

OBITUARY:

Vice-Admiral David Willoughby Leach, AC, CBE, LVO

Honorary Life Member and former President of the Royal United Services Institute of New South Wales, Vice-Admiral David Leach passed away in Sydney on 19 January 2020. He had served for 43 years in the Navy rising to become Chief of the Naval Staff (1982 – 1985) and, after retirement, continued to give significant public service to the Australian War Memorial and local government as well as the Institute.

Vice-Admiral David Willoughby Leach, AC, CBE, LVO, served as Chief of the Naval Staff from 1982 to 1985. He was born on 17 July 1928 in Perth, Western Australia and joined the Royal Australian Naval College in 1942, aged 13. During his time at the college, he was appointed Chief Cadet Captain and was awarded the King's Gold Medal for exemplary conduct.

In 1946-47, he served in ships of the British Pacific Fleet before completing his Sub-Lieutenant courses in the United Kingdom in 1948. Following return to Australia, he served in HMA Ships *Australia* (II), *Murchison* and *Arunta* (I), and, in 1960-61, after specialising in gunnery, he served in the Royal Australian Navy flagship, HMAS *Melbourne* (II), as the Fleet Gunnery Officer. As a Lieutenant, he played State Representative Rugby for Victoria.

Command appointments followed in HMAS *Vendetta* (II) (1964-66) with the Far East Strategic Reserve and as captain of HMAS *Perth* (II) during her second deployment to the Vietnam War in 1968-69. *Perth* was an efficient and effective ship providing swift and accurate fire on enemy positions from the gunline. On one occasion, *Perth* was the target of 30 rounds of counter battery fire from North Vietnamese gunners. Due to rapid ship handling, none of the incoming shells found their target. This deployment earned *Perth* a United States Meritorious Unit Citation, and David was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE).

Captain Leach served as Director of Naval Plans (1969-70) and was appointed a Lieutenant of the Royal Victorian Order (LVO) for his services as Liaison Officer during the 1970 Royal visit to Australia. He was the Royal Australian Navy's representative in Britain (1971-74).

Promoted Commodore in 1975, he served in Navy Office as the Director of Naval Plans, Director General of Naval Operational Requirements (1975-76), Chief of Naval Matériel and Chief of Naval Personnel. In 1977, he completed the United Kingdom's Senior Staff Course at the Royal College of Defence Studies.

Following promotion to Rear Admiral, he was successively Assistant Chief of Naval Staff - Matériel (1978-79), Flag Officer Commanding the Australian Fleet (1979-80), and Assistant Chief of Naval Staff - Personnel (1980-81). In 1981, he was made an Officer of the Order



of Australia (AO) for his service as Commander of the Australian Fleet.

On promotion to Vice Admiral in April 1982, he became Chief of Naval Staff. In 1984, he was promoted to Companion of the Order of Australia (AC), for services to the Navy particularly as Chief of Naval Staff. He retired in 1985.

After retirement, Vice Admiral Leach continued to render significant public service as a member of the Council of the Australian War Memorial and as a Member of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. He also served as an Alderman for eight years (1991 – 1999), including one year as Mayor (1995) of the Municipality of Woollahra. He was

known for his good nature, hard work and fairness. He addressed shortcomings in corporate governance and made a lasting impression on Council staff.

After retirement, Admiral Leach also became a very active member of the Royal United Services Institute of New South Wales (RUSI NSW). He was President from 2001 to 2004 and sought to position RUSI NSW to contribute to the defence policy process in Australia, where there was a lack of independent 'think-tank' input, input that Royal United Services Institute provided in Britain. Under his leadership, RUSI NSW took significant steps. We made major submissions to government and to parliamentary inquiries on Australia's maritime strategy, network-centric warfare, and rebuilding the Australian merchant navy. Subsequently, we have continued to research and make submissions to government where we have had the expertise. Our policy contributions, though, have been overshadowed by the contribution of two think tanks formed this century, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) and the Lowy Institute. They were formed to do a job that, as David saw it, we should have been doing all along.

Throughout his distinguished naval career and in later life, Admiral Leach gave great service to the nation. He exemplified Navy values in peace and war and made major contributions to the modern navy through his leadership at sea and ashore. Admiral Leach was the last former Chief of the Naval Staff to have served in the Navy during World War II.

**Royal Australian Navy, Michael Flynn,
David Leece and Paul Irving**