

Frank

An extraordinary life that left a lasting impact
on the Northern Beaches of Sydney, Australia

McAskill



A life well lived

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Introduction

In recognition of the history and the positive impact of the Frank McAskill Award Program in the Manly, Warringah and Pittwater area, it was decided by the three local councils that a publication be produced honouring

both the man and the Award. To these ends, a research project was proposed to highlight both Frank's extraordinary life and the contribution to the community by the many McAskill Award winners.

Frank McAskill Early Life

It is a long way from suburban Perth, to creating an indelible impact on the northern beaches of Sydney. However this was the culmination of the extraordinary life of Frank McAskill. Frank was born in Perth on 7 May, 1918. His parents, Seymour and Grace had been raised in other parts of the world, Seymour in Hobart

and Grace in Suffolk, England. Frank was soon to have a younger brother, Seymour. It should be remembered that in 1920, Perth had a population of approximately 135,000 and had yet to be connected to the eastern states by telephone, which finally came about in 1930.

Frank McAskill

Early Life (cont)

The family home was in Victoria Park, a southern suburb immediately across the Swan River Reach from the Perth CBD. Frank went to school at the Victoria Park Primary School on the corner of Cargill Street and the Albany Highway starting in 1924 and was joined by Seymour two years later. Subsequently he went to the Perth Technical College, the precursor to Curtin University which was established in 1980. He gained his Leaving Certificate in 1937 and from there joined the Western Australian Railways at Midland as a Fitter and Turner. Both Frank and his brother Seymour worked there, cycling from Victoria Park each day.



Western Australia Railways workshop

A flat 15 kilometres there, and 15 kilometres back. The Midland Railway Workshops have been described as the most important engineering establishment in the State of Western Australia (WA). (The site is now undergoing a similar heritage treatment to that of the railway yards at Eveleigh in Sydney). Franks interest in trains extended to a hobby of model-making. The family still remember Frank creating toy trains, carriages and jeeps as toys for the children to play with in their sandpit. From the age of 16, Frank became a member of the army militia and it was from this experience he developed a consuming interest in artillery. Prior to the start of WWII he had reached the rank of bombardier in the 103rd Howitzer Battery in Perth. It was in these hard, frugal economic times, that Frank established a regime of hard work and organisational skills.

World War 2

On the 9th May 1940 Frank enlisted to fight and was immediately given the commissioned rank of Lieutenant. This was largely due to his six years experience in the army militia. Frank was appointed to the 14th Battery of 2/7 Field Regiment, 9th Division which trained at Northam in WA and later saw action in the Western Desert in Egypt. When

the Australian forces were withdrawn from Africa after the fall of Singapore in February 1942, Frank returned to Australia.

His marriage to Betty Carter soon followed and the couple set up home at Armagh Street, Victoria Park. The ensuing war years were not easy for them, as Frank was constantly on the move.

A 'normal life' for Frank usually involved a number of projects on the go at any one time.

In 1942 Frank undertook further training in jungle warfare on the Atherton Tableland in Queensland, and was subsequently involved in the assaults on Brunei and Kuching, on the west coast of Borneo. He was eventually discharged on 4 February

1946, when he and Betty were able to resume a 'normal life'. This resulted in the birth of their

sons Peter in 1946 and Ross in 1952. A 'normal life' for Frank usually involved a number of projects on the go at any one time, and these projects were always completed with the appropriate protocol and outcomes.

Post War

At the end of the war Frank was 27 years old, and like many men during this period, set about re-establishing his career and caring for his family. Consequently he resumed his employment as a fitter and turner at the WA Railways.

Frank at this stage had reached the commissioned rank of captain and maintained his involvement in the army with the Citizens Military Force (CMF), 3rd Field Regiment Royal Australian Artillery (RAA).

With the commencement of the Korean War in June 1950, there was an immediate demand for experienced artillery officers and Frank re-enlisted as a Company Commander of the 14th Training Battalion, stationed in Puckapunyal in Victoria.

Thus begun the McAskill's family life, located at various army establishments across Australia. Peter McAskill, Frank's eldest son, remembers that most of the married quarters for the family of officers were sparsely furnished. Consequently, items such as rugs and blinds, travelled with the family to give their homes a bit of colour and a touch of their own personality. The arrival at a new quarters was always a tightly organised affair, with all family members well drilled as to their respective roles.

