

Vale Terrence James Melbin Royal Australian Engineers

It is with deep sadness that the family and friends of Terry advise of his death at Emu Plains on the 28th of August 2025.

Terry was born in Northam, Western Australia, on the 13th of February 1936, the youngest of seven children to William and Eva Melbin. He attended Marist Brothers School; however, his early years would not have been easy as his father died in 1941, leaving his mother to raise the family. Terry's first job was as a fireman on the West Australian Government Railways, operating steam locomotives out of Northam.

In 1951 Terry met a young lady named Pam Risdon, and they became an inseparable couple. However, around the same time the Australian Government reintroduced National Service, this time for eighteen year olds meaning Terry was subject to call up. On the 2nd of January 1956 he started his Army training at the 17th National Service Training Battalion located in Swanbourne, near Perth. There he did 98 days of continuous training and then on the 9th of April 1956 commenced another 78 days, to be spent over three years, serving in the Citizen Military Forces. He was finally discharged from the CMF on 28 January 1960, but must have liked Army life as he enlisted in the Australian Regular Army three days later. He was allocated to the Royal Australian Engineers, soon becoming a plant operator.

Pamela and Terry, who married on the 19th of May 1956, went on to have four children – twins Liana and Lynette, Debra and Terrance (Junior). Pam was to spend much of her time raising the family as Terry was sent to Papua New Guinea in mid-1964 for ten months. As a Corporal he was involved in the Malaysia/Indonesian Confrontation for most of the latter half of 1966. Then in April 1968 he was to spend a year in South Vietnam where he was promoted to Sergeant.

Tragedy struck in June 1972 when Lynette, aged 15, went missing and has never been found, while Terrance died in 2011, aged 49. The love of the couple for their children has held steadfast until Terry lost Pam in July 2020. Terry remained a devoted father to his children, their partners, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

At his funeral held in Minchinbury on 9 September a very special eulogy, written by Tony Coyle, was read out. It is a very unique tribute to a great soldier, and is reproduced in full.

'In 1974, I was the Officer Commanding the Lord Howe Island Detachment of 1 Field Engineer Regiment for the construction of the Lord Howe Island Airstrip.

I had overall responsibility for the project, which included the soldiers, achieving the program and budget, achieving the specification, getting approval to adjust the design and specifications as required, talking to the media, and keeping the government departments, the politicians and the Army happy.

While my neck was on the block for its success, the person who was responsible for the nitty gritty and the daily issues that arose with a civil engineering project on a small island in the Pacific Ocean, and thus the person who really built the airstrip, was Terry Melbin.

Terry worked long hours and led the construction team with distinction. He never got flustered although sometimes his face showed signs of frustration, particularly when we had heavy rain and wind for several days in a row. But Terry took all this in his stride.

Importantly, Terry had the respect of the soldiers. Also importantly, as my right-hand man, Terry made my job a lot easier as I knew he was capable, reliable, professional and loyal.

The result was a great job done, on time and on budget. We know it was great, because last year was the 50th anniversary of the project, and we could all see that the airstrip was in excellent condition.

RIP Terry, your duty is done.



Lord Howe Island, Anzac Day 1974. Captain Tony Coyle leads the Army Detachment with Terry Melbin, most appropriately on his right hand side (at left of the photo).

Terry retired from the Army as a Warrant Officer Class 1 on the 2nd of February 1980 and worked as the senior works manager for the Blue Mountains Council until 1994.

Terry never forgot Lord Howe Island and he and Pam had a holiday on the Island in 2019. Although he was not sure he would be able to attend the 50th Anniversary Reunion he did, along with Liana and Tracey, and Debra and Anthony. Terry and his wife did not have easy lives, but the Island Airstrip is their lasting legacy, along with a loving family and friends.