



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Kenneth John Oram

SPEECH

Wednesday, 24 June 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 24 June 2009	Source House
Page 7104	Proof No
Questioner	Responder
Speaker Robert, Stuart, MP	Question No.

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (9.42 am)—I rise to honour the late Kenneth John Oram, a pioneer in Australian aviation and one of the foundations on which Army aviation was born. Ken was born on 8 March 1920. He attended Randwick Public School and went on to Sydney Boys High School, where he was school captain in 1937. Ken joined the CMF, a member of 1st Medium Brigade AFA, and then Royal Military College, Duntroon in 1940. Because of his timing in entering Duntroon he was one of the few staff officer cadets to be awarded the Efficiency Medal. Ken graduated senior under officer in 1942 and was awarded the King's Medal for Outstanding Academic Achievement and the Sword of Honour for leadership abilities. He was only the fourth cadet in RMC's history to do so.

In 1942 Ken entered the war with the 9th Battery of the 2/5th Field Regiment at Milne Bay in Papua New Guinea. After what he described as 'a short and nasty battle', the Japanese were defeated for the first time in the war. He took part in the assault on Salamaua, fighting with both Australian and American troops. He gathered further experience with attachment to the US Navy on PT boats in the Solomon Islands and at Headquarters 1 Australian Corps AIF. His final part in the war was at Balikpapan, Borneo, Indonesia, with the 7th division. At the end of the war he went to Cabarlah, near Toowoomba, for officer training school, where he met and fell in love with Joan Smith. They were married on 30 November.

In March 1947 Ken and Joan left for England, where he undertook an advanced artillery course at Larkhill and subsequently went to Middle Wallop and flying school to be trained by the Royal Air Force. By the time he retired from active flying in 1975 he had logged more than 7,000 hours on 94 different types of aircraft—all mishap free. He now believed it was vital for an air observation post for the modern Australian Army. In 1949 Ken returned to the School of Artillery on North Head and he set out to convince his senior commanders of this need. The Army was unsure, the RAAF tried to dissuade them and progress was very slow. Ken finally convinced Colonel AL McDonald, who was director of military operations and plans, to support his plan to put pilots and trainees into an aviation unit and charter civil aircraft. Thus 1 Army Aviation Company was raised in 1957, with Ken responsible for training standards, policy statements, organisation and equipment tables, and flying procedure practices of the company.

Post Army, Ken joined Qantas to help build their flight crew and maintenance training centre, and it was while he was at Qantas that he was approached by his school friend, Rollo Kingsford-Smith, to assist with the delivery of a new de Havilland Dove aircraft from the UK. He teamed up with Harry Purvis to bring the Dove from Hatfield, England, through France and Greece and then they went on a hopping tour across the Middle East, Pakistan and India and down through Malaya and Singapore and finally Indonesia before reaching Australia. It took them six weeks, in which time they encountered snow storms in Europe, hang-ups in bureaucracy and challenges getting rations in the plane—which were resolved by Indian coolies running relays across an airfield with water in giant skin bags to fill the plane's many-gallon tank.

Once flying was behind him, Ken moved to PA Management Consultants and finally to Consolidated Goldfields, where he travelled the country identifying 'new leaders' for the Australian mining industry. He retired in 1982. Ken and Joan moved to Queensland and settled in Runaway Bay, in the mighty electorate of Fadden. Today I honour in federal parliament a truly great Australian.