

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

officers and, to a lesser extent, representatives of defence industry driven by entrenched marketing habits rather than an up-to-date grasp of 'jointery' and modern warfighting

Now is the time for further refining ADF command control and for more reinforcing of Joint-service integration. The experiment of combining the VCDF and Chief of Joint Operations appointments has not worked despite the efforts of the incumbent. The recent recreation of a two-star Head of Military Strategic Commitments (the latest name for ACOPS) is further evidence of this. The CDF is worked too hard and there is not enough overall redundancy built into the system at its highest levels. The understudy, project-direction capacity, gross-error check, representational, protocol and other duties of the VCDF would be better constituted as a stand-alone position again. It is also time to formalise the obvious logic that the Chief of Capability Development appointment could never be effectively undertaken by a public servant and that the position, by professional necessity, will always need to be held by a senior ADF officer.

Odd as it may now seem, there has been reluctance in the past to create new military three-star positions on the grounds that there would be 'too many three-stars' or that there would somehow be an 'imbalance' with the six civilian deputy-secretary and equivalent positions. However, given the near doubling of deputy-secretary positions such an objection now would be simply ridiculous. ♦

Understanding our strategic history, not perpetuating it

Recently the ABC broadcast a controversial dramatisation of historical events. It aroused renewed concern among historians that viewers might wrongly believe it was an accurate recreation of the period and the historical figures concerned. We refer of course not to the two-part television program *Bastard Boys* on the 1998 waterfront dispute, but to the 90-minute telemovie *Curtin* covering our worst wartime crisis in late 1941 and early 1942.

The last time these events were recounted via television was, much more comprehensively, in the 360-minute mini-series *The Last Bastion* in 1984. That series includes several historically accurate, crucial and evocative scenes that are sadly missing from or skated over in the story told in *Curtin*. It is simply entertainment or myth-making, not history, when any one man is trumpeted as the saviour of the nation for the strategic decisions taken at that time. Those with a good knowledge of Australian history, for example, know that another key figure was the Chief of the General Staff (CGS) from September 1940 to July 1942, Lieutenant General Sir Vernon Sturdee. Moreover, Sturdee's relationship to Curtin, and the trust Curtin, the War Cabinet and the other two Service Chiefs placed in him, is central to any thorough understanding of the period and the lessons to be drawn from it.

Dr W.E.H. Stanner, research adviser to Ministers of the Army, Percy Spender (conservative) and Frank Forde (Labor) during 1940-42, and a member of the Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale 1942-44, has noted that Sturdee was 'one man who kept his head when the government lost its head after the Japanese attack'.

Professor David Horner, the Professor of ADF history at the Australian National University and the author of some 25 books on Australian military history and strategy, notes in his chapter on Sturdee, in *The Commanders: Australian Military Leadership in the Twentieth Century*, that Sturdee was '... the rock on which the Army, and indeed the government rested during the weeks of panic in early 1942'.

It is also worth remembering that in February and March 1942 Singapore and then Java fell to the Japanese, pretty much as senior Army and RAAF officers had regularly forecast since the Chauvel Report 20 years previously. These professional strategic judgments continually embarrassed and annoyed both conservative and Labor governments in the inter-war period. This was chiefly because governments preferred to champion the 'Fortress Singapore strategy' alone, because it was the cheapest defence-spending option and appeared politically expedient in the short run. Several parallels with the discredited defence-of-Australia dogma of the 1985-2000 period are obvious.

Furthermore, in the early years of World War II the Chiefs of the RAN and RAAF were British officers on secondment. In matters of major strategic advice to the Government, especially where Australian decisions might be at variance with British strategic preferences, these two Chiefs had advised Sturdee, the prime-minister and the cabinet that they would stand by any professional advice the CGS provided and back him to the hilt.

Sturdee consequently acted as quasi-CDF. He led and supervised preparation of the strategic appreciations that convinced the Curtin Government to bring the Australian Army's three surviving battleworthy divisions home from the Middle East for the direct defence of Australia.

In *The Last Bastion* there is a highly accurate and moving scene where Sturdee, brilliantly portrayed by the distinguished Australian character actor Vincent Ball, addresses Curtin and the full War Cabinet. With consummate professional deliberation Sturdee summarises the strategic situation and advises that, in his professional opinion as their senior strategic adviser, the request by Churchill to divert the Australia-bound convoys carrying the 6th and 7th Divisions to Burma and Java instead needs to be refused unequivocally. Exemplifying the high principle and resolve of the man and his responsibilities, Sturdee adds that if this decision is not taken, he will have no professional alternative but to resign as CGS and the Government's principal military adviser.

There is naturally a tendency for scriptwriters to concentrate on Australia's prime-minister in that period, John Curtin, and his great efforts at leading Australia at a time when a Japanese invasion appeared imminent. Curtin was a reformed alcoholic, a former pacifist and an undiagnosed sufferer of bipolar disorder who nevertheless became our war leader. He is a scriptwriter's dream as a character and the temptation to overstate his role, or discount the contributions of others, is obvious. But cinematic portrayals of this period that do not accurately record events merely reinforce bad lessons and encourage detrimental attitudes and beliefs that linger to the current day.

We need instead to concentrate on the institutionally correct formal relationship between Sturdee and Curtin, and the