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# United Service

*Informing the defence and security debate since 1947*

## **The Global Strategic Outlook**

A minority government has assumed in power in Australia and is under pressure to revisit the Defence White Paper<sup>1</sup> which it released in 2009. Assessment of the global security outlook will be a key element of any such review.

The global security outlook is in flux. For most of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Australia's national security guarantor – Great Britain up to World War II; the United States after the war – was also Australia's major trading partner. While the ANZUS Treaty<sup>2</sup> remains the bedrock of Australia's security, the United States is no longer our major trading partner, a role which has been assumed by China. How sustainable is this trade/security dichotomy?

The United States remains the world's only super-power, but over the last decade has been weakened by international terrorism; military adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan; the global financial crisis and her resultant international indebtedness; weaknesses embedded in her political culture and unique form of democracy; and dependence on fossil fuels; among other factors. Indeed, a multi-polar geopolitic is re-emerging with China, India, Japan and Russia becoming more assertive in what the White Paper refers to as the Asia-Pacific century.

China, in particular, is on the ascendant. Now a confident global power, she has underwritten much of the United States' debt. Consequently, it is in the interests of both countries to cooperate wherever their mutual interests coincide and generally speaking are so doing. China, however, is modernising her armed forces and is now able to challenge the United States Pacific Fleet in relation to Taiwan.

China is also in competition with India, Japan, South Korea and her neighbours in South-East Asia and is spreading her influence more widely. She is asserting her territorial claims in the East and South China Seas; securing naval and merchant marine bases at key sites around the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea; projecting 'soft power' into Africa, Melanesia and Polynesia via supposedly 'no-strings-attached' development assistance; and using sovereign wealth funds to secure long-term interests in strategically-important natural resources around the world, including agricultural land, mineral resources and water; among other measures.

Given this background, Australia is likely to be faced with conflicting interests as it seeks to manage its

relationships with its major security partner, the United States, and its major trading partner, China. India, another Asian economy also on the ascendant, faces similar dilemmas. Australia and India, while different in many ways, share a rich common heritage which we maintain both bilaterally and through the Commonwealth of Nations, among other fora. Australia and India have much to learn from each other from the exchange of experiences and views and through exploiting opportunities to work collaboratively.

The 2011 Blamey Oration, which the Institute will be hosting on 26 May 2011, will be delivered by Vice-Admiral A. K. Singh (Retd), until recently Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief Eastern Naval Command, India. It will provide an opportunity to further the Australia-India relationship and improve our mutual understanding of the global security outlook and its possible management. Plan to attend and participate in the debate.

**David Leece<sup>3</sup>**



## **Women serving as infantry in combat**

I have read with interest the address by Sonya Enkelmann to the Royal United Service Institute of Tasmania on 'Women in the Armed Services', in which she said: "I don't see why females can't serve in the Arms Corps of Artillery, Armour and Infantry, as it is certainly within the mental and physical abilities of many women I know"<sup>4</sup>.

Much has been said in recent times of gender equality in the Defence Force and a number of arguments have been put forward to justify the employment of women in all departments of each Service. I found, in some 20 years of post-war service, that female personnel generally were intelligent, capable, fit, disciplined and equal, or better, in their postings than their male counterparts. Nevertheless, based on my experiences as a rifleman, medium machine-gunner and flame-thrower operator in New Guinea and Bougainville during World War II, I have reservations about women serving in combat in the Infantry Corps.

In a front-line position in combat, gender must be forgotten. For us, 'home' was a hole in the ground – a 2-man pit or tent. Flimsy shelters soon disappeared, as they were heavy and no protection against incoming

<sup>1</sup>Australian Government, Department of Defence (2009). *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030 – Defence White Paper* (Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra) 140 pp.

<sup>2</sup>Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty 1951

<sup>3</sup>David Leece is a vice-president of the Institute and editor of *United Service*. These are his personal views.

<sup>4</sup>Enkelmann, Sonya (1998). A personal perspective from a serving officer – the third in a trilogy of addresses to the Royal United Service Institute of Tasmania on 'Women in Armed Services'. *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute of Australia* **19**, 105 – 107.

enemy mortar, artillery or aerial bombardment. There were no latrines, toilet paper, soap, toothpaste or towels, despite the best efforts of supporting services to re-supply them. Enemy activity was often designed to ensure sleep deprivation, causing exhaustion and rendering the infantry formation more susceptible to ground attack. It was a kill or be killed situation, where training and mateship helped the infantryman to survive.

