

**RICHARD KINGSLAND, AO, CBE, DFC  
PILOT, PUBLIC SERVANT  
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Richard Kingsland

UNDERLYING all that Sir Richard Kingsland achieved as a top-ranking public servant and as a daring RAAF pilot in World War II - when he was known as Dick Cohen - was a strong spirit of adventure and resourcefulness.

Some of his air force exploits before and during the war read like a boys' own annual or spy thriller. The urge for excitement that led him to "perform slow rolls 15 metres above the water in a float plane" did not die in the postwar years, as his career led him into administrative positions that tied him to a desk.

He merely transferred that spirit to the mental arena - finding a public service career that enabled him "to do things and change directions in performing services very exciting indeed".

To him, public administration, his love of the arts through looking, reading and listening to music were explorations that made every day too short. This approach spilled over into the wide range of community activities with which he became involved in retirement.

Kingsland, who has died in hospital in Canberra, aged 95, gave up a promising job with the old Speedwell bicycle manufacturer, Bennett & Wood, to join the RAAF as a cadet in 1935.

He had gone solo for barely eight to 10 hours when he sneaked off to display his new-found aerial skills to an attractive young school teacher he'd just met. He flew over to her school, landed nearby, took her flying, put her down again and flew back to base at Point Cook. But his propensity for "showing off" came to an abrupt halt after he was put on a charge for low flying. Extricating himself with a minor

penalty, he settled down to serious flying and was picked for a three-man team to provide aerobatics for the RAAF's 1937 Laverton air display.

On the day, he clipped the "tan" with his wingtip, going very close to wiping himself out.

In July 1939, he was sent to Britain to ferry to Australia the first of the Sunderland flying boats. But war broke out and the Australian government offered the aircraft to Britain for the war's duration - and Kingsland was attached to the RAF's No. 10 Sunderland squadron.

The squadron was assigned to escort shipping convoys in the Atlantic, but on one mission in 1940, he flew Lord Gort, chief of the Imperial General Staff, and the British information minister, Duff Cooper, to Morocco. He landed in an estuary in Rabat only slightly wider than his Sunderland's wingspan. Gort and Cooper were there to try to rally the colonial French to the Allied cause, which Vichy had deserted.

The French, however, rejected the British overtures and Kingsland received a radio warning to get the two VIPs out as the situation turned nasty. Through a ruse, he got the French to send a boat to the Sunderland. When the pinnacle came alongside, Kingsland leapt aboard, put a gun in the back of the man in charge and ordered him to make for the shore.

A dash through the streets of Rabat in a commandeered car to the British consulate followed. There he was told Gort had gone to a hotel where he was trying to win over the French military. Putting Kingsland under a blanket in the back of a car, a consulate official got him through police patrols and dropped him near the hotel. But as he jumped out of the car, a French police car pulled up and shots were traded as they sought to prevent him reaching the hotel.

Instead of being able to extricate Gort, they were both detained and thrown into jail. But in the excitement the French hadn't taken Kingsland's revolver. He managed to shoot off the cell lock, shot and wounded several people in the jail corridors, bailed up a car and, without further incident, got back to the aircraft to which Cooper had already made his way after sheltering with sympathetic officials.

Boatloads of armed police surrounded the aircraft, but shortly before dawn, Kingsland started all four of the Sunderland's engines and, dodging fishing boats and pursuing police boats in the pre-dawn light, he taxied at high speed through Rabat harbour. The Sunderland bounced off the first couple of swells as they reached the open sea, but Kingsland had enough flying speed to take off and fly safely back to England via Gibraltar. It was a close-run affair, for which he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

His exploits in New Guinea as commander of No. 11 (Catalina) Squadron were in the same vein. RAAF veterans still recall the day he used one of these lumbering aircraft as a dive-bomber to destroy Rabaul wharf, despite a heavy barrage from Japanese guns. Later, he commanded the RAAF station at Rathmines, in New South Wales, where he met a young assistant section officer, Kathleen Adams, who later became his wife. Shortly after, he was promoted to group captain, at age 26 the youngest of that rank in the RAAF, and became director of operational training.

In the last year of the war he was sent to Morotai as director of RAAF intelligence and also acted in Manila as director of intelligence to the commanding general of the United States Far East Air Force. A stint as director-general of organisation followed before he left the RAAF in 1948 to join the public service as manager of Sydney airport.

