

## Vale Major Leonard Oswald Hansen, OAM (Retd)

Major Len Hansen, believed to have been the third-last surviving 'Rat of Tobruk' from North Queensland's 2nd/15th Battalion, died on 02 July 2007, aged nearly 90. Born in Mackay in late December 1917, Len lived in the same house in Byron Street all his life with three exceptions: when it was washed into the middle of the street by the cyclone and tidal wave that hit Mackay in 1918 (when he was a month old), when he was away with the 2nd AIF for five years in World War II, and in the last year or so where he spent time in hospital and a local nursing home. Len was educated at Victoria Park State School (where the Hansen brothers were among its first students in 1926), and Mackay Technical College, where he studied accountancy part-time in the late 1930s, finally completing his qualifications on returning from the war in late 1945.

In April 1939 Len joined his local militia battalion and transferred to the 2nd AIF's 2nd/15th Battalion the day it was raised in May 1940. He served with the battalion during the siege of Tobruk and then in the Syrian campaign, Al Alamein, New Guinea (Lae, Finschhafen and Sio) and finally in Borneo (Brunei and Labuan). In the battle at Bumi River in New Guinea Len, by then company sergeant major of B Company, took temporary command when his company commander was killed. Mackay's well-known 'Rats of Tobruk' memorial in Queen's Park (adjacent to Victoria Park school), which features prominently on the North Queensland tourist trail, owed its erection solely to Len's persistent efforts to honour his mates.

When the CMF was formed in 1948, Len re-enlisted and served with the 31st and 42nd Battalions. He was commissioned in September 1950. After commanding the Mackay-based B Company of the 42nd Battalion, in the early to mid 1950s, his final military posting in 1958-59 was as commander of the battalion's administration company.

After the war Len became a prominent businessman in Mackay for twenty years in partnership with his brother Lester (another 2nd AIF 'Desert Rat'). Later he served in the management of the Mackay Gas Company (later a branch of Boral) until his retirement from paid employment in 1983. He was also a Justice of the Peace for many years. In nominal retirement Len devoted even more time and determined efforts to a wide variety of voluntary causes and local organisations. This included the West Mackay Rotary Club (founding member, Paul Harris Fellow, 48 years membership), the Australian Institute of Management, the Red Cross, Freemasons, the Australian Flag Association and numerous local charities and community activities.

Len also founded the ADA's Mackay Chapter in 1981 and led it for 22 years. His initiative, leadership and sheer damn persistence were enduring factors in Mackay now having the ADA's largest local chapter outside the state capital cities. Over recent decades numerous Australians from all walks of life (many now in quite senior appointments) responded to his insistent invitations to address quarterly chapter dinners, several more than once at various stages of their military, diplomatic, political or other careers. Ambassadors from a range of countries also accepted Len's invitations to speak

during visits to north Queensland. Some speakers even came all the way from Canberra solely to keep faith with Len's belief that they had something useful to say, and that the Mackay region's importance as a major commodity exporter was worth seeing first hand. All enjoyed Len's sincere, hospitable but at times somewhat eccentric approach to hosting their Mackay visit.

When later elected as a Queensland representative to the ADA National Council Len always made a point of travelling to Melbourne, at his own expense, for national council and subsequently ADA board of directors meetings. Len served on the board from mid 1998 to early 2003 and at his last board meeting in late 2002 was honoured with a special plaque recording his service on the council and then the board. A special motion of thanks at the 2003 AGM also honoured his long and distinguished service to the ADA at national level and with the Mackay chapter.

One word sums up Len Hansen, persistence. In mid 2003 a well-attended public testimonial dinner was held to honour Len's long service to the Mackay community. Chaired by retired federal MP, Ray Braithwaite, it was attended by current and former mayors of Mackay, senior representatives from numerous local organisations and many citizens of the Mackay area. Current federal MP for the Mackay area, De-Anne Kelly, also spoke warmly of Len when recording his many services to his community and nation in a June 2003 speech to the House of Representatives. In the Australia Day honours list in 2004 Len was awarded the medal of the Order of Australia for his services to the community.

The eulogies at Len's funeral on 06 July 2007 were given by the Mayor of Mackay, and by Ray Braithwaite, former ADA executive director Mike O'Connor, and Judy Stewart, a teacher at Victoria Park School. It says much for Len that Ray and Judy are also ADA members. The ADA was also represented at the funeral by Chapter Chairman, Eric Eastment, and another 30 ADA members. The Association thanks Len's brother Lester, sister Joan, his five nieces and their children for the long and dutiful service given to the cause of Australia's defence by this extraordinary old soldier. ♦

### BEQUESTS TO THE ADA

Have you considered making a donation or bequest to the Australia Defence Association?

The Association runs a very lean operation and every dollar makes a difference. A suitable form of bequest is 'I bequeath the sum of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to the Australia Defence Association (ABN 16 083 007 390)'.

If you have already made a will, you don't have to change it; you can simply make a codicil.

The Association can assist with the provision of will or codicil forms, or referral to a solicitor. Further details may be obtained from [bequests@ada.asn.au](mailto:bequests@ada.asn.au)