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OBITUARY

Leo Mahony

Mr Leo Mahony, foundation National Secretary of the Royal United Services Institute of Australia and an outstanding Defence civil servant, has died after a long illness. Here follows an edited version of a eulogy delivered at his funeral in Canberra on 9 November 2007 by a former Chief of the Air Staff and National President of the Royal United Services Institute of Australia

Air Marshal S. D. Evans, AC, DSO, AFC, RAAF (Retd)

After joining the Commonwealth public service [Department of Army and then the Defence Signals Directorate (DSD)], Leo Mahony did an arts degree majoring in political science. He wrote a history of the DSD – a history, it seems, that just vanished, which is a pity. He subsequently served in the Australian Embassy in Thailand where he met and married Judith in 1969 and enjoyed a very happy 38 years based on love and a mutual interest in Mercedes-Benz cars and the 'Sport of Kings'.

Leo's true vocation, however, came about with his move to the Department of Defence, where I met him in 1978–79. At that time, Leo was secretary to several of the highest-level committees in the Department, all dealing with matters of highly-classified material and, indeed, the forum for some robust discussion between the 'top brass' of the Department and the Australian Defence Force.

Leo was privy to this extraordinarily high-level consideration of Australia's defence and security material for some 20 years – longer than any Secretary of Defence, longer than any Chief of Defence Force or service Chief of Staff. What stories he could have told – what a book he could have written! But, in the many close conversations we had over the years, not a word of those committee meetings was revealed. My urgings to write a book fell on deaf ears, which illustrates the integrity of the man whose life we celebrate to day.

Outside his official job, Leo had a deep and abiding devotion to the Royal United Services Institute of Australia. Soon after he became Secretary of the United Service Institution of the Australian Capital Territory, together with the then President, Major General Ron Hughes, he proposed to the various state United Service Institutions that a national body be set up. This was agreed in 1974 and it was left to Leo

to do the ground work in putting in place what became a national institution – an institution respected by, and which receives an annual grant from, the Federal government; an institution that, through its state constituent bodies, conducts seminars and discussions on the defence and security of Australia every month in each state; and an institution which conducts an international seminar every three years. On the occasion of the International Seminar, the event is usually opened by the Prime Minister, with presentations by the Minister for Defence, the Chief of the Defence Force and people of like calibre from the United Kingdom, the United States, Indonesia, Singapore and other nations in and beyond our region.

Imagine the work involved in these events – even of the day-to-day administration in coordinating with and keeping constituent bodies in touch. This fell almost entirely to Leo, who had an intimate knowledge of our defence machine and of the Institute's constituent bodies in every state. Leo regularly astounded me by his recall of people and events involved within the Department of Defence and the Defence Force and within the Institute's constituent bodies. He could advise who served in each and every senior appointment in Canberra and every executive appointment in the constituent bodies.

To put all this in a single statement, let me say that the Royal United Services Institute, as a national institution, would not exist to day had it not been for the work and devotion of Leo. Leo **was** the Institute. He had the respect and affection of every member and we are all saddened by his passing. I have this strange feeling that, right now, he will be urging Ron Hughes to set up a new branch in his new surroundings. As we RUSI members join him up there, I'm sure he will have an application form ready for us to sign.