

Max Willis 1935 – 2021

Institute member, Brigadier The Honourable M. F. Willis RFD ED CSI, politician, citizen soldier and lawyer, has died in Sydney aged 85 years.



Max Frederick Willis was born at Murwillumbah, New South Wales, in December 1935 and was educated at Murwillumbah High School and the University of Sydney from which he graduated as a Bachelor of Laws in 1957. From 1958 to 1971, he practised as a solicitor with Serisier, Willis and Browning at Miranda in southern Sydney.

A member of the Liberal Party, in 1970 he was appointed to a vacancy in the New South Wales Legislative Council. He was Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Council from 1977 to 1978 and Leader from 1978 to 1981. In 1991, he was elected President of the Council, but resigned the position in 1998 under controversial circumstances and retired from politics in 1999. For his parliamentary service, he was awarded the Centenary Medal in 2001.

Max had a parallel career as a citizen soldier, enlisting in the Sydney University Regiment in 1953, where he was later commissioned. He also saw regimental service as a rifle company commander in the 4th Battalion, The Royal New South Wales Regiment,

before becoming Commanding Officer of the University of New South Wales Regiment (1972-75). During the Vietnam War, he visited Australian troops in Vietnam as a Citizen Military Forces observer. Later, he became a brigadier and was appointed successively as Commander 5th Brigade and then as Assistant Commander Training Command and Commandant of the Reserve Command and Staff College. His service concluded in 1986 having served 33 years in the Army Reserve. For his military service, he was awarded the Reserve Force Decoration (RFD), the Efficiency Decoration (ED), the National Medal and the Australian Defence Medal.

He was a member of the Institute for most of his adult life. He also developed a particular interest in Pacific affairs, an interest that led to him being awarded the Cross of the Solomon Islands (CSI) for most conspicuous and outstanding service to that nation. He married Wendy Patricia Booth in 1970 and they had four children. He died in August 2021, aged 85 years.

David Leece