

## Is the ADA biased?

As our website notes, in a broadly community-based and apolitical public-interest body such as the ADA, not every member (or reader of this journal) is likely to agree with the Association's position on every issue all the time. The key point involved, however, is that they agree on the need for informed public debate on defence and wider national security issues – and on the ADA contributing to such debate as an independent and non-partisan guardian and advocate of the long-term public interest.

The letters to the editor section of *Defender* fulfils an important role in this regard. As do articles and book reviews published in the journal, many of which do not necessarily reflect an ADA view on the issue concerned but are included because they assist in furthering informed debate. Moreover, it is not unknown for ADA members to disagree at times in the pages of *Defender* or indeed in other fora. The Association has always seen this as a strength not a weakness.

The ADA has also always encouraged feedback on its contributions to public debate and provides a comprehensive means of doing so on our website. Guidelines for the submission of letters to *Defender* are also published in each issue and detailed separately on the website.

The letters to the editor in this issue of *Defender* include one from Dr Alan Stephens expressing concern that the ADA is biased against the air force, biased in favour of expeditionary strategies and tanks, and that some ADA criticism of particular points of view has included *ad hominem* attacks. The examples cited involved items published in the ADA's monthly bulletin, *Defence Brief* over the last six months or so.

For reasons of space the editor's note accompanying Dr Stephens' letter (see page 36) could not include an explanation of the procedures involved in reviewing the concerns expressed. In the interests of transparency, fairness and context the following points of clarification are offered:

- Dr Stephens' letter was the only complaint received on any of the items mentioned. A dozen or so emails in total were received expressing favourable comments and supportive observations about the matters in question. These came from diverse readers and included former senior air force officers and senior academics.
- Dr Stephens declined several offers to refine the expression of his complaint or expand on the examples cited.
- The concerns expressed were then individually reviewed, as is, by the Editorial Board of *Defender*. Given the apprehension about potential bias they were also considered, again individually, by the ADA Board of Directors. The resulting individual views were collated by the editor of *Defender* – and this was done independently of the authors of the items in question.

- The examples cited by Dr Stephens were also referred, independently and anonymously, to three prominent academic specialists in Australian defence matters. One is not an ADA member.
- All reviewers and referees were unanimous in dismissing the complaints made and in recommending the letter be accompanied by an editorial note summarising the ADA position on the matters raised. ♦

## Oiling some command and control creaks

Real joint command of defence force operations is now undisputed in ADF professional circles. Some debates still occur about the efficacy of various mechanisms for joint control of these operations but most of these will fall aside too once the new integrated joint headquarters at Bungendore is stood up in early 2009. This is the clear lesson from British and New Zealand experience with joint commands, and integrated joint headquarters, that eschew the component command models so beloved of those wedded to outmoded single-Service mindsets.

Proper joint command and control of ADF capability development processes is also one of the great successes of recent years – often to the chagrin of those who long for the days when the Defence civilian bureaucracy was able to interfere almost at will in such matters of military professional competence. The joint-Service approach to capability development has clearly resulted in a much better integrated ADF force structure. It has also resulted in a much closer alignment between our defence strategy, the demands of current operations and the myriad doctrinal, training and through-life logistics and maintenance processes needed to execute both strategy and operations as effectively and seamlessly as possible.

There have, of course, been strident claims to the contrary, particularly from the coterie of former Department of Defence officials now clustered together at the ANU's Strategic and Defence Studies Centre. These objections generally stem from desires to protect personal legacies, or from ideological grounds, rather than reasoned criticism. They also spring from a reluctance to accept that integrated joint-Service command of operations and capability development has largely destroyed the destructive single-Service rivalry of yesteryear – and for good. The virtual elimination of such rivalry naturally disappoints those former and current civilian officials who – for their own purposes and no public good – used to delight in inciting, encouraging and exploiting inter-Service disagreements in order to divide and conquer the three Services individually.

There is also no small irony that those who still argue about strategy and capability development with single-Service mindsets are invariably former civilian bureaucrats, academics who have enjoyed long tenure, long-retired ADF

*Letters continued from page 5*

Sir: The ADA has been an important voice in the defence debate for many years. Consequently, I believe it is time to reverse two unhealthy trends in recent commentary which, if continued, will diminish the Association. The first concerns bias; the second *ad hominem* attacks.

