

memorable victory were poorly treated by any standard, and especially so when compared with the excessive recognition (according to some commentators) accorded to rear-echelon officers (from all three services) throughout the Vietnam war. Smith's comments on the administration of honours and awards he recommended reflect little credit on a number of senior officers.

Other contentious subjects the authors tackle include prior intelligence, Army–Air Force relations, the use of armour, and American artillery.

Something of an attempt has been made by veterans' groups to place Long Tan alongside Gallipoli and Kokoda in the Australian military pantheon. This is stretching the point, with the preceding two operations occupying a unique place in the national psyche because of their profound and entirely different political and social contexts.

At the same time, as a feat of arms, Long Tan can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with anything any Australian warriors have ever achieved.

Grandin has done a good job with this project. In places *The Battle of Long Tan* is a real page-turner; and throughout, it enjoys the distinction of presenting first-hand the views of the handful of men who commanded, fought for, and ultimately won a great victory. At a different level, it could serve as a tactics guide for infantrymen. This unusual book makes an important contribution to our appreciation of the most significant Australian experience during the decade of the Vietnam war. ♦

Bob Grandin, 'The Battle of Long Tan: As Told by the Commanders to Bob Grandin', Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2004, paperback, 332 pp., RRP \$35.00.

True Believer: John Howard, George Bush and the American Alliance

Robert Garran

Reviewed by Dr Hugh Smith



John Howard, Garran argues, has almost single-handedly brought Australia's foreign policy into complete alignment with the views of the Bush administration in the United States. More than any previous Prime Minister, Howard is a 'true believer' not only in the benefits of the alliance to this country but in the values of the current Republican administration in Washington. According to Garran, however, support for the United States comes at too high a price. *True Believer* is a vigorous indictment, written in a readable style and with a good grasp of history and politics in both the US and Australia. Whether readers will agree with the charges laid by the author is another matter.

John Howard's commitment to the US alliance is explained in a number of ways: his upbringing and obvious admiration for Churchill as a leader in difficult times; his realist perception of international politics as a dangerous environment that demands vigorous efforts to maintain security; his strong personal 'bond' with George W. Bush who is also 'conviction politician' prepared to assert his 'moral rectitude'; his relative lack of interest in Asia which is seen more as a source of problems than of security; and his belief that Australia and the US are closely, inevitably and inextricably bound by democratic values and a shared history and culture. Howard, in short, has been impressed by America's hard

power and co-opted by its soft power.

All of the above help explain Howard's attitude towards the US. But it is more difficult to assess which factors carry greatest weight. Would Howard have gone all the way with President Clinton (with whom he had a strong and mutual antipathy) or even with President Gore? Would he have been less emotionally committed if he had not been in Washington on the day the Pentagon was attacked, which apparently influenced him to invoke the ANZUS pact for the first time? And without the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, would Howard have been able to show his true colours?

In Garran's view, Howard's support for the alliance not simply a foreign policy judgement, it is also part of his attempt to re-claim Australian nationalism for the Liberal side of politics. Only the Liberals, Howard claims, can and will pursue Australia's true national interests. They had originally negotiated the ANZUS treaty (albeit with some internal disagreement, as Garran notes) and only they can now be relied on to maintain it in good health. Likewise, only the Liberals, Howard has recently asserted, could have negotiated the free trade agreement with the US. At the same time, Howard's position allows him to denounce Labor for its dogmatic anti-Americanism and its failure to understand the need for

security against major, new and long-term threats.

An important part of Garran's argument deals with what he sees as the costs of 'bandwagoning' with the United States. These include consequences for Australia's foreign policy such as a claimed diminution of Australia's standing and influence in Asia and an overestimation of the value of force in international politics at the expense of multilateralism. More generally, Garran believes Australia has encouraged the US to damage the international system through its unilateral widening of the doctrine of self-defence to extend not only to pre-emptive strikes against looming attacks but also to preventive war against possible long-term dangers. At the same time, Garran argues, Australia has unwisely supported the US in downgrading the value of the United Nations as a means of managing international and internal conflicts.

