

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

confidence the latter rightly placed in the former, so that the real and enduring national security lessons of late 1941 and early 1942 can continue to resonate. Curtin may have made the final decision on returning the AIF divisions from the Middle East, and about standing up to Churchill, but it was Sturdee who put the intellectual and professional steel in his spine at a time when panic gripped most of the War Cabinet.

During this period the strategic-level politico-military interface in Australia worked correctly and indeed properly in constitutional and professional terms. It probably worked the best it ever has, not least because it had to. Unfortunately, Curtin subsequently adopted a flawed structure for receiving strategic and military professional advice. For various reasons, not least self-doubt, he came to rely for strategic advice solely on a foreign general, Douglas MacArthur, and a civilian bureaucrat intriguer, Sir Frederick Shedden, rather than his own Australian military advisers.

Elements of the flawed politico-military interface that resulted have unfortunately persisted down to the present day. They underly many of the institutional and organisational culture problems embodied in the perpetually troubled and unbalanced diarchical organisation of the Department of Defence. They have encouraged the unwarranted belief that widespread interference in military professional matters by public servants is somehow normal and not contradictory to the Westminster principle of civil control of the military by Ministers. They have led to the increasing and inexcusable side-lining of the Service Chiefs as senior advisers to the Government, and to the demise of the former inter-departmental Defence Committee that included the CDF and the Service Chiefs to properly balance civilian advice to the Government. They have also meant the accretion of defence responsibilities by bodies, such as the Secretaries' Committee on National Security, that are beyond the professional capacity and legitimate authority of such bodies to handle.

All because we remember Curtin but forget Sturdee, and forget they worked as a team. And when we remember Curtin we forget his improper dependence on MacArthur and Shedden. ♦

Blaming the victim again

Once again the myth is being pushed that the Government's (really the community's) attitudes to Islamist extremism are somehow too 'hard-line' and supposedly to blame for a purported lack of co-operation by Australian Muslims with the federal police and ASIO. Similar claims are made regarding a supposed reluctance by Muslims to join our police and security intelligence agencies. The recruiting challenges are, in fact, more to do with citizenship requirements and security clearance difficulties, and with protecting staff and their families from potential intimidation, than any marked reluctance by Australian Muslims to help or serve.

The AFP and ASIO have a difficult job to do and they are generally undertaking it with considerable professionalism, tact and restraint. They are treading a delicate line in order that their necessary activities in monitoring extremism and countering terrorism are not unduly exploited by Islamist propaganda. The aim of such propaganda, of course, is to wrongly paint any security measure as 'anti-Muslim' and somehow aimed at all Muslims.

Describing common-sense counter-terrorism policies as 'hard-line' is simply more of the 'blame the victim' denial reaction that unfortunately still persists among some Australian Muslims, especially self-styled community leaders doing a bit of grandstanding. It also emphasises the unwillingness by some Muslims to concede that if moderate Muslims had done more to denounce and discourage Islamist extremism early enough, Australia would not still have anywhere near the same problem with combatting it.

Countering the Islamists is as much a spiritual and intellectual battle for the heart of Islam as it is a law and order problem for Australia as a whole. Moderate, mainstream Muslims are an essential part of this spiritual and intellectual battle. But they must become engaged in it because only they can shoulder much of the effort. Denying the problem or blaming their fellow Australians for being 'hard-line' is merely ceding the initiative and the spiritual middle ground to the Islamist extremists.

The bottom line in the argument as to whether current counter-terrorism policies and laws are 'hard-line' or 'anti-Muslim' is to acknowledge the overall tolerance and democratic maturity of Australian society in how it has carefully reacted to Islamist extremism. Despite 100 terrorist murders by Islamist there has been no serious backlash against Australian Muslims from the wider Australian community. This is a tribute to Australian society generally and, indeed, to the good sense of many Australian Muslims. But such tolerance will obviously be stretched if Muslim community leaders refuse to face reality and help Australians as a whole to defend ourselves against Islamist terrorism.

While there are Australian Muslims who support, sympathise, or are even prepared to excuse Islamist terrorism here or overseas 'in principle', the wider Muslim community must expect some degree of concern and even justifiable suspicion from their fellow Australians. Constant 'blame the victim' reactions from some Muslim spokesmen only increase such concerns and suspicions. At the very least they smack of an unwillingness to help fight the problem. At worst, they smack of apologia for the terrorists. ♦

A veteran fix for ADF recruiting and retention

The ADA does not normally enter debates on matters affecting war veterans, or other groups of former ADF personnel with grievances, unless a major matter of public importance involving our current defence efforts is involved. The Association generally leaves such matters up to the specialist veteran or other representative organisation concerned.

