



## **9RAR ASSOCIATION**

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## **Colonel Bruce Perks MO**

### **Happy Birthday “Doc” - 70 Not out**

Firstly, let me say how honoured I am to share in this intimate gathering and to have the opportunity to shine a light on a small portion of the chapter in Bruce’s book of life entitled “The Army”.

Bruce and I both served together in the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment which is the youngest Infantry Battalion in the Australian army and no longer exists. I speak tonight on behalf of the 9RAR Family.

At the time, I was a very green Private soldier just out of recruit training and Bruce was a lofty Captain the RMO

We met at Woodside in hills when I joined 9 RAR at Easter 1968 and have a friendship which now spans over 45 years

Warm, friendly, welcoming and comforting to the sick and injured, Bruce was “The Doc” to us all.

He was at times, somewhat of a soft touch.

Suffering a serious hang over from excessive drinking while AWOL, a soldier suffered a head injury in a tackle playing Rugby during Battle PT. Whisked of to the RAP, Bruce gave him 2 days Rest with light duties. He spent it in bed sleeping off his hangover!

Having said that, have you ever wondered how much we take doctors for granted?

Whenever we are sick or injured, in this society we have an expectation that

- a doctor will be there
- we will be cured.

There is always a doctor there.

The same exists in the army, in peace time and in war. There was always a doctor there.

EVERY day and night

I have immense respect and admiration for the affable gent affectionately known by a couple of thousand men as “The Doc”

The battalion conducted training exercises in all corners of South Australia, Canungra and Shoalwater Bay in Qld, honing warrior skills in readiness for the daily duels with life and death.

Meanwhile the Doc, fresh out of University with little practical medical experience himself, trained and prepared a remarkable team of medics to fight alongside the soldiers in the field to ensure that life triumphed in most cases over death.

Personally, I took a step onto the medical merry-go-round at Canungra and later at Leigh Creek in the spectacular Flinders Ranges. I got so crook, before I knew it, I was on a civilian aircraft in full army uniform, pack and webbing, SLR rifle in my hand en route to Daws Park Repat Hospital in Adelaide. Can you imagine walking onto a plane today and handing a rifle to a pretty young hostie asking if she could find somewhere to put it?

As the RMO, Bruce treated EVERY member of the battalion, every soldier and every officer, from the Commanding Officer down. Everyone depended on the Doc.

Whether you had a cold, gunshot wounds, tropical diseases, malaria or legs blown off by mines-who ya gunna call?

Though just a few years our senior, Bruce was a mixture of a father figure and a mother hen. Always welcoming, never judgmental, he was there to turn to, for all who needed help

Here is a man who has saved many lives. He holds a special place in the hearts of all who owe him just that-their life. Sadly he lost too many lives which, being the caring professional he is, hurt him personally-every time. We were all his boys.

Every man has a Doc Perks story. At a recent reunion, one senior committee member brought the house down by proudly introducing Bruce to his wife. He told her that Bruce had held his balls before she did!!

It is an incredible calling – to take up medicine, but to do so in a war zone, where life was cheap and death a constant companion takes a special breed of man. I pay tribute to that man this evening.

Living in the jungle a month at a time in combat conditions, created many medical challenges. Tropical diseases, skin disorders, malaria, were common. There must have been every disease known to man and some never seen before, everything that could bite, scratch, or sting - we came across. Who was always there? The Doc.

The wet season brought on bronchitis and pneumonia but also problems from feet being wet for days on end. It is like in a bath when they get all wrinkly. It is possible to leave the sole in a boot.

Always compassionate, Bruce was a trail blazer, innovative and forward thinking. He took responsibility for the mental health of the men. It was he who had to make a call on moving men out of the field. Reassigning them due to what we now know are mental health issues, if he thought they were a danger to themselves or others. This incredible man, at age 25 was making these calls to help his men.

We live in an era of 35 hour working week, 5 weeks annual leave, public holidays, sick days and every comfort possible. Dr Bruce Perks was the ONLY doctor in 9 Battalion. Dr Bruce Perks was the only doctor for over a thousand men EVERY day and EVERY night, in training and in war.

Who replaced him for the night shift, for the weekend, or when he went on leave ? No-one!

He had no shifts and he had no leave.

He was the RMO 24/7 month after month .

He dealt with horrific mutilation and death.

He cared about his men.

He mended broken bodies and tortured minds.

He presided over and suffered the death of dear friends, death by enemy, accident and by murder.

He did so without relief, without support and without peer.

Heroes, emerge from circumstances way beyond comprehension or control  
They come in many shapes and sizes, they come in many guises.

Ladies and gentlemen please be upstanding and raise your glass to my hero-  
"The Doc" Bruce Perks.

Thank you

Doug McGrath