

Vale Major General Kenneth Joseph Taylor, AO (Retd)

Major General Ken Taylor, who died in Perth on 22 March 2008, aged 78, was another ADA member with long-held and strong views about the development and defence of northern Australia. Views he put into particular effect in the early 1980s when the Army's senior commander in Western Australia, and which he continued to express intellectually and practically until his death almost thirty years later.

Born in Subiaco on 15 June 1929, his father was an agent for Shell and Ken's early education was in country schools such as Lake Grace and Merredin, before the family returned to East Perth and then Dalkeith. His secondary education was at Christian Brothers College in Perth where Ken excelled at both sport (swimming, sailing, tennis and hockey) and academic studies (especially mathematics and physics). He entered the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in the 1947 intake, reputedly after his earlier desire to become an atomic physicist was subverted by the ten shillings a week pocket money then paid to Duntroon cadets.

Fittingly enough, Ken graduated from Duntroon to the Royal Australian Signals (corps) in 1950 and then completed a Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Western Australia. He served in the Korean War as a rifle platoon commander with 1RAR and 2RAR during 1953-54, including in the battle of The Hook. In the late 1950s he completed a two-year postgraduate course in applied science and technology at the Royal Military College of Science, Shrivenham, in the UK and then served on an exchange posting with the British Army of the Rhine in West Germany.

He attended the Army Staff College at Fort Queenscliff in 1961 followed by a staff posting at (the Commonwealth's) Headquarters Far East Land Forces in Singapore. Returning to Australia he raised 103 (task force) Signal Squadron in 1965 and, following promotion to lieutenant colonel, became commanding officer of the Sydney-based 1st Signal Regiment. This was followed by a staff posting as head of the communications-electronics branch at SEATO Headquarters in Bangkok and attendance at the Joint Services Staff College, Latimer, in the UK.

On promotion to colonel in 1973 he was Director of Recruiting at Army Headquarters and in 1974 was appointed the Director of Military Art (and deputy commandant) at RMC Duntroon. Promoted to brigadier in 1976, he was the first Director-General of Computer Operations in the Department of Defence.

In 1980-82 Ken was double-hatted in command of the 5th Military District (covering Western Australia), and of the main field army formation based there, the Army Reserve's 13th Field Force Group (now 13 Brigade). During this time, ably supported by then WA premier, Sir Charles Court, he studied, developed and argued the case for an Army Reserve unit in the Pilbara dedicated to the local defence of the region. After winning approval, he raised the Army Reserve's 5th Independent Rifle Company at Port Hedland in the Pilbara in 1982, and it was subsequently expanded, as he had planned, into a full Regional Force Surveillance Unit as the Pilbara Regiment in 1985.

Ken left WA for Canberra on promotion to major general in 1982 and the post of Chief of Materiel – Army at Army Headquarters, the senior specialist job in the Army for officers of a technical background. He was appointed an Officer in the Order of Australia in 1985, retired from the Army after 38 years service in May 1985 and returned to Perth.

In retirement he was honorary colonel of the Perth-based 10th Light Horse Regiment, 1985-1988, but the Pilbara Regiment also remained deep in his affections and psyche. In June 1988 Ken became its first honorary colonel and was still enthusiastically in harness when he died just short of 20 years later. As honorary colonel he was very popular among all ranks and a willing fixture at regimental ceremonial activities. He also remained very interested in the operational side of the unit, attended all course concentration periods and worked, with Sir Charles Court, in the early to mid 2000s to have the regiment's impressive memorial erected (and opened by Sir Charles in 2005). In 1997, the regiment's new headquarters in Karratha was named Taylor Barracks in Ken's honour.

For a soldier, Ken also loved the sea. After sailing at school and with the Sea Scouts on the Swan River, he later raced sailing dinghies, crewed in the Sydney to Hobart and *Parmelia* yacht races, and in the infamous 1979 Fastnet race in the UK from which his boat withdrew. He was eventually the first commodore of the Army Sailing Association. His last boat, an S80 called *Katie*, was raced on the Swan out of the Royal Perth Yacht Club. He played hockey into his early 60s, golf until his mid 70s and was also a founding member and several times president of the West Lewis Island Gentlemen's Fishing Club in the Dampier Archipelago. A bronze plaque at Todd Bay, erected by his club mates, commemorates his love of Australia's North West and its people, as well as his rare qualities as a friend and mentor to many.

Ken's well-attended military funeral at Karrakatta in Perth on 02 April 2008 included a 100-man guard of honour from his beloved Pilbara Regiment and other WA units. In October 2008 his name was added to the honour roll on the regimental memorial in Karratha and his two sons scattered half his ashes in the waters of the Dampier archipelago, with the other half scattered in the Swan River at East Fremantle.

The ADA thanks his wife, Ket, and their family for Ken's long, dedicated and thoughtful service to the cause of Australia's defence. ♦

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