

**Robert William Buchan** was born in Dandenong, Victoria, on 25 May 1950 and was conscripted in 1970, but as he was undergoing studies at the Gilbert Chandler Institute of Dairy Technology (1969 - 1971) his intake into the Regular Army Supplement (NS) was deferred until October 1971.



Intakes of National Servicemen commenced four times each year with a ten-week Recruit Course. For Intake 4/71 this occurred on 29 September 1971. Melbournians were issued a train 'Travel Warrant' and travelled as a group to Seymour and then bussed to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Recruit Training Battalion at Puckapunyal, known as "Pucka".

Robert wrote: 'Prior to enlistment I had a haircut, I thought it was short, but no, everyone had to have the hair cut by the civvy barber on arrival - and they charged us for! ... You lined up and received 4 injections. Two in each arm - one of the most vivid memories of "life" at Pucka. Another was the runs to the top of the "Tit hill". That two short two weeks has remained in the memory. Recruits were advised that the Army needed junior officers so when the offer of applying for officer training at Scheyville, N.S.W., was Robert passed the physical, mathematical & psychological tests. ... 'Anything was better than Pucka. It was the excuse to get out. We might end up doing the ordering around instead of being ordered around. It could not get any worse. It was during this period that one conscript had had enough - changing into civvy clothes he hitch-hiked to Melbourne. A kindly driver stopped to pick him up. It was the RSM. You could pick the short hair a mile off. When the Corporal in charge of the section found out who was going to Scheyville (OTU) they rapidly changed their domineering tune - they were afraid we might come back as their Platoon Commander and hand out some retribution. As a "one-pip" Platoon Commander this may have meant leading a platoon from the front in a Vietnam style war. This thought did not cross our minds - nor did the fact that the chance of being sent overseas was now low. Probably anywhere was better than returning to Pucka, a similar thought was echoed by my great-uncle Frederick Buchan when he left there (Seymour) for France via Egypt in 1917.

'Travel to Scheyville, within cooee of Richmond Air Force Base - we almost ran there numerous times - was by Hercules, a noisy, four engined long serving aircraft - still in service! We were bused to Mangalore Airfield - grass - wearing army issue greatcoats one cold October day. After a noisy take-off and some hours, we landed at Richmond, having gone via Wagga to pick up more Cadets from the 1<sup>st</sup> Recruit Training Battalion at) Kapooka, N.S.W., into the heat of the Hawkesbury River hinterland. Scheyville was an old military base of indeterminate age and was headed by a Commandant, Lieutenant Colonel (Kerr). Some of the Instructors were Corporals who we called 'Sir' and even a Scheyville Graduate, a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, possibly the most disliked of all staff.

'A non-stop 22 weeks at Scheyville had arrived. This is backed up by a weight reduction from 13.25 stone down to 11.5 stone in 4 weeks. There was no leave for four weeks & you only got half a day then if you passed the 3-mile cross country run in a certain time. I did it with a badly ingrown toenail. The nail on the big toe caused a lot of problems and several trips to a European Podiatrist at Windsor fixed it - he would spray freeze the toe the cut into the corner. it was a welcome outing -the pain excepted. It was akin I imagined to being released from prison.

'Fitness was improved by constant running, push-ups & chin-ups - usually all back-to-back.

The typical day was up at 0600 and on the parade ground at 0620 if you had extra-drills (I had 13 - not a great number). The Army used the "Father-Son" system very efficiently. You were given a senior Officer Cadet as your "Father". He had 4 weeks to get you up to speed. If you failed, he got the punishments for you - 20 minutes on the parade ground in field order, including the bolt in the 7.62mm (Self Loading Rifle or) SLR. Mine was a Persian, Darius Pourshasb. Darius was certain that, as he was a Persian, the system was against him - he did not complete Scheyville and discretely disappeared as many others did.

'Breakfast was at 0700, classes commenced at 0900, stopping at 1700 hours & dinner was at 1800; this was followed by class at 1900 - 2100 hours; one hour to study and prepare for bed then lights out at 2200 hrs.

'The SLR was issued on day two - (for us) these came knocked down, packed in a plastic bubble FULL of grease - you had to remove all the grease by washing the rifle in petrol (no OH&S implications in 1971) then you had to memorize the serial number - quickly! The rifle lived above the study desk on the plywood rifle rack, the bolt was in the small steel locker under the steel desk. No armoury was used then except for the GPMG's. To save time we sometimes did not lock our bolts away - a big NO NO!