Peace Time Army

Frank's initial posting to Puckapunyal was from 1951 and with the pressure of the Korean War easing after the armistice in July 1953, the family left Puckapunyal for Georges Heights in Sydney. Frank was now the Battery Commander, 1st field Regiment 'A' Field Battery, RAA.

As the focus of Australia's military defence started to move toward Indonesia, Frank's next secondment was to Jungle Training Centre at Canungra.

Peter recalls that time with some delight, as an eight year old playing around the moats of the old Georges Heights military establishment. During this time Frank was elevated to the rank of Major and in 1956 was seconded to Canberra to take on official duties relating to the Queen's visit of that year. It was particularly satisfying for Frank to be recognised for his organisational talents and appointed to such an auspicious tour.

As a matter of historical interest, it was at this time that the National Service

in the army was redesigned, with national service for the navy and air force being abolished. National Service had been in operation since 1951, requiring all males over 18 years to be liable for 176 days training.

In 1957 Frank was appointed Company Commander of 12th Training Battalion stationed at Holsworthy. Although he held that position until mid 1958, the family was not required to move from Georges Heights. However the long trip back and forth caused some hardship.



Frank and Betty McAskill

Peace Time Army (cont)



Appointed a Member of the Military of the Most Excellent order of the British Empire (Frank McAskill on left)

As the focus of Australia's military defence started to move toward Indonesia, Frank's next secondment was to Jungle Training Centre at Canungra, on the Gold Coast hinterland. He was appointed the Major in charge of Artillery Instruction. The family remained at Canungra from 1958 to 1961 and then transferred to Wacol (south western outskirts of Brisbane), where Frank was stationed until 1964 as 2nd in command of the 4th Field regiment. It was from there that Frank and the family moved to North Head, Manly and the School of Artillery.

School of Artillery

The appointment to the School of Artillery at North Head, as officer in charge of administration was an apt finale to Frank's military career. The period from 1964 to 1971 was a turbulent time in the Australian Army, with the Vietnam War playing an increasingly larger role in the army's focus on training. The war also

tower of strength in looking after the needs of everyone."

Frank, Betty and sons moved into Parkhill Cottage, near the entrance to the School of Artillery and eight happy years followed. The commanding officer, prior to Brigadier Salmon, Major General Begg observed:

Major McAskill was a tower of strength in looking after the needs of everyone

had an effect on the tenure of the commanding officers at North Head, with the average being 22 months. The administrative role became crucial as was recognised in the words of Brigadier J.R. Salmon CBE, commanding officer from March 1967 to January 1969; "Throughout my time as Commanding Officer - Chief Instructor of the School of Artillery, resources were severely stretched, particularly in accommodation and administration. Major McAskill was a

"In 1965, the School was very poorly provided with married quarters, there being seven houses for officers and none for other ranks. Before I left in November 1966, many more had been built."

The change of accommodation conditions for army personnel, was very much due to the efforts of the then Chief Administrative Officer, Frank McAskill. The McAskill residence, Parkhill Cottage, was ultimately handed over to the Manly Hospital in 1973.

School of Artillery (cont)

It was during the years of Frank McAskill's tenure, that the School of Artillery became an important part of the Manly community. Lance Bombadier Bobby Fulton was stationed at North Head and at one time the Australian Rugby League team trained at North Head. Fulton, later captain of the Manly Warringah Rugby League team and Kangaroo representative, was a physical training instructor at North Head. The Manly Rugby Union team played many early season games on the ground behind the main Army Mess Hall.

In the early 1950s, the Manly Mayoral Ball was initiated and held in the main Mess Hall at the School of Artillery. Frank became an important element in the organisation of the Ball in the late 1960s. Mayor Jean Hay well remembers Frank's organisational ability and attention to protocol. Jean recalls the close association with Frank and the School of Artillery and

their generosity in providing tents and marquees for special functions. She also recalls Betty's involvement in the Manly Lantern Club which raised money for the Royal Blind Society. While Frank was in charge of Administration, and Acting Commanding Officer on several occasions, he arranged for the relocation of a 25 pound gun to Griffith Park as a fitting memorial to those who served in the War.

It could be said that during his tenure at North Head, Frank McAskill demonstrated a passionate interest in the local area which left an indelible impression on the community. This was an important factor in the success of his next career move into social welfare. However, he continued his interest in the army and in 1981 was appointed President of the Royal Australian Artillery Association (NSW) and a founding member of the Artillery Historical Society (North Head).

