

Dinner in honour of the Armed Forces in the NT
SPEECH by His Honour Mr Tom Pauling AO QC
Administrator of the Northern Territory
Government House – 2 April 2009

It is a great pleasure for Tessa and me to have this opportunity to host you, Chief Minister, and senior representatives of Australia's defence forces at Government House. We have a rich tradition of service tracing through our history and I would like to share a few examples of the relationship between this House and the Armed Forces. A gentle sweep of history.

In 1870, Captain William Douglas was appointed South Australia's second Government Resident in the Northern Territory - the first to be based in Palmerston as Darwin was then known. Born in Wales, he was a Captain's steward in the Royal Navy before resigning in Hong Kong. He then became a skipper of clippers in the South China Sea. History relates that Douglas served aboard the *Royalist*, the private warship of James Brooke the *White Rajah of Sarawak*, and that the Second Rajah was his uncle on his mother Mary's side. He is also said to have sailed with Sir Henry Keppel during the *Dido's* campaign against Dayak pirates.

During Douglas's term in office as Resident, Edward William Price Esquire served as a Stipendiary Magistrate and Commissioner of the Circuit Court in Palmerston. He was appointed Government Resident in 1876. Born in Dublin, Price served in the Royal Navy, including service in the Black Sea during the Crimean War.

Prominent visitors have enjoyed Government House hospitality over the past 138 years. On 10th December 1919, The Honourable Staniforth Smith, Deputy Administrator, appropriately hosted the Smith brothers, Ross and Keith, who had arrived in Darwin that day from London in a Vickers-Vimy bomber as the winning competitors in The London-Australia Air Race. The journey had taken a total of 27 days and 20 hours.

Captain Ross Smith served with the 3rd Light Horse Regiment in Gallipoli and Sinai. He then volunteered for Number 1 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps.

He was wounded in action twice and was decorated for bravery six times. His brother, Lieutenant Keith Smith, also served with the Light Horse but then sailed to England to enlist in the Royal Flying Corps.

Robert Hunter Weddell was appointed Government Resident for North Australia in 1927. Colonel Weddell saw active service in the original 7th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force, notably commanding the two lead companies in the second battle for Krithia in May 1915. They occupied a front of some five hundred metres in the assault - Weddell was the only surviving officer.

His successor in Government House, Charles Lydiard Aubrey Abbott, enlisted in the Australian Naval & Military Expeditionary Force and served in German New Guinea, before transferring to the 12th Australian Light Horse Regiment. He saw active service at Gallipoli, Sinai, Palestine and Syria.

Not only did the Government Residents and Administrators serve, so did some of our staff. Dick Butler was of aboriginal descent and became the Head Gardener in 1961. He was a character, known for impromptu performances on the mouth organ particularly during corroborees held in the Botanic Gardens.

The Darwin Mobile Force was raised in New South Wales in November 1938 and arrived in Darwin the following year, establishing itself in the disused Vestey's Meatworks. Butler served alongside other Aboriginal men, artillerymen tasked with providing mobile protection for the Headquarters of the Army in the Northern Territory. Dick Butler earned the distinction of being the first soldier to earn the Long Service and Good Conduct Medal for service completely in the 7th Military District. His photos and medals are displayed on the Western Verandah.

The Honourable Frederick Chaney was appointed Administrator in March 1970. During the Second World War, his service as a pilot included secondment to the Z-Special Unit, Services Reconnaissance Department, and he received an Air Force Cross for his gallantry.

This story would not be complete without mention of Eric Johnston who retired from the Royal Australian Navy in December 1980 with the rank of Commodore after more than three decades of distinguished service. This included extensive service off the Malay Peninsula during the Confrontation and commanding HMAS *Vendetta* off Vietnam which earned Eric a US Commander-in-Chief-Pacific Commendation.

Commodore Johnston holds the distinction of holding office as the first Honorary Colonel of the North West Mobile Force, NORFORCE – having, on occasion, exchanged Naval whites for military khaki and slouch hat. And it was my pleasure, last week, as the current Honorary Colonel of NORFORCE, to tour Centre Squadron in Alice Springs and to meet with Major James Cook.

I know that the Northern Territory is in the very safe hands of the men and women serving with the Australian Defence Forces. I would like to take this opportunity as Administrator of the Northern Territory to extend a wholehearted thank you to you all and to emphasise how welcome you are.