

Gunner of Renown



Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company

General Sir John Gordon Noel WILTON, KBE, CB, DSO

(1910-1981)

John Wilton entered the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in 1927 and graduated on 9 December 1930, being allotted to artillery. In the midst of the Great Depression he was given the option of entering the Public Service or serving in the British army, he chose the latter and along with another classmate was sent to the UK for a gunnery course at Larkhill.

Thereafter, he was posted to 6th Field Brigade at Bordon, England, equipped with horse drawn 18 pounders and participated in manoeuvres at brigade, division and corps level. In November 1931, the Brigade trooped to Bombay and then northwest to Fyzabad on the Gogra River. In 1934, he was sent to Maymyo, Burma, with 10 (Abbottabad) Battery (3.7 inch mountain howitzers) as battery commander, where there were border skirmishes between Burmese and Chinese.

In 1936, Wilton returned to Australia on eight months leave, and soon after his return to India decided to transfer to the Indian Army Ordnance Corps and an increase in salary in January 1938. He returned to Australia and married Helen Thelma May Diana Marshall, from Nyngan, NSW, on 9 July 1938 at St Andrews Church of England, Summer Hill. She spent a short time with her husband in India.

Meanwhile, Wilton applied to rejoin the Australian Staff Corps and was accepted in May 1939. He was posted to 2nd Battery, 1st Heavy Brigade, the coast artillery custodians of Sydney Harbour and surrounds. Having gained technically from a short posting with the coast artillery in India he raised 12th Battery at Port Kembla and installed two 6 inch Mark XI guns. On 30 August 1940, the first gun was ready for proof firing. Soon after, he was appointed BC 8th Battery, 2/4th Field Regiment, 7th Division unit.

In the Middle East, Wilton moved to BMRA 7th Division on 19 March 1941, with CRA Brigadier Frank Berryman. Initially deployed to the Western Desert, 7th Division artillery was suddenly moved east for the Syrian campaign after which he was posted to I Australian Corps as GSO2 to the CCRA, Brigadier Cyril Clowes. While there he attended the British Army Staff College at Haifa gaining a 'B' pass.

Back in Australia he found himself GSO1 and a lieutenant colonel on HQ 3rd Division then formed in Queensland and training for service in New Guinea. In the Salamaua campaign, his exemplary staff work recognized the importance of administration and logistics in terrain where shortfalls in plans could not be readily rectified. Wilton also saw value in using 3.7 inch howitzers (mountain artillery) in the capture of Mt Tambu.

In September 1943, Wilton was sent to Washington as GSO1 Australian Military Mission but in late 1944 he was back in the SWPA as GSO1 (Ops) at Advanced LHQ again working for Berryman. Most of the planning for the three Oboe operations in Borneo had been done, and as the end of the war approached he was promoted Colonel GS responsible for Staff Duties and Training. By August 1945 and he was in Morotai and was awarded the OBE for his services.

Wilton was then posted to AHQ as Director Military Operations and Plans and given the task of post-war planning for the army, involving its role, structure, and interface with foreign policy. In 1952, he attended the Imperial Defence College in London, and thereafter was appointed Commander 28th Commonwealth Infantry Brigade, 1st Commonwealth Division, in Korea in March 1953.

Thereafter, Wilton went on to become CGS and Chairmen Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Vietnam War before retiring in 1970.

He died on 10 May 1981 and was given a full military funeral in Canberra. He was survived by his wife Helen, sons Robert and John and daughter Virginia.

Sources: D. M. Horner, *Strategic Command*; Obituary, *Australian Gunner*, No.81, p.23; J. Graham, *The Canberra Times*, 13 April 1966; *Tiger Story*, F. E. Elliott, pp. 3-8, Alan H. Smith.

For more information follow this link: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/wilton-sir-john-gordon-noel-15765>