

Neville White

22 September 1950 – 15 December 2025

On Thursday 29 January, fifteen mates met on the deck at the Arboretum in Canberra to remember our classmate Nev White. A number of others from interstate apologised for being unable to attend (understandably). Special effort from Peter Martyn and John Price who drove from Sydney on the day.

The gathering commenced at 10 am and finished at 1115 and was followed by coffee and musings inside. The Canberra Engineers group facilitated the gathering with Steve, Eric, Garry and Bill each contributing. Unfortunately, Urq was away with family in Adelaide.

Steve advised that he had strong commonality at RMC with Nev – age, NSW education, engineering, footy, half class – and estimated that they spent at least 35 hours per week together. Steve also indicated that he, Nev and Greg Thomas were Wello boys back in second and first class and socialised together frequently. Interestingly, by comparison, Kym indicted that at RMC he had virtually nothing to do with Nev – different company, different academics, different sport. There would be many of us who can relate to that.

Steve gave some background on Nev – born September 1950; dad a WO2 in the Army Medical Corps; finished school in 1967 and worked in an actuary firm (we think); met Michele at school; smartest engineer in our class; academic qualifications, BE; Masters in Engineering; Masters in Business/Economics; Bachelor of Laws; retired from the Army (finally) in January 2003; and retired from full time work in November 2021 (Michele retired on the same day), so 53 years in the workforce.

Eric talked about the last few months of Nev's life. As background, Nev had two melanomas removed in 2024 and in early 2025 was diagnosed with prostate cancer. He had keyhole surgery in April 2025 from which he was still recovering in October. Eric explained that Nev and Michele travelled in the period 17-19 October to Queensland via Grafton, where a family wedding took place. Nev drove to Grafton and then on to Bribie Island, but when he arrived there, he felt run down and attended emergency at Caloundra Hospital on 20 October. The doctors determined that he had a melanoma that had metastasised and that tumours were present in the brain and lung. Terrible news that required his repatriation to Canberra. He returned to Canberra on 23 October and was subject to a range of tests that indicated that the cancer was well advanced. He undertook further tests and some treatment but was admitted to hospital on 17 November. The family realised that his prognosis was not good and they made the decision with eventual support from DVA and the Hospital that he could be supported at home with equipment and medical support. He returned home at the end of November. He stayed at home until his death on 15 December 2025.

Eric explained that throughout this time the Engineer group provided support and assistance. One of the saddest aspects of his illness was that he lost his cognitive ability very early on. On visiting him he looked like he recognised us but didn't actually know who each of us were. Obviously being there to support the family was important.

Following his death, Nev was privately cremated on 19 December. No one was in attendance, which reflected his written wishes to his daughters. Tough on the family.

The family had a gathering at the White residence in Campbell on 17 January. The attendees (about 35 of us) included his brothers and sister, his close family, and we engineers. The lunch lasted for five hours and included speeches from Nev's son in law, Garry and Steve. Overall, a fitting celebration of his life. But because of the privacy, the Engineers decided that a class gathering was appropriate and hence the activity on 29 January.

Bill talked about the early days of Nev's Army career, that they shared as troop commanders at Holsworthy. He explained that they had their moments with a difficult OC, and solved the unit Duty Officer problem between the two of them. They also worked in Paddington on a following posting and travelled together from the Holsworthy area. In those early years Nev worked at SME, and also did a twelve month attachment as an engineer to the construction firm John Holland, when they were building the Eraring power station.

Bill also explained that Nev had a posting in accommodation and works as a major in HQ 3MD, Melbourne and then moved back to a regimental appointment at Holsworthy. In those days, the Construction Regiment had regimental HQ and a squadron at Holsworthy, with a squadron in Puckapunyal and one in Perth.

Garry talked about a range of Nev's postings including International Policy Division, Staff College in 1985, Chief Engineer in Adelaide, SO 1 appointments in Canberra, followed by JSSC in 1990. Nev was a Military Fellow at ADFA for three years and was posted to the Washington Standardisation Office in 94-95. He was posted back to Canberra with his final posting being Director Project Delivery – A, as a Colonel. Nev took discharge in January 2003.

Garry also reminded us that as White, Nev was actually the junior member of the class (alphabetically anyway) and as such had the dubious honour of changing the "days to go" board in the mess. This was done at 6 pm every day throughout his 4th class. Garry explained that there was a technique that required the flicking out of the numbers, which were not to hit the floor. Most of us were too busy at mealtime to notice, especially once we realised that it wasn't us. Garry also said that late in first class during the absence of the rest of the class on interstate training, Nev was the acting BSM. Most of us had forgotten or never known that as well.

Steve covered Nev's post discharge career with his first transition job in the Defence Housing Authority. After two years he moved to Multiplex Asset Management and then to the University of Canberra as the Director of Facilities. He returned to Multiplex, then known as Brookfield Multiplex in a project capacity. In his last ten years he worked for the property consultancies GHD and JLL where he worked as a consultant involved in the development and delivery of capital works projects predominantly for Defence. In his post Army career of 17 years, he had six different employers, but all roles were based in Canberra. Nev retired from full time work in November 2021. Interestingly, Michele retired on the same day.

Steve sought comments from others present with Peter Martyn, Warwick Elliott and Kym MacMillan contributing. They talked about their RMC time with Nev and Kym talking about overlapping through the standardisation program.

The group adjourned to the café area for more reminiscing, and coffee of course.

Nev was a good guy who achieved a lot in his life. He was a good mate and we will miss him.

Compiled by: Steve Jones

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