

Donald James Dennis (Trick) (1/65) (with assistance from Len Mellor, Fourays newsletter)

Don was born at on 20 April 1945 at Manly, NSW. After leaving school he studied Electrical Engineering at university, but he left to become an Advertising Copywriter. He was a competitive swimmer and had tried out in 1964 for the Tokyo Olympics narrowly missing a place in the breaststroke contingent to Ian O'Brien, who went on to win a gold medal. Don had completed a private pilot's licence at age 18 and later applied to join the RAAF, only to be told that he was short sighted and was to wait six months before another assessment.



On graduation from OTU Don is instructed by his father on wearing the Sam Browne

Fate intervened as his 'number came up' in the conscription ballot and Don enlisted as 2782334 with the second intake of Nashos on 29 September 1965 and at 1 RTB Kapooka was selected for officer training at Scheyville with Class 2/65, commencing on 15 October. On graduation on 7 April 1966 he was allocated to the RAA but posted to the HQ 1 Division Army Aviation Regiment's 16 Army Light Aircraft Squadron at RAAF Base Amberley as Assistant Operations Officer. On 8 January 1967 Don transferred to the Army Staff Corps on a Short Service Commission. He served with 161 (Independent) Recce Flight in Vietnam from 14 August 1967 until 13 August 1968, posted to the Flight as the Operations Officer and Air Traffic Controller (ATC) working in the first Control Tower at Nui Dat on the side of SAS Hill. He expanded and streamlined the Flight Operations Room and pilot briefing and de-briefing. On return to Australia Don transferred to 1 Aviation Regiment, a part of the Aviation Corps that had been raised on 1 July 1968, while Don was still in Vietnam. He promoted to Lieutenant on 2 November 1969.

Don spent two years training with the RAAF and Department of Civil Aviation in control towers and schools around Australia. He was posted to the Army Aviation Centre on 1 April 1971 and from 1 August 1972 served as the Army Aviation Corps Senior Air Traffic Controller at the Army Aviation Centre Base Squadron at Oakey, Queensland, operating from the tin sheds and the temporary control tower. Don changed his surname to Dennis, adopting the name of his Auntie who had won a gold medal in swimming at the 1932 Olympics. On 14 June 1974, the now Captain Don Dennis retired from the Army.

His electrical engineering background coupled with his flair for writing saw him involved with technical writing for a number of companies. He spent some time in Indonesia as the CEO of Rentokill. Don wrote a number of books. Following up on his first book on Vietnam, he published 'The Guns of Mushu' in 2006, an account of a Z Force raid on an island off the northern coast of Papua New Guinea during World War Two. Don's uncle was the only survivor of that patrol.

An early member of the Australian Army Aviation Association (AAAA or Fourays), Don developed the first Fourays website and managed the Association's on-line presence for many years. He was also a regular contributor to the early editions of Fourays magazine, Don often expanding on his writings on Vietnam. Don's sometimes impetuous actions didn't always gain endorsement from senior officers, but there was no doubting his intellectual skills. These skills coupled with his razor-sharp observations and acute sense of humour made Don the life of many parties and his writings the chronicles of Army Aviation in the sixties.

In the words of a contemporary: some people cast shadows on our lives, but Don brought light. Don passed away peaceful in palliative care early on 22 April 2020, in Stanthorpe, Queensland. He is survived by his partner Sarah McLaughlin.

Len Avery of the Army Aviation Association sent in the photo below. Hard to think that there was a war on with these 'chaps'.



161 Officers, Nui Dat, October 1967

Rear: Capt Phillip Roberts (RW), 2Lt Adam Fritsch (RW), 2Lt Don Trick (2/65 Ops Offr), Maj George Constable (OC), 2Lt Mike Meehan (RW), 2Lt Kevin Peacock (FW), 2Lt Blair Weaver (RW), Capt Peter Robinson (OC Workshops)

Middle: 2Lt Ross Goldspink (RW), 2Lt Tom Guivarra (FW), 2Lt David McFerran (FW), Capt Bernie Forrest (FW), Capt John Coggan (RW).

Front: 2Lt Ross Hutchinson, 2Lt Peter Garton.