'Scheyville was a series of long huts. At one end was the Parade Ground and up the hill was the 'Nissan' style Cadets Mess. To this hut we wore dress trousers (black with a red stripe), white shirt, cummerbund & hand tied bow ties. After 22 weeks some Cadets still could not tie their bow ties. We undertook etiquette lessons incorrect use of cutlery, crockery & glassware - one subject in 36, in which were all examined and had to be passed to graduate.

'Of 108 who arrived in the 4/71 intake only 56 completed. A lot dropped out along the way. One of these was the son of an ARA Colonel. Out on exercise one day he was fed up, left his rifle next to a tree & walked away - to where we don't know. We were told we would not be seeing him again & to go and comb the bush until we found the rifle (don't expect bed until it was found, which someone did at 0200). Another left after an injury - jumping of the troop transport in the Colo-Putty training area the rifle hit the ground first and he landed upon it, the barrel & sight entering the anus. His (compensation) case was only settled in about 1998 - it was heard on the National News.

'Pucka was like a kindergarten compared to Scheyville. You even had to call the Corporals "Sir". I had a bad start with a (Education Corps) Captain who taught military correspondence. I fell asleep in the first lesson, he was not motivating. The first Chief Instructor was Lieutenant Colonel Burnett. Later I was issued his steel trunk and still have it. At our senior class's graduation, I was given the task of door opener for the General's car when he arrived and departed from the parade ground. All went well on his arrival but not at departure. I was taken by Jock, the Scottish WO2 to the office of the RSM, WO1 Mahoney & interrogated by them both. I was not aware until I was told that I did not wear the white gloves required when opening doors. I had put them in my pocket when placing chairs on the Parade Ground - to keep them clean. For the next 11 weeks Jock gave me hell & he came very close to being physically assaulted - even though he was bigger than this Officer Cadet. After our April Graduation, when I was commissioned a Second Lieutenant Jock, told me how he thought the whole episode a great joke. RSM Mahoney, a short but solid man, who carried his badge of office, a pace stick, was looked upon by all with awe and terror.

'At Scheyville, Cadets learnt to fire the 7.62mm L1A1 SLR, the L1A2, the automatic & hard

to control version of the SLR, the 9mm Browning pistol & the 9mm F1 (Sub Machine-gun). The F1 round went so slow it was said that you are able to catch it at 25 yards. The odd grenade was also thrown; the instructor enjoyed pointing out the grenade marks on the wall of the brick bunker from which you lobbed it - the marks were on the inside of the wall! We seemed to spend all our time running between classes. If you had PT, you had to shower before changing for the next class. If you were unlucky you got to be the duty-student who got punished if the class was late to the next lecture. It was impossible to achieve the set timetable in some circumstances. You could not depart until the whole class was ready.

‘Tactics were held in the valley with a small creek meandering through it. On one occasion I was carrying the GPMG, a 7.62mm calibre heavy U.S.A. made machine-gun. If you got it dirty you had to clean it so I ran around the creek bed rather than across the creek - the non-amused NCO sent me back and made me jump into the creek. This weapon was prone to jamming when the linked rounds dragged in the dirt & it entered the breach. Not a weapon to give you confidence.

‘Two exercises were held out bush in the Colo-Putty area of the Hawkesbury Valley. Here there was large sandstone gorges & typical dry Sclerophyll scrub. On one exercise the navigation went awry & a Cadet walked over a cliff - not to be seen again. It was on one of these exercises that we were standing in a tent, out of the rain, to clear our weapons of blank rounds. I had not done it correctly and when the bolt went forward a shot was fired amongst all the staff. Punishment - two weeks loss of privileges effective immediately combined with defaulter’s parade. As I was then out bush, I did not miss many privileges. This happened twice!

‘Another feature were the huge webs of the Orb Spider stretching between the trees - an arachnophobic’s nightmare. Luminous mushrooms were also sighted on a moonlight night. It was on one of these than an Officer Cadet put his rifle against a tree & walked away. I recall that he was the son of a Colonel.

‘On one of these exercises we had to dig foxholes (weapon pits) - no jack hammers in 1971 - there is NO comfort in lying in these after heavy rain when they have filled with water but this was not an option when you were on watch. Whilst lying in a foxhole on night we were "under attack" by the enemy, soldiers from Holsworthy commanded by an ex-Scheyville 2Lt. He was behaving aggressively and coming too close. We were being attacked by "whizbangs" - mortar simulators. When an Cadet defender's SLR discharged a blank round into his ear at virtual point-blank range he was quickly subdued.