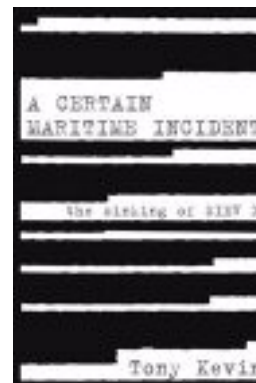
Joining in the war on Iraq—'Howard's war', as Garran terms it—is likely to prove the most costly mistake. A country that was not a terrorist threat has been turned into one; and a future government of Iraq, if Shia-dominated as seems likely, may align more closely with Iran, another member of the 'axis of evil'. Garran finds Howard guilty of what might be called the 'Turnbull doctrine'—'my ally, right or wrong'. The Prime Minister, of course, does not appear to believe the US venture in Iraq to be doomed (and if he does, he is unlikely to admit it). But Garran and Howard would agree on one thing: John Howard is a true believer in the alliance. ♦

Robert Garran, 'True Believer: John Howard, George Bush and the American Alliance', Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2004, paperback, 228pp, RRP \$24.95.

A Certain Maritime Incident: The Sinking of SIEV X

Tony Kevin

Reviewed by Dr Tom Frame



Despite its title and content, this book is actually about the place of morals and ethics in public policy and administration. Put simply: Tony Kevin objects to the apparent immorality of the Commonwealth government's immigration policies and its alleged unethical behaviour in failing to prevent the deaths of 353 people in October 2001. He decries the 'Howard government's manifold cruelties to boat people', condemns the 'iniquitous temporary protection visa system' and claims Australia's involvement in the War on Terror has 'led to the undermining of the nation's civil liberties and multicultural values'. In chastising the Coalition for its approach to refugees and illegal immigrants and its attitude to their acceptance or apprehension, Kevin claims the sinking of SIEV X (Suspect Illegal Entry Vessel with 'X' denoting unknown rather than number 10) is Australia's equivalent of the Nixon Administration's 'Watergate' conspiracy. More disturbing, he claims that the 'cover-up continues to this day'.

The circumstances surrounding the sinking of SIEV X can be quickly recounted. A small unseaworthy boat left an Indonesian port in southern Sumatra on 18 October 2001 and sailed into the Sunda Strait bound for Christmas Island. Crowded on board were 421 people originating from the Middle East who had paid large sums to the 'people smuggler' *Abu Quassey* for passage to Australia. Several days prior to SIEV X putting to sea, intelligence sources had reported the 'imminent' departure of three vessels from

Indonesia for Christmas Island. The information conveyed on the time and place of their departure was, as usual, inaccurate and imprecise. In the case of SIEV X, Australian Coastwatch was advised that this particular vessel was expected to depart, or had departed, from a number of different Indonesian ports on four different dates in the month of August, within a seven-day block in September, and on five separate dates in October. SIEV X stalled and then sank in international waters on the afternoon of 19 October 2001. A total of 353 people perished. Some survivors were recovered by an Indonesian fishing vessel and taken to Jakarta. But was Australia in a position to prevent the sinking or, at the very least, rescue the victims?

As part of Operation Relex, a comprehensive maritime surveillance operation in Australian and international waters between Java and Christmas Island had been mounted to detect and intercept the people smugglers' vessels. RAAF P-3C Orion aircraft were conducting nearly continuous flights of 4 to 5 hours duration throughout the 440 kilometre by 280 kilometre surveillance area. HMAS *Arunta* was patrolling closer to Christmas Island. The ship and its embarked helicopter were ready to intercept vessels identified by the P-3Cs as they approached the (Australian) contiguous territorial waters zone which was 24 nautical miles from the Christmas Island coastline. This surveillance and interception operation continued from 17 to 23 October. As *Arunta's* helicopter was unserviceable on 19 October, an additional Orion flight was launched. The aircraft was