Continued controversy about the inadequacy of the compensation being paid to surviving war veterans and the families of dead veterans has, however, now clearly reached the stage where it is affecting recruiting for the current defence force. If the broader Australian community believes that the veterans of previous wars are not being treated appropriately then families will continue to discourage their younger members from enlisting in the ADF. Even when they enlist anyway, through youthful enthusiasm and the perennial belief that 'it will never happen to me', they are less likely to

stay for the long term once they become aware of the issue – particularly when they later accrue families and wider responsibilities of their own.

The recent ADF recruiting summit achieved broad agreement that the marketing of the defence force in recruiting terms needs to emphasise more than just the jobs or even the careers available. Service in the ADF is a fundamental function of citizenship integral to the well-being and security of the nation, not merely a matter of lifestyle or a temporary economic or employment relationship between the State and individual Service personnel.

Service in the ADF also entails responsibilities, exigencies and risks peculiar to the military profession. Our defence force, of necessity, is an unlimited liability company. Those voluntarily (or compulsorily) undertaking military service have an actual and implied contract with their fellow citizens that they, and their families, will be treated appropriately during their service – and fairly compensated then and afterwards for death, wounds or other disability caused by such service.

Fixing our inadequate or inconsistent treatment of the veterans of previous wars is therefore both a strategic and a moral issue. It is also an issue that is not going away, even as the youngest surviving World War II veterans enter their 80s and the youngest Vietnam veterans approach 60. The operational tempo of the last decade or so means Australia will have tens of thousands of younger veterans for at least five or six decades to come. As demographic pressures continue to shrink the ADF's recruiting pool, and as the population ages overall, we need to ensure that our inadequate treatment of veterans does not persist as a disincentive to ongoing recruitment and retention. ♦

Indexing not the index finger

Another impediment to recruiting and sustaining an adequately-sized defence force is continued strong dissatisfaction about the indexing of ADF superannuation pensions and the various compensation payments to disabled veterans. Both are indexed to increases in the consumer-price-index (CPI) only and fall ever further behind each year. This seems unfair and indeed discriminatory when, for example, various social welfare payments not involving the responsibilities, exigencies and risks of military service to the nation are indexed much more generously – to the higher of CPI increases or increases in male-total-average-weekly-earnings (MTAWE), and with the added safeguard that payments such as aged-pension and unemployment payments cannot drop below 25 per cent of MTAWE.

There is an obvious solution and it is fair, simple and transparent in perpetuity. ADF superannuation and veteran's compensation payments should be permanently indexed by the same method used to index parliamentary pensions. ♦

Disunity and biting hands that try to help

None of this, of course, is meant to imply that the efforts needed to fix the plight of war veterans will be an easy task. It is also a task becoming harder because agreement and unity among veterans is fragmenting not strengthening.

The number of separate organisations representing different types of veteran, different disabilities or other causes is growing regularly. Some of this is a reaction to real and perceived failures in representing particular categories of veteran by the larger and more established veterans' bodies such as the RSL. Other fragmentation stems from geographic, financial and expertise pressures in federal bodies, differing local conditions, political or operational disagreements, and suspicions that some veterans' organisations are now too ossified in their decision-making or too close to the bureaucracy or government to be fully effective lobbies. Some fragmentation is simply the result of personality clashes, irrational resentments, chips on the shoulder about being led again by retired officers, or the simple desire by some individuals to be a big fish in a small pond.

It would also be fair to say that, judging by their public statements and the quality of their research and lobbying efforts, some of the newer and somewhat esoteric veterans' bodies do not seem particularly well organised or led. Nor do they appear objective and informed enough in their public stances to win much public support. This can result in unhelpful contributions to public debate, especially when their input is sought and sensationalised by journalists motivated by a desire to sell newspapers, lift ratings or futher their career, rather than by any real desire to air genuine issues effectively through informed debate.

The Internet has also encouraged direct and independent action by some individual veterans, or small and dispersed groups of veterans who have not previously been able to contact each other easily. In such cases they are often veterans who are ostensibly or actually disappointed with the plethora of existing veterans' organisations. One serious problem resulting is that the emails consequently exchanged often appear to encourage opinions and action without necessarily improving the research and argument involved. In some prominent cases, originators and recipients seem keen to circulate emails for communication but not otherwise use the Web for actual research.

Unfortunately, independent action can be quite counter-productive, especially when emails full of abuse and short on facts, objectivity, context and logical argument are sent willy-nilly to bureaucrats and politicians. One result is that they discredit the veterans' community as a whole. Another is that they discourage negotiation towards a solution of grievances because they offer no reassurance that rational and reasonable interaction is likely. Even more unfortunately, the originators of some emails appear to be suffering the types of psychiatric disability that can hinder effective lobbying because they involve complications caused by PTSD, depression, isolation, paranoia, alcoholism and insomnia – some in combination. As a rough rule-of-thumb the date-time group on such emails can often be a good indication of the cogency of the contents.

But all must be gathered again into the veterans' fold before the lobbying attack can be renewed effectively. Some circuit-breakers in veterans' community organisation and leadership are needed to kick-start the collective and focused effort needed to fix things. ♦

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