‘Whilst in my Senior Term I was promoted to Colour Sergeant, the Bridges Company “2IC”. It was my luck that my Company Sergeant Major broke his ankle as this meant that I had to lead the parade at the graduation as Acting Company Sergeant Major. The Company Sergeant Major carried a sword & gave all the orders - they were NOT simple. When you are out front you could not keep a low profile.

‘During our Senior Term we had an overflow of ARA Officer Cadets from Officer Cadet School at Portsea, Victoria, relocated to Scheyville. These were the 9 am - 5 pm Regular Army boys who did the same course as us over 12 months. They believed they were a "cut above" us.

‘Graduates from the 4/71 intake included John Heggart. I am told he left the Army, joined the

South African Police Force, rejoined the Australian Army and rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and was appointed Provost Marshall. Another was Neil Turner. When I met him again at an Army Cadet Annual Camp at Puckapunyal in 1999: he had not changed much in the 25 years since I last saw him. He was posted to the Corps of Engineer after Scheyville. He left the ARA and was the head of the Army Cadet Corps holding the rank of Brigadier. David Kaethner (Class 2/69), a friend who lived at Mount Gambier was ex-Scheyville. Also, at Mount Gambier, was Leon Rowe, ex-4/71 intake.

‘In April 1972 I was posted to the RAAOC School, Bandiana Detachment. I was the Officer Commanding of the Storeman Technical Platoon, which was at Bonegilla, in the original migrant hostel (with huts similar to Scheyville), together with the Driver Platoon (Scheyville class-mate 2Lt Terry South - & Peter Anthony Williams (Class 1/71) - OC Clerical Platoon). We had a staff of one WO2 & three Sergeants. One of these was Lofty Drew. The staff delivered the course content & the OC delivered nominal lessons. The course was of 6 weeks duration with two weeks of tactics added on. The worst aspect was teaching the troops, of various ages and capabilities, how to fire the F1 9mm sub-machine gun. This was held on the 25-metre range at Bandiana. The F1 was notorious for the sudden circular motion of the barrel upon firing. Some soldiers never even placed one round on the target due to this effect. Soldiers had been known to turn around, away from the target saying "Sir, my weapon won't work". This really arced up the ever-present Warrant Officer. I carried out my share of Duty Officer at Bonegilla; nights were cold in winter in the guardhouse. This was the only time I wore the issued (officer style) great-coat. ‘At the RAAOC Centre the RSM was a WO1 Redenbach, tall, solid & even more imposing. When on the range he had control and even the Company Commander Major John Frewen assisted in picking up the brass (7.62mm cartridges). I learnt many years later that he was to be posted to the U.K. on exchange - the story goes that he was not allowed to go until his bent & squashed nose was subjected to cosmetic surgery.

‘Christmas 1972 was between courses, so the Course's OC's & staff proceeded to lake Eucumbene then to the Gippsland Lakes at Lakes Entrance. We had Army Land-Rovers, 5 tonne Internationals 4x4 and a WW2 Mack truck with dual rear axles. In tow we had an Army boat & outboard, shotguns for duck-shooting (the short-barrelled riot gun type with perforated steel in lieu of a wooden forestock) - I don't recall any ducks being shot. We walked on a frozen lake in the Snowy Mountains - a foolish act, looking back. Reaching “the Entrance” we hired a boat & went fishing. ‘The Adjutant at the School of Ordnance was Captain Peter Haddad, later to become the first RAAOC Major General. When the Whitlam Labour Government came to power in late 1972, we had the option of immediate discharge. I chose to stay until the original discharge date. Attempts were made for National Servicemen to stay on - some did.’

Robert's discharge day was 25 May 1973 – the following day he married Anne O'Brien. Post-NS Robert worked for 25 years for Kraft Foods Ltd, initially as a Cheesemaker then for 22 years in Management, in Simpson, Mt Gambier (where he discovered a mate in David Kaethner, 2/69) and Leitchville. He later worked as Production Manager at Mackay Casings, Wangaratta and finally as 2IC at Alpine MDF, Wangaratta. All six of his children were soldiers, two of whom served as WO1's in the ARA. Just a little over two months before his death on 5 July 2010, following a battle with melanoma, Robert attended the ANZAC Day Service at the Cenotaph, proudly wearing his Nasho Medal. Robert is buried at the Eldorado, Vic, Cemetery. In 2015, post Robert's death his eldest granddaughter also served, during a Gap Year.