Historical Society

From 1973, Betty and Frank were keen members of the Historical Society and Betty is still a member, maintaining a life long interest. Frank was the Vice President of the Society throughout his membership, and was particularly concerned at the acknowledgement of personalities and historical events through the establishment of commemorative plaques. Susan Pinson, fellow Historical Society member, well remembers being driven home at night with Betty and Frank who lived close by. The meetings usually finished about 10pm in Manly and the drive home to Manly Vale often took a detour to check out the wording of a recently installed plaque. It is therefore very fitting that a plaque acknowledging Frank's contribution to the Manly community, is located on the beach end of the Corso, Manly.

During his time at the School of Artillery, Frank arranged for the recording of all gravesites in the 3rd cemetery at the Quarantine Station. This cemetery which was inside the School of Artillery grounds near North Fort is of national heritage significance and the document signed by Major Frank McAskill remains the basic record of the cemetery, a fitting tribute to his interest in history.

Community Action

When Frank retired from the Australian Army as Lieutenant Colonel, at the age of 53, it was his desire to become more involved in community work (both paid and voluntary). Ray Reeves, a lifelong friend from the Victoria Park Primary School described him this way;

“Always larger than life, he was ever more than ready to lend a helping hand. Indeed he was the epitome of the old tor. Ask of the busy man, others have not the time. Frank always made time and many can attest to this.”

Employment at Warringah Shire Council

In September 1971, Frank was appointed Social Welfare Coordinator on the staff of the Warringah Shire Council. It was the first appointment of this type and he quickly put his stamp of precision, care and diligence on this position. Frank facilitated the development of the Manly-Warringah Federation of Senior Citizens with its network of 45 local senior's organisations. The Federation was established in February 1976 and attracted a board of skilled people to manage the operations of the Federation, including Mr A.W. Randall who was Honorary Secretary for many years. Randy Randall recalls one particular meeting. "Everybody knew Frank McAskill. Frank was into everything, knew everything and everybody. He arrived at my office door one morning and said; 'I have a job for you. It won't take long and you can do it in your spare time; it's only

until we find someone else to do the job.'" Thus began a short job; sixteen years as Secretary and three years as Assistant Secretary!"

While Frank's organisational skills were well known before he took on the role of Welfare Officer, his ability to lobby, identify needs in the community and research funding sources were strengths ready to be unleashed.

Over the eleven years he held the position at Warringah Council, Frank supported the Federation and ensured that the Board was effective and committed, enabling the Federation to continue long after the passing of Frank McAskill (on 4 January 1983). The Federation of Seniors became a dedicated lobbying force in the area and in 1989 won the NSW Premier's Award.

Northern Beaches Computer Pals for Seniors

The group was formed in the early 1990s and now has a membership of about 170 people. The 2004 group award was an appropriate recognition in this digital age. Computer Pals has taught more than 1,000 local seniors on the northern beaches to use a computer both for emails and research.

Northern Beaches Neighbourhood Services

The group winner in 2000 had been active on the Peninsula since 1972 and had a strong association with Frank McAskill in its early years. The previous name of the organisation was the Manly Warringah Citizens Advice Bureau or CAB. In 1998, the organisation, with its home at Dee Why, became the Northern Beaches Neighbourhood Service covering Pittwater and Warringah and included the Manly Neighbourhood Centre.

In 1972, during the early development of the organisation, Frank McAskill was the Vice President which provided an important link with Warringah Council.

Legacy

Frank McAskill was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 1971. While this was in recognition of his army career, his contribution to his local community would undoubtedly have been a consideration in his selection.

The individuals and organisations that participated in the Frank McAskill Awards are a testimony to Frank's passion for his local community and his drive and enthusiasm to address the needs of the less advantaged, particularly the elderly.

This publication draws to a close the Frank McAskill Award Program but Frank's place in Peninsula history will remain - as will the spirit of the Award. "The improvement in the quality of life for senior citizens in the Manly, Warringah, Pittwater Area."



Frank and Betty McAskill at MBE presentation.



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Australia
1988

Lieutenant Colonel Frank McAskill
MBE RL JP M.A.I.W.

Administrative Officer - School of Artillery
1964 - 1971

Social Welfare Co-Ordinator
Warringah Shire Council
1971 - 1982

Sponsored by his family