

# 'Colonel Bob' won Wodonga's hearts

## A long life of service



By HOWARD JONES

BOB McLean, the old soldier with a ready smile, has fought his last fight.

Colonel Robert Allan McLean MBE OAM died late on Friday at the Wodonga hospital he loved so much.

He was a military man, family man, public benefactor, hospital president, teacher and friend of the poor and sick, but much more.

"Colonel Bob", as he was known, was among Wodonga's best-loved community leaders, sharing that status with his wife of 63 years, Betty McLean.

Colonel McLean, 86, was born in the Melbourne suburb of Malvern and served with the Citizens Military Forces before World War II.

At age 20 he enlisted in the 2nd Australian Imperial Force and was commissioned an officer of the Royal Australian Army Ordnance Corps in 1943.

He always said the best thing he ever did was marry Betty after a 10-day romance in 1944.

But he had a war to fight and saw active service on the beaches of Borneo in 1945 as he organised vital supplies, being mentioned in dispatches.

After the Japanese surrender, he almost didn't make it home.

Then aged 23, he was ordered to receive the sword of surrender from

### OBITUARY

Bob McLean

the Japanese at Sandakan, where forced marches and other cruelties had killed 2400 Australian and Allied prisoners.

His vehicle stalled as he was being driven to the ceremony through thousands of armed Japanese.

Undaunted, he seized a bicycle and, ringing the bell furiously, he went on to accept the surrender.

On his discharge, he joined the regular army and stayed 30 years, while he and Betty raised three children, Robyn, David and Vicki.

The family had two long spells in England, in 1950-52 and 1969-70 while Colonel McLean was on exchange postings.

In 1952, he returned to Canberra and was made RAAOC's chief depot planning officer responsible for the efficient use of manpower and resources nationally.

Later he commanded a field depot at Singleton and was promoted to lieutenant-colonel in 1960 and awarded an MBE.

His move to Wodonga in 1964 started a new life for him beyond the army.

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• Colonel Bob McLean was among Wodonga's best-loved community leaders, sharing that status with his wife of 63 years, Betty McLean. The World War I veteran died on Friday at the age of 86 at his beloved Wodonga hospital.

### our say: editorial

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## EDITORIAL

The Border Mail  
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### Man of action an inspiration to all

COLONEL Bob McLean has died after a lifetime of service to his country and to Wodonga.

He and his wife, Betty, were inseparable partners in improving their community.

They never sought rewards, and reluctantly received medals and community honours.

The McLeans weren't content just to sit on committees or boards, but demanded action, although their approaches were different.

Colonel McLean was used to wielding authority, but if convinced of the justice of a cause, he would go to much higher authorities to achieve results.

Mrs McLean was a city councillor and with the help of other pioneering women leaders quietly revolutionised the way the council helped families and women in particular.

Together, the couple directly helped less fortunate folk and set up a women's refuge, among many other good works.

Colonel McLean's dream of a new Wodonga hospital was to be shattered by state politicians but he nevertheless achieved great results for his city.

We bid farewell to a fine man.



## Quick wit and help for soldiers, civilians

### MEMORIES

COLONEL Bob McLean once said: "If you start moving a mountain with a wheelbarrow, you've made a start."

His outlook combined an undisguised enthusiasm for life with a quick wit that endeared him to soldiers and civilians in Wodonga for 40 years.

Colonel McLean's association with Wodonga began when he was appointed second in command of 1 Central Ordnance Depot in 1964.

At once he made a difference

and, among other things, planted trees to beautify the Bandiana base.

On his return from England in 1971, he was promoted to colonel and put in command of both the Albury military area and the depot, restyled 31 Supply Battalion in 1975.

As well as securing supplies for Vietnam, Colonel McLean took action on several practical issues locally, such as reducing motor accidents by discouraging soldiers from drinking and driving.

Colonel and Mrs McLean took many measures to help the wel-

fare of soldiers and their families, understanding the disruption that each posting brought.

After retirement in 1976, he threw himself into public life, as a director of Wodonga hospital and president from 1976-86, president of Lifeline and a board member of the Albury-Wodonga Corporation from 1977 to 1986.

He and Mrs McLean quietly helped lone parents facing hospitalisation who could not pay bills, sometimes caring for their children.

They started the city's first women's refuge in their garage.

Among his few disappointments was Health Minister Tom Roper's shock decision to stop planning for a new Wodonga hospital.

Wodonga hospital never forgot Bob McLean and named a new maternity wing after him.

Until a few weeks ago, he was a patient advocate and, although not a doctor, always perked up patients with a smile.

Mrs McLean, his three children and five grandchildren survive him.

A funeral service will be held at the Conway funeral home today at 3.30pm.