

Vale Brigadier Denis Owen Anthony Magee (Retd)

Brigadier Owen Magee, one of the Army's and the country's most noted nation-building civil engineers, died on 14 May 07, aged 82. Born in Wickepin in 1925 and raised in the Western Australian mallee country, his secondary schooling was by the Christian Brothers at Aquinas College in Perth. He entered the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in 1943 and graduated in December 1944 under the accelerated wartime curriculum.

He first saw active service in the Wewak campaign in 1945 before being sent to the University of Western Australia to undertake a bachelor's degree in civil engineering. He completed his studies just as the Korean War began, and spent the next two years on field and construction engineering tasks in Korea and Japan. In the early to mid 1950s he served at the rocket range at Woomera, and as the site engineer for the British nuclear weapon tests at Maralinga, before being seconded to the Snowy Mountains Scheme in 1956-58. Following staff college at Quetta in Pakistan he commanded the School of Military Engineering and was Chief Engineer at Northern Command in Brisbane. In the latter post he oversaw the rebuilding of Enoggera Barracks, and the construction of Lavarack Barracks in Townsville and the Army Aviation Centre at Oakey. His final appointment in the late 1960s was as the Army's Director of Fortifications and Works in Canberra, which also involved him visiting Vietnam for protracted periods on at least two occasions.

On leaving the Army in 1970 he was appointed Executive Director of the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority over 200 other candidates. For the next 16 years, and with great sensitivity to the area's irreplaceable heritage as modern Australia's birthplace, he led and supervised the renewal and rejuvenation of the 14 hectares of derelict wasteland and urban slum comprising 'the Rocks'. This involved difficult and protracted struggles with self-interested commercial developers and politicians, and prolonged battles with corrupt and occasionally violent construction unions. He also managed the task without the federal or state governments having to invest a single dollar. In 1970, about 25,000 people visited the Rocks annually. In 1985 when he departed some 2.5 million did so.

After leaving the Authority, Owen established his own consulting engineer business and also undertook extensive voluntary work with the Sisters of Charity, RSL Veterans Homes, Legacy, Sancta Sophia College and various other worthy causes. He also served as Honorary Colonel Commandant of the Royal Australian Engineers.

Owen was an inveterate writer of letters to the editor. His mid-2006 letters to leading newspapers opposing the proposed privatisation of the Snowy Mountains Scheme were highly influential contributions to public debate. His last letter in *Defender* appeared in the Winter 2006 issue, and

incisively dissected the narrow-minded arrogance underlying the flawed reorganisation of the Department of Defence by Sir Arthur Tange in 1974.

The ADA was represented at Owen's funeral by Executive Director, Neil James, and several Sydney-based members including Owen's brother-in-law Frank Devine. The Association thanks Owen's family for his dedicated service to the ADA, and the cause of Australia's defence, and offers its condolences to his wife of nearly 53 years, Beverley, his children Tom and Jeremy, and Owen's four grandchildren. ♦

Vale Lieutenant Colonel Peter Robert Charlton, RFD (Retd)

Peter Charlton, the last specialist Australian defence correspondent and press commentator with actual military experience, died on 17 May 2007, aged 61. Born in Newcastle in 1946, he was educated at the then selective Newcastle Boys High School before undertaking a commerce degree at UNSW. After working briefly for the Queensland government as an economist, he was offered a finance cadetship with the Queensland afternoon paper, *The Telegraph*, in 1969. By 1976 he was finance editor and also leader writer across a wide range of subjects. He joined the *Courier Mail* soon after.

A skilled wordsmith and thoroughly professional journalist, in 1978 he was awarded the Commonwealth Press Union's Harry Brittain Memorial Scholarship which took him briefly to Oxford University and secondments to the *Yorkshire Post* and the Territorial Army's Royal Green Jackets regiment. In addition to his journalistic and military-exchange experiences Peter took the opportunity to visit 1st AIF battlefields in France and Flanders. In 1976 and again in 1981 he was a Smith-Mundt Visiting Fellow in the US. In 1989 he was appointed associate editor of the *Courier Mail*, was its political editor in Canberra during the early to mid 1990s and its Sydney-based national affairs editor from 1996.

He joined the Army Reserve for a brief period in Newcastle during his school days but his career as reservist took off when he was directly commissioned into the Army's Public Relations Service in 1975. Given his military history interests he corps-transferred to infantry soon afterwards and joined Queensland University Regiment to catch up on normal officer training. In senior appointments he served on the staff at Headquarters 1st Division and was the second-in-command and later commanding officer of 49RQR during its very busy days as a near full-time Ready Reserve battalion (the first and only reservist officer to do so). His deep knowledge of military history undoubtedly assisted him to hold his own with full-time military professionals during tactical training and professional discussions.

Peter was the author of nine books on military history and Australian politics. The former include: *The Thirty-Niners* (1981), *The Unnecessary War* (1983), *Pozieres 1916* (1986),