

Gunner of Renown



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth John ORAM, EM

(1920-2009)

Ken Oram was born at Randwick, NSW, on 8 March 1920, the son of an AMP Society insurance representative, a veteran of the 1st Battalion, AIF, and a talented sportsman. Ken was educated at Sydney Boys High School where in this final year, he captained the school and represented it at swimming and shooting. [Mother and siblings??]

On leaving school he joined 1st Medium Brigade at Avoca Street, Randwick, in 1937. His talent in mathematics and science was recognised by his officers, and he was a Gun Position Officer Assistant at his first annual camp. On 24 February 1940, he was accepted into the Royal Military College where he excelled in all activities and academically. Oram won the King's Medal and was awarded the Sword of Honour when he graduated from the short wartime course on 29 June 1942.

Oram was posted to HQRAA 3rd Division for the assault on Salamaua, thence GSO3 Ops and GSO3 Air at HQ New Guinea Force. He attended the Staff School at Cabarlah and after the war was selected to undergo pilot training in Air OP procedures at Middle Wallop, UK. His ambition to bring air support into the army took a step closer when he remained to gain an instructor's rating to carry back into the Regular Army in 1949.

He used his term in Britain to establish his aviation credentials with test pilots (household names in those days) and aircraft manufacturers, and gained experience on many aircraft types. He developed his ideas of an integral air arm for the army, separate to the RAAF, but never had a flying posting in the Australian Army. He noted that when nominations were called for from artillery officers to be trained in Air OP, 'it was not some far-sighted leap into the air by the AMF – rather, it was to standardise with the British Army'.

In 1950, Major Oram was Senior Instructor, Field Wing, School of Artillery, where he continued to spread the gospel about the importance of Air OP in counter bombardment. He stated his views in the AAJ, 'Army Aviation and the Future', (August 1952). At the School he brought in a more relaxed and less formal approach to course shooting critiques.

Oram next took the post of GSO2 Land Air Warfare at AHQ after a spell as BMRA 2nd AGRA, Melbourne. His superior at AHQ was Colonel A. L. McDonald, Director Military Operations and Plans, who proved a valuable ally. McDonald subsequently raised 1st Army Aviation Company at Bankstown aerodrome. The fruits of Oram's and others labours are embedded in the traditions of Army Aviation which now calls Oakey home.

Ken Oram's penultimate posting was Personal Assistant to Lieutenant General Sir Henry Wells, CGS, where he visited units in Malaya and in the four corners of the continent. It was

to be the high point of his career. His next posting was to an 'administrative backwater' in AG branch, which saw him say 'goodbye' to the Army and his Regiment [when??].

For all its brevity compared to his peers from RMC war shortened courses, Ken Oram had no regrets. He noted: 'In retrospect – no regrets. Given the opportunity I would have enjoyed contributing more to Army Aviation but looking at Oakey today, I can see many signs of our hard work'.

Oram then took up a flying career with Qantas. He retired in 1975 with 7,000 flying hours in 94 aircraft types, all mishap free. He died on 24 February 2009 and his funeral service was held at the Somerville Chapel, Nerang, on 3 March. He was survived by his son and daughter. His wife pre-deceased him in March 1999. [Wife's name, when married etc??]

Source: Alan H. Smith, 'Cannonball', Journal of the Royal Australian Artillery Historical Society, No 43, July 2000, p. 9; Cannonball, No.74, p.12; correspondence 8 April 2000.