

## **JOHN FREDERICK MILLER CVO, AM, MBE**

**19 September 1930 – 21 April 2022**

(Adapted from a eulogy delivered at his funeral on 3 May 2022)

John Fredrick Miller was born on 19 September 1930, at home at Eastwood, New South Wales.

He enlisted in the Australian Army on 2 January 1953 and entered the Officer Cadet School at Portsea, Victoria on 23 January 1953 as a member of the 3<sup>rd</sup> course. He graduated in June of that year. His early commissioned service was with largely with 15 National Service Training Battalion at Puckapunyal. He also spent a period in 1956 with an Army Task Force on Weapons Trials which included the British nuclear tests undertaken at Maralinga.

In May 1956 he joined 3 RAR as the first of four battalions of The Royal Australian Regiment that he would serve with. From January 1957 until June 1959, he served with 3 RAR, 4 RAR and 1 RAR. He was then posted to re-join 3 RAR on operational service in Malaya in June 1959 and stayed in Malaya with 1 RAR when they replaced 3 RAR. He concluded this period of operational service on the Headquarters Australian Army Force – FARELF in Singapore and returned to Australia in October 1961.

John's next posting was with Headquarters 3 Cadet Brigade in Melbourne for two years and then in October 1963 he returned to 1 RAR at Holsworthy which at this stage was a Pentropic Battalion, a huge organisation of over 1300 personnel. (For part of this time, John was the Mortar Platoon commander which had 12 mortar tubes, many vehicles and about 90 soldiers. Only about six years later, I also commanded the 1 RAR Mortar Platoon but with the downsizing of the battalion structure, I only had 6 mortar tubes and far less personnel. When talking about these old days, mortars would invariably come up and John would occasionally remind me that "mine was much bigger than yours!"

On 1 March 1965, the Pentropic experiment was dispensed with and 1 RAR split, with the main part deploying to Vietnam as the first and only Australian regular battalion committed to that war. The remainder, of which John was part,

provided the nucleus for the formation and raising of 5 RAR and the arrival of the very first intakes of National Servicemen.

He served with 5 RAR for three years including active service in Vietnam. In March 1968, he was posted to Headquarters Eastern Command at Victoria Barracks Sydney, which subsequently became Headquarters 2<sup>nd</sup> Military District. John spent much of his time in ceremonial and protocol activities which provided a strong basis for his later career. He retired from the Army in the rank of Major on 6 April 1981 after almost three decades of service.

John always considered his time in 5 RAR as the highlight of his military service and he gave back his all, to loyally support the battalion and its association. He was an original 5 RAR member. In March 1966, just 12 months after the battalion was raised, as OC Admin Coy, he led the battalion advance party to Vietnam. This required some very quick and diligent work with his small team to make all the arrangements for the arrival of the remainder of the battalion over the coming few weeks. We were the first battalion, or 'vanguard' of the newly established Australian Task Force so there was no earlier experience to fall back upon in a new area of operations.

In July, at very short notice, he assumed command of C Coy to replace an under-performing officer. In this capacity, John's leadership built the company back up to a very effective fighting sub-unit.

Max Carroll, the battalion operations officer, known as a 'straight shooter', recently made two points to me. *"First: 5RAR was blessed administratively, by having as back-ups to Stan Maizey, an A Grade team of Mr Fixits, with John Miller, Ron Shambrook and Ralph Thompson. Nothing was impossible with that lot; and John as OC Admin Coy was a key figure. Then, without batting an eyelid, he handled operations and C Coy with equal aplomb"*.

*"Second: Whilst being a modest and unassuming bloke; and a loyal and staunch friend to many, he was a good, solid, reliable, professionally competent officer"*.

As one of his platoon commanders in Charlie Coy, I can vouch for this first hand. John was recognised as a strong, reliable, tactically sound and safe OC, and held

in high regard by all ranks of C Coy. I consider his most significant contribution, which probably went unnoticed by many, was getting Charlie Company back on its feet after the disastrous leadership of his predecessor. In an infantry battalion it is never wise to say that one sub-unit is better than another as it is the whole team that counts, but John certainly led Charlie Coy from strength to strength.

