

BRIAN SULLIVAN MC MG

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War Hero Fought for Veterans

Born: May 5, 1945 Died: May 12, 2002

Brian Sullivan was a decorated war hero and exceptional leader in the battlefields of Vietnam. After his tour of duty he became a key player in the fight for the improved conditions of war veterans in Queensland, especially Toowoomba.

Born in Binnaway, NSW, Brian John Sullivan was the second of four children to Leister and Nina. He worked hard on his chores while still a child, but found the time to develop his talents as a tennis player, footballer, and golfer. Before he was a teenager, he helped care for his ageing grandfather, and learned to drive early to assist his father on mail runs. Brian did summer work with his father as he got older, working on cotton fields, wheat harvests and silos.

Brian was academically strong, and topped the class during his years at Binnaway Central School. The final two years of his education were spent at Coonabarabran High, narrowly missing out on dux of the school. Upon winning a scholarship to Teachers' College, Brian spent two years studying at Armidale. He received his first posting to Tooraweenah Public School, teaching until called up for National Service, A ballot system determined who was conscripted for service in Vietnam, and when Brian's birthdate was selected he headed for Puckapunyal to begin training. He accepted this turn of fate with a spirit of adventure, and ended up being sent to Scheyville for officer training. Then it was off to Vietnam. Allotted to the Royal Australian Armoured Corps, Second Lieutenant Sullivan joined the C Squadron, 1st Armoured Regiment in South Vietnam in August 1968, and the B Squadron in February 1969. Brian was Mentioned in Dispatches in 1969 when in command of troops searching for a protected arms cache. Under heavy enemy attack, Brian displayed leadership and courage to allow evacuation of wounded and dead, prevention of greater casualties, and redeployment opportunities for the infantry. In June that same year, Brian was wounded in action while earning his second medal, the Military Cross. Fighting in Binh Ba, possibly the second largest battle involving Australian troops, Brian and his men took the brunt of the enemy fire, enabling eventual defeat of the North Vietnamese troops. The men who served with him during this period admired his cool leadership and bravery under fire as a tank Troop Commander.

Back in Australia, Brian trained as a helicopter pilot at Amberley. The young Lieutenant began his first flying posting at Oakey with the 16th Aviation Squadron in 1971, and later that year was awarded the Vietnamese Campaign Medal. While in Oakey, Brian met and married Diane Richards, a local teacher, and they became parents to two children, Kristina Anne born in Toowoomba in 1977, and David John, born in Brisbane in 1982. In 1972, Brian was posted as a pilot to 162 Reconnaissance Squadron, Townsville, and a year later, moved to Portsea, Victoria, to become an instructor at the Officer Cadet School. Promoted to captain in 1974, he moved back to Oakey as a pilot, becoming the second in charge of the Aviation Base Support Squadron in 1976. Further Army postings involved moves to Melbourne and Brisbane. In 1979, Brian was promoted to the rank of Major, and in 1981 was awarded the National Medal. Other decorations followed, with the Defence Force Service Medal in 1984, and the Australian Active Service Medal in 1998. Also in 1998, Brian was awarded the

Medal for Gallantry for actions in Vietnam, and in March this year, received the Anniversary of National Service Medal.

Brian retired from the Army in 1983, settling in Toowoomba with his family and working for the Returned Servicemen's League. He was passionate about issues impacting upon war veterans. Joining the Toowoomba sub-branch of the RSL in 1976, Brian was elected to the committee in 1988, and became a Special Welfare Assistance coordinator. He was also elected as a Western District councillor in 1988, representing the Warwick sub-branch, and became the Western District member on the Administration and Finance Committee. He served as the district junior vice-president for two years. Brian's involvement with the RSL grew. He represented the district on the State Council of the RSL, and was elected to the position of State vice-president in 1992. In this role, he was a member of both the Special Projects Committee and a representative on the RSL and Ex-Services Clubs Association Committee for five years. He also served as a State councillor for the Far North Queensland District. Brian's professional and conscientious input into the RSL Appeals Committee, in particular the Girl In A Million Quest, was tremendous, given it was such a large and difficult organisational feat. In 1991, Brian was elected the War Veterans Homes Company director. In this role, he had free rein to use his talents to provide welfare for ex-servicemen and the wider community. Brian lobbied hard for the establishment of a war veterans home in Toowoomba, and was delighted when the Westhaven complex was finally completed to his high standards, maintaining an ongoing interest in the Home.

Brian was awarded RSL Life Membership in the year 2000. A re-organisation of the War Veterans Homes necessitated a Lifestyles Committee, and Brian became its chairman. In this capacity, he concerned himself personally with the interests of the residents in the complexes. Brian Sullivan was aged 57 when he died in Toowoomba. He is survived by his wife, and two children.

From Bill Burton bill.burton19@bigpond.com 14 October 2019

I have been conducting some research into the late Brian John Sullivan, MC, MG, MiD, who was a graduate of 1/66 Officer Training Course, Scheyville. He was allocated to the RAAC, and following Corps Training, was posted to 'C' Squadron, 1st Armoured Regiment for service in Vietnam. He arrived in Vietnam in August 1968, and in June 1969 he took part in Operation "Hammer", which was also known as the Battle of Bihn Ba. Because of his actions and demeanour throughout the battle, a former 5/RAR company commander Major Murray Blake MC, (later Major General) had been reported as saying that he held Brian in the highest possible esteem, because his actions and heroic deeds during the attack saved about one hundred and fifty to two hundred of his (5/RAR) 'diggers'.

There are many sites on the internet which have Brian's date of death shown incorrectly. Brian was born on 5 May 1945 and slipped away peacefully, after a fierce and determined battle against cancer on 12 May 2002, with his wife Diane, Mother Nina, daughter Kristina and son David by his side.