

BIOGRAPHY

Who wasJohn Raymond Broadbent?

Major General John Raymond Broadbent, CBE, DSO, ED, was a citizen-soldier. After concurrent distinguished military and legal careers, he became president of both the Law Society of New South Wales and the Royal United Service Institution of New South Wales.

John Raymond Broadbent was born in Manly on 24 June 1914. He studied at the University of Sydney, gaining the degrees of Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws in 1938 and then became a solicitor in Sydney. While at university, he enlisted in the Sydney University Regiment in 1935 and was commissioned in 1937, subsequently serving in the 17th Battalion (The North Sydney Regiment) until after war was declared.

Broadbent enlisted in the Second Australian Imperial Force on 7 May 1940 as a lieutenant in the 2/17th Australian Infantry Battalion, 20th Brigade, 9th Division (Army Number NX12225). He arrived in the Middle East with the battalion in November. Promoted captain in 1941, he saw action in the Western Desert, including during the siege of Tobruk in 1941 and the Battle of El Alamein in 1942.

Broadbent returned to Sydney in February 1943 and was posted to New Guinea from August. As a major, he served as the 20th Brigade beach master during the amphibious assaults at Lae and Finschhafen (Scarlet Beach) in September before re-joining the 2/17th Battalion for the Huon Peninsula campaign, including the advance from Finschhafen to Jivevaneng on the Sattelberg Road and then the advance along the Rai coast from Finschhafen to Sio. Subsequently, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) for "energy and determined leadership at Lae and Finschhafen" as a major.

On return to Australia in February 1944 and aged only 29 years, Broadbent was promoted to lieutenant colonel and was appointed commanding officer of the 2/17th Battalion which he trained on the Atherton Tableland before leading it throughout the Borneo campaign of 1945. In Borneo in June 1945, Broadbent led the 2/17th Battalion in the 20th Brigade's amphibious assaults in Brunei Bay as part of Operation Oboe 6 and in the subsequent advance along the Brunei coast to the Seria oilfields and in other coastal and riverine operations against the Imperial Japanese Army in Brunei. He returned with his battalion to Australia in December and was discharged on 15 March 1946 following the disbandment of the battalion in February 1946. For his leadership in Borneo, he was mentioned-in-despatches.

Post-war, on the raising of the Citizen Military Forces (CMF) in 1948, Broadbent was appointed the first commanding officer of the 17th/18th Infantry Battalion (The North Shore Regiment) (Army Number 261506). He commanded the battalion for three years until 1951. From 1955 to 1957 he commanded the 5th



Brigade as a brigadier and in 1958, he joined the Eastern Command Officers Staff Group (ACMF). He was promoted to major general in 1963 to command Headquarters Communications Zone and then, from August 1965 to November 1966, he became General Officer Commanding the 2nd Division. From December 1966, he was posted to the Unattached List of Eastern Command until he retired in June 1971. Broadbent's military service was recognised by his appointment as a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in June 1967. He had earlier been awarded the Efficiency Decoration (ED).

In civil life post-war, Broadbent became a respected solicitor in Sydney. The tenacious commitment to loyalty, integrity and fairness that he embodied as a soldier also characterised his work as a solicitor. His practice was not big, but any old soldier or soldier's widow received whatever legal help was needed, whether payment could be made or not. That, he would say, was the dignity of the profession. Dignity was a word he used a lot. He related it to the duty and privilege of service.

He was very active in the Law Society of New South Wales and served as its President from 1971 to 1973. He played a significant role in the Law Society's decision to take the banks to court to have interest paid on solicitors' trust accounts. This enabled fidelity funds to be paid in full and allowed the establishment of the Law Society legal aid scheme. It also enabled the Law Society to found the College of Law in 1973. The college provided, in place of the former articles of clerkship, a full-time practical legal training course for all graduates intending to enter practice as solicitors. In 1972, at Broadbent's instigation, the first inspector of solicitors' trust accounts was employed.

He also became an Honorary Life Member of the United Service Institution of New South Wales and was its President from 1989 to 1992 when the Institution was incorporated and received permission to use the title "Royal".

Broadbent's character, and the affectionate regard in which many of his colleagues held him, was expressed by Henric Nicholas, QC, in 2003: "He is a fine soldier and an astute solicitor, with whom one always stands a little straighter."

John Broadbent died in Sydney on 27 October 2006 aged 92. He was accorded a military funeral at St Thomas' Anglican Church, North Sydney, the Garrison Church of the 17th Battalion, on 3 November 2006 in a fitting farewell to a man who had committed his long life to the service of his nation.¹

David Leece

¹Photo of General Broadbent: the Broadbent family.