John did enjoy the occasional tippie. On operations, all companies had to undertake resupply of critical items whether it be ammunition, water, rations, boots etc. For security, each item was identified by a three-letter code from the phonetic alphabet and radioed back to base. But John introduced a new four-letter code for one particular item – ‘JWBL’. This did cause some confusion back in base but was well known to his trusted CQMS Bob Treneer, who readily identified it as ‘Johnny Walker Black Label’ and duly dispatched this treasured item, usually by helicopter with the other resupply items.

This would occasionally happen when we were in a secure coy harbour or perhaps at a FSB with no threat. John would issue his formal orders to his subordinate commanders in the late afternoon. After the evening stand-to, there would be a call on the radio – *“31, 32, 33 this is 39, fetch sunrays, Over.”* When we were on net, his next message would be – *“Confirmatory orders my location in 15 minutes. Bring pannikins, Out”*. So off we would trot with our weapon in one hand and our metal coffee mug in the other. It was only a tippie of JWBL, but good for morale. I guess the remainder of the bottle was disposed of by the OC and the incumbent artillery forward observer!!

In early February 1967 John left C Coy to commence preparations for RTA. This was short lived as he returned to C Coy for a short period after his replacement OC (Major Don Bourne) was KIA on 14 Feb along with our Company 2IC and Forward Observer. It was a disastrous day for our company and the battalion. A firm and familiar person was needed at a critical time. To keep the company occupied and to get minds off the incident, the CO directed us out of Nui Dat immediately for a short company operation to the north. That was John’s final task in command.

Our most junior soldiers also held John in the highest regard. Doug Bishop, a reinforcement, the youngest member of our company, and who was badly wounded in his first contact, wrote a letter to John on his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2020 to thank him for his service. In his conclusion, Doug had this to say to John: *“As the finishing line of life draws closer, I could not forgive myself should I fail to let you know how much I (and other diggers) appreciate the job you did, then and since, and the perfectly gentlemanly manner in which you have always carried it out.”*

John did lead the advance party on RTA with a key mission from the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel John Warr to source a live tiger mascot to meet the battalion and HMAS Sydney on arrival at Garden Island. He successfully achieved this from Taronga Zoo, with Quintus 1, and so began the sequence of live tigers as the battalion’s mascot.

After Army service, John had a highly successful career with the NSW Office of Premier & Cabinet as the Director of Protocol. In this capacity he was deeply involved with Royal visits, Vice-Regal occasions and a full range of ceremonial and protocol activities. I wonder if there is a connection between John leaving us on 21 April, which happened to be the same day as the Queen’s 96<sup>th</sup> actual birthday?

For many years he was the chief marshal for Anzac Day marches in the City of Sydney; and was a regular sight on the corner of Martin Place & Pitt Street, which was his point of control.

John was a key initiator of the 5 RAR Association and arranged for committee meetings to be held at Victoria Barracks for many years. He wrote the original constitution and was a long serving Vice-President of our association until he stepped aside due to his wife Esme’s declining health. He was a source of sage advice to me in my 15 years as President, although we did have a few interesting discussions on the way ahead.

John was invited on several occasions to become a life member of the 5 RAR Association but he would not accept this as he felt that he had received enough

accolades in his career, and that others should be so appointed. John was recognised throughout his military and civilian life as a professional, a person with the highest standards of integrity, a firm believer in tradition, an outstanding organiser with an exceptional flair for detail.

This can be seen by the awards he has received – firstly as a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 1971 during his military service, appointed by the Queen as a Lieutenant of the Royal Victoria Order (LVO) in 1986 which was later upgraded to Commander (CVO) in 1992 and finally as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 1993.

Melinda & Kate, you must be exceptionally proud of your father and grandfather. His was a long life of achievement, well lived and you have many fond memories to cherish as you move forward. To us all, he was an outstanding soldier and leader within a world class infantry regiment, particularly the tiger battalion. As we say *“Once a Tiger, Always a Tiger”*. Rest in peace John Miller, you will not be forgotten.

Roger Wainwright OAM

03 May 2022