Taking leave for a year to be an airline transport pilot, he pursued a career in the Department of Civil Aviation until moving to the Department of Air in 1952. Two years later, after becoming an assistant secretary at Department of Air, he was sent to London and completed the Imperial Defence College course before becoming a first assistant secretary in the Department of Defence in 1958.

In 1963, he was appointed to head the sprawling Department of the Interior, which he skilfully reorganised. A monument to his energy and innovation is the Canberra School of Music, which was established during his tenure and of whose council he became chairman in 1972.

Twice the position of head of Department of Defence became vacant, and Kingsland was tipped as the logical choice, but each time he let it be known he didn't want the post: he didn't believe he was secretary of Defence material.

He was keen on heading the Department of Air, but when the job came up in 1969, his then minister, Peter Nixon, wouldn't let him go. However, Nixon relented in 1970 and Kingsland took over as secretary of the Department of Repatriation and chairman of the Repatriation Commission, translating to head of the Department of Veterans' Affairs until his retirement in 1981. He believed that one of his major achievements during his 11 years looking after the interests of veterans was the indexation of the main service pensions, which the government introduced in 1977.

Others pointed to his diplomacy, patience and hard work in maintaining excellent relations with the many organisations representing ex-servicemen and their dependents.

Before his appointment at the Department of Repatriation, Kingsland was responsible for a notable act of repatriation himself in 1969 when a faulty undercarriage in a Boeing 707 led to an unscheduled stopover in Paris. Wandering the boulevards, he peered through the dusty window of a shop marked "Antiquities", and saw on an easel an oil painting of three demure and beautifully gowned ladies on a back-lit terrace gazing out into the night. As a frequenter of art galleries, his blood surged as he recognised that he had stumbled on a work by Australian artist, Rupert Bunny.

Having established that it was indeed a Bunny, a deal was struck and the painting, *La Terrasse*, would grace the Kingsland home until the family presented it as a gift to the Australian National Gallery, where it is on permanent display.

His pace and commitment did not lessen when he retired; his activities encompassed about 20 different jobs, most of them unpaid. Some of those, such as his membership of the board of management of the Canberra Theatre Trust, founding chairman of the Canberra School of Art, trustee of the Australian War Memorial and his involvement with the National Heart Foundation, began before retirement. Others that followed were the chairmanship of the Commonwealth Films Board of Review, ACT Arts Development Board, and the Commonwealth Uranium Advisory Council.

The challenges and problems they threw up all interested him and gave him immense satisfaction, especially the links formed with the great variety of people involved.

However, one issue that caused him major concern in retirement was the politicisation of the Commonwealth Public Service. The result, in his view, was that public servants seeking to "protect their rear" were providing muffled advice to their ministers, while also "spending too much effort trying to protect their ministers". To him, among the worst developments were the loss of power of the Public Service Board and the difficulties public servants now had to face in getting through the morass of ministerial advisers.

Born as Julius Cohen in Moree, where his father was a mercer and storekeeper, he recalled his childhood as not being a very happy one. That stemmed partly from his background, being baited and teased at school as a "Jew boy". The difficulties created by the Depression also contributed to his unhappiness, especially when his father's plans to develop a chain of stores in Sydney fell apart.

The move to Sydney, when he was aged five, left the family in difficult circumstances.

After attending primary school at Camden and Randwick, he won a place at Sydney High School, where he did well. But the Depression precluded him going on to university.

Throughout his RAAF service his Jewishness was never a problem, though he did consider changing his name in case he became a prisoner of war. He didn't change his name then, but as a safeguard his identity disc carried his religion as Buddhist, much to the amusement of his crews.

However, after the war, thinking of the two daughters he had then and not wanting them to suffer as he had in his childhood, he decided to change his name by deed poll to that of his stepfather, Herbert Kingsland, whom his mother had married some years after she was widowed in 1935. He also dropped his given name of Julius, for Richard.

He was knighted in 1978 after having been made a commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 1967, and further recognised as an officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in 1989.

During his public service career he served 12 ministers and built a reputation as a trusted and experienced departmental head. In June 2010 he published his autobiography, *Into the Midst of Things*.

He is survived by his wife, Kathleen, two daughters and a son.

Read more: <http://www.theage.com.au/national/obituaries/boys-own-adventures-in-wartime-and-sterling-public-service-20120828-24yol.html#ixzz24zs84cC1>