The August-September 2006 edition of *Defence Brief* included a piece on the Israeli Defence Force's militarily effective but politically inept operation against Hezbollah in Lebanon earlier in the year. While generally informative, the piece concluded with a curious swipe at a particular group of military professionals, as follows: 'One other observation commonly voiced among Israeli commentators is also worth noting. It will be a long time before another fighter pilot leads their defence force'.

As a former bomber pilot I have no particular brief for fighter pilots. However, this kind of self-indulgent generalisation has no place in any serious publication. The point here is that history records literally thousands of unsuccessful, even disastrous, campaigns and operations led by individuals other than fighter pilots, for example, soldiers. In Australia's case, the names of Gordon Bennett, Sydney Rowell and Stuart Graham come readily to mind; while at the coalition level an argument can be made that American-led forces were successful in the former Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 and in Iraq in 2003 despite the leadership of army generals Wesley Clark and Tommy Franks, not because of it. Do these and similar examples mean that no soldiers should ever again lead a defence force?

Turning to personal attacks, the sarcasm evident in the item on Professor Des Ball's recent Blake Dawson Waldron address, reported as 'Well off the ball and far from the mark' in *Defence Brief No. 126*, does the Association no credit. Just because Professor Ball disagrees with the ADA's oft-stated preferences for expeditionary strategies (vice defence-of-Australia strategies) in general and main battle tanks in particular does not mean that he should be subjected to the kind of snide commentary contained in the ADA article.

Constructive debate is characterised by two features. First, it is balanced. And second, while all ideas and commentary are fair game for the most trenchant criticism, attacks on individuals are unacceptable. ADA will best serve its members and the defence debate by observing those characteristics.

**Alan Stephens**  
**Australian Capital Territory**

*Editors Note: The comment in the August-September 2006 'Defence Brief' faithfully summarised public debate in Israel on the future of their CDF, Air Force General Dan Halutz, after the 2006 war in Lebanon – and followed a visit to that country during such debate by the ADA's executive director. It was a very specific, factual and carefully worded reporting of the debate in Israel at that time, and since, and not any inference that fighter pilots axiomatically make poor strategic-level commanders generally. The term 'air force officer' was deliberately avoided to prevent readers wrongly believing that a parallel was being drawn with the situation*

*in Australia and New Zealand where the CDF post is, or has been recently, held by senior air force officers. The accuracy of the summation has been borne out by the conclusions of the Israeli Government's subsequent independent commission of inquiry into the conduct of the 2006 Lebanon War.*

*The claim that the ADA has an 'oft-stated preference for expeditionary strategies (vice defence-of-Australia strategies)' is unwarranted. The ADA view has long been that Australian defence strategy needs to incorporate balanced, adaptable and flexible defence capabilities that provide for both the defence of Australian territory and offshore resources, and for the protection of our wider national interests in the region and globally. This is especially so when various operations in support of our national interests continue to occur much more frequently than existential, or even serious, threats to our national territory. Neither category of strategic challenge can or should be ignored at the expense of the other.*

*The claim that the ADA is also biased, in supporting the Army's re-equipment with a quite limited number of modern main battle tanks, is similarly unwarranted. Our predominantly light-scale land forces require the greater protection, enhanced combat power, and increased operational flexibility that can only be provided by tanks. The sense of this overdue decision is clearly borne out by the recent operational experiences and similar decisions of our US, British and Canadian allies.*

*Finally, the claim that criticism of the recent lecture by Professor Des Ball was unbalanced and constituted an ad hominem attack is unfair. The item in the April 2007 'Defence Brief' overwhelmingly concentrated on a detailed and systematic rebuttal of the points advanced by Professor Ball. It also accurately recorded the considerable audience puzzlement at the lecture's content ignoring much recent informed debate on the topics concerned. The overall conclusion that an undergraduate advancing a similar standard of polemic '... would be swiftly told to resubmit it after appropriate academic effort' was, at most, a robust statement of the ADA's rejection of the points contained in the lecture.*

## BEQUESTS TO THE ADA

Have you considered making a donation or bequest to the Australia Defence Association?

The Association runs a very lean operation and every dollar makes a difference. A suitable form of bequest is 'I bequeath the sum of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to the Australia Defence Association (ABN 16 083 007 390)'.

If you have already made a will, you don't have to change it; you can simply make a codicil.

The Association can assist with the provision of will or codicil forms, or referral to a solicitor. Further details may be obtained from [bequests@ada.asn.au](mailto:bequests@ada.asn.au)