

Thomas (Tom) Fulton Coleman Lawrence, AM

Tom was born in Yass in 1915. In the mid-1930's Tom studied engineering at Sydney University graduating as a civil engineer in 1938. Whilst at Sydney University he joined the Citizen Air Force and acquired a pilot's licence.

Upon graduation, Tom became involved in developing wind tunnels for aeronautical research at Melbourne University and the newly established CSIR Division of Aeronautics. He moved further into aircraft development during the Second World War, including working on Beaufort aircraft, and equipment used to airdrop supplies to troops in the mountainous islands north of Australia.

In the immediate post-war period, Tom was employed as Technical Superintendent with Australian National Airways based in Melbourne. In the late 1940's worked in aeronautical research at the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnborough involved in developing rocket science and technology.

In 1953, Tom returned to Australia taking a position at the Weapons Research Establishment (WRE) at Salisbury in South Australia, where he led a Division carrying out guided missile assessment and design of rocket vehicles including those used for upper atmospheric research. At this time, Australia was at the forefront of research in this field. During this period, he was also heavily involved in negotiations and cooperation with the UK in weapons development and with the US in support of Australian aspects of its space activities.

In 1965, Tom became Chief Superintendent of the Aeronautical Research Laboratories in the then Department of Supply. In late 1967 the family moved to Canberra following the transfer of the Department of Supply from Melbourne, with Tom occupying the position of Controller of Research and Development.

During the last 10 years or so before retiring, Tom was Deputy Secretary in charge of all research and engineering in the Department of Supply. From time to time, he acted as Secretary of the Department. Tom's progression to such positions resulted from his varied and successful contributions to Australian defence science and technology, over a period of 40 years of his professional career.

Tom was Acting Secretary when Cyclone "Tracy" struck Darwin in December 1974 and was instrumental in authorising and arranging some of the considerable logistic support of the Department of Supply needed after the cyclone. In recognition of his significant contribution to the public service, Tom was awarded Membership of the Order of Australia (AM).

He was a Fellow of the Institution of Engineers (Australia) and a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society (RAeS). He was a Council Member of the Australian Division of the RAeS and at one time was Chairman of the Canberra Branch of the Society. He died in 2003.