We had seemingly insurmountable obstacles to overcome, no change of clothing or opportunity to take off one's boots for weeks, and, when one did have the opportunity, the flesh came away. Minimum hygiene had to be maintained; and, in tropical situations, we showered or bathed when it rained. Nudity among those not committed to patrols or stand-to was essential to allow basic cleansing – there was no privacy.

The enemy always ensured that life was as difficult as he could make it. Above-ground movement rendered the infantryman liable to be hit by enemy fire, so crawl trenches had to be dug by weary soldiers. At all times, infantrymen had to be prepared to work and fight at the limits of endurance for long periods. Casualty rates were seldom low and a front-line infantryman had the expectation of becoming a casualty and/or having to retrieve and care for dead and wounded mates.

While, arguably, certain women could perform all the duties of an infantryman in combat, the load-carrying capacity of most female soldiers could limit their ability to move long distances on foot over difficult terrain. Further, in the event of a female infantry soldier being taken prisoner, she would be liable to degradation and possibly rape, for front-line soldiers in war can be quite feral and, unless controlled and disciplined, may resort to savagery and revenge. Consequently, senior infantry commanders may be loathe to use female infanteers and consider that females could best serve in supporting roles. Certainly, in World War II, knowing that women were in supporting postings was a morale boost to infantrymen who were enduring the rigours of front-line fighting.

I have the utmost admiration for women in the services, but I would wish to see their capabilities reviewed to ascertain their 'most suited' role. While, as an old infanteer, I have strong reservations about women serving in the Infantry Corps, if all serving personnel, regardless of gender, perform to the best of their ability, they will increase the *esprit de corps* and efficiency of their unit and the Defence Force, as a whole, will benefit.

**Captain W. H. J. Phillips, OAM, ED, JP (Retd)**  
Coffs Harbour, 29 March 2010

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### **Origin of the Australian Flag**

In the last two issues of *United Service* and in this issue, readers have debated whether or not Australia should have a new national flag. This edited version of a note which first appeared in the 2010 Newsletter of

the Australian National Flag Association (NSW) explains the origin of the current flag. It is published to help inform that debate.

At federation on 1 January 1901, Australia had no official flag. The Union Flag ("Union Jack") took pride of place; and much in evidence was the "Australian Ensign", the flag of the Australian Federation League, which had become the unofficial flag.

Two Melbourne journals – the *Melbourne Herald* and the *Review of Reviews for Australia* – however, had each started a national flag competition. In 1901, the Commonwealth Government made the quest official with its own offer of £75, bringing the total prize money on offer to £200 (\$18,379). From the 32,823 designs submitted, the judges selected five almost identical designs as joint winners with the prize money divided among them. The winning designs incorporated: a Union Flag on a blue background; a large six-pointed star, representing the six federated states; and, five stars of nine, eight, seven, six and five points respectively, representing the Southern Cross. An Australian flag manufactured to this design was flown for the first time on 3 September 1901 – on the dome of Melbourne's Exhibition building. The Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, announced on 11 February 1903 that His Majesty the King had approved this flag, in the form in which it was displayed in the *Government Gazette* of 20 February 1903, as the official Australian flag.

In 1912, at the request of the British Admiralty, the design was amended to improve appearance and reduce the cost of manufacture. The large star now had seven points and the Southern Cross four seven-point stars and one five-point star. This is the flag's current design.

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### **LETTERS**

#### **Conflict in command during the Kokoda campaign: Did General Blamey deserve the blame?**

I enjoyed immensely Rowan Tracey's essay in the June issue [*United Service* 61 (2) 24 – 29, 2010]. Tracey strongly supports what I and Brigadier Philip Carey have been saying for years. What is more, he presents his material so logically and progressively that it leaves little room to disagree with his conclusions. Three facts are significant here:

- The Kokoda Trail campaign has never been properly analysed from the viewpoint of ground and tactics.
- There was never any ill-feeling by Allen towards Blamey. Blamey's ADC told me that Blamey visited Allen in Darwin as soon as he could and they spent until dawn yarning in a convivial way.
- Rowell was the first of the war's senior officers to come out with an autobiography, which he did in order to present himself in the best possible light. