

Vale Sir Charles Walter Michael Court, AK, KBE, KCMG

Sir Charles Court, who died in Perth on 22 December 2007, aged 96, was a patron of the Australia Defence Association for nearly twenty years but was always careful to ensure that his long career and reputation in politics did not affect the apolitical aims and work of the Association.

Born in Crawley, West Sussex, on 29 September 1911 his family emigrated to Western Australia when he was six months old. Educated at the selective-entry Perth Boy's (now Hale) School, he also began formal music training at 12 – after playing the cornet in the Salvation Army band where his family worshipped and later the Perth RSL Memorial Band. In 1930 he and his cornet won the brass solo division of the national band competition. Later, in 1953, he became a life member of the musicians union, having joined as a 14-year old in 1925. While working as a newspaper delivery boy he studied accountancy at night school and in 1927 was articled to a firm of auditors. He opened his own accountancy practice in 1933 and was a foundation partner of Hendry Rae & Court, 1938-1970.

In 1953 he entered state parliament as the member for Nedlands and subsequently became the Minister for Industrial Development and the North West (1959-71) and Railways (1959-67). He became Opposition Leader in May 1972 and Premier on 08 April 1974, replacing Labor's John Tonkin (another founding member of the ADA). Sir Charles (first knighted in 1972 when his OBE was upgraded) retired as Premier on 25 January 1982, shortly after his 70th birthday.

As a minister, deputy premier and later premier he oversaw the Ord River Scheme, the development of the Kwinana industrial strip in Perth, the start of large-scale iron ore mining in the Pilbara, and the significant Japanese investment that helped transform Western Australia from a largely agriculturally-based economy to one based on resources. He was instrumental in getting the North West Shelf gas project off the ground and also oversaw the development of the nickel mining and mineral sands industries in WA.

His interest in defence matters began in the mid 1920s as a senior cadet and a short-term conscript in the 1909-1929 national service scheme, and then a volunteer in the Militia's 44th Battalion. In all three cases he was apparently soon grabbed by the unit band.

In 1940 he re-enlisted as a private in the Army Service Corps (ASC), with the intention of transferring to the 2nd AIF as an infantryman. After being soon promoted lance corporal, corporal, lance sergeant and sergeant he was commissioned as a lieutenant. In February 1942 he transferred to the 2nd AIF and was posted to the 1st Armoured Division, then in New South Wales. Soon after he was promoted captain and appointed as adjutant of the division's ASC Support Group. After attendance at the Staff College's junior wing,

at Duntroon, he served on the DAQMG (administration and logistics) staff at Headquarters 1st Armoured Division.

He moved with the division to Western Australia in late 1942 and was later promoted major while serving with its headquarters. In 1943 he was seconded for a period to Headquarters Northern Territory Force in Darwin, and led one of the staff teams undertaking operational and logistic military appreciations of the potential use of northern Australia for offensive operations against the Japanese.

After completing the senior wing of the Staff College, then located at Cabarlah on Queensland's Darling Downs, he was posted in early 1945 to Headquarters 2nd Corps and then Headquarters 3rd Division, both at Torokina in Bougainville, where he remained until demobilised, as a lieutenant colonel, in early January 1946. He was awarded the OBE in 1946 for his service as a logistics staff officer in Bougainville, particularly for maintaining and co-ordinating communication and supply lines in the outer islands between April and September 1945.

In later life Sir Charles was honorary colonel of the University of Western Australia Regiment, 1969-1974, and the Special Air Service Regiment, 1976-1980. He was a patron of the Australia Defence Association, 1981-1998, and the patron of the Special Air Service Association, 1987-1994, and the Pilbara Regiment Memorial Fund, 2003-05. He was made a life member of the RSL in 1981.

Beyond and above party politics and his military service, Sir Charles had a passionate interest in defence matters, including the economic strength required to sustain our national defence efforts and the vulnerabilities and potential of northern Australia in both regards. Long before such views became commonly accepted, he maintained that the integrated development of industry, commerce and strong population bases in northern Australia had synergistic effects on economic strength, economic stability and national defence.

From the 1980s to the early 2000s he was a particular supporter of the Army's new Regional Force Surveillance Units. In conjunction with Major General Ken Taylor (Retd), its honorary colonel for twenty years, he maintained a special interest in the development of the Pilbara Regiment. In August 2002, in a ceremony with Ken Taylor officiating, the regiment's new purpose-designed troop depot in Carnarvon was officially opened by Sir Charles and Lady Court and named the *Sir Charles Court Lines*. On Remembrance Day 2005 Sir Charles also unveiled the Pilbara Regiment memorial in Karratha.

A keen reader of *Defender* for decades he continued to correspond with the ADA national office until suffering ill-health in early 2007. The ADA thanks Lady Court and his family for Sir Charles' long and dedicated service to the cause of Australia's defence. His state funeral in Perth on 04 January 2008 was a most fitting farewell for a great Australian visionary and pioneer. ♦