginning, almost 20 years ago, both as a Committee member and then as its current President. He was very much an ideas man and a networker, with a wealth of wisdom and knowledge to draw on from both his business and Army Reserve experience. The current sound position of both the Committee and the Pipes and Drums is in no small part due to his influence. Don was also a passionate sailor for a great part of his life where as a member of the Royal Brighton Yacht Club he owned and sailed a Jubilee and for the last 27 years or so a Dragon, which, for those who don't know, is a quite technical three person 1926 classic style 9 metre Olympic class yacht. Don was a competent skipper, cool under pressure and he gained a few trophies. A number of us had the opportunity to spend time on the water with Don and it would be fair to say that no day was dull. When becalmed during those long multi-race Victorian or National Championship January days, the problems of the world would be discussed and many innovative, some might say outrageous, solutions determined. In recent years Don was elected as Vice Commodore and then Commodore of the Club and in these roles also brought to the fore the unique Blanksby style of leadership. Such was Don's passion for sailing that a few years ago he purchased a new Dragon from the UK and was achieving some good results. He was really disappointed this summer when on damaging an ACL he was unable to compete in the National Championship and then the World Dragon Championships that were held in Fremantle WA.

Don's passing has left a definite gap in the social fabric of the Victorian business arena, the defence service community, the sailing fraternity and of course his family of whom he was very proud. Don's legacy to all of us will be the enduring memory of a man who got things done. A man who could readily justify any moment of political incorrectness on his part, a man who did not suffer fools quietly and a man who genuinely enjoyed a good time with those he cared about. He will be sorely missed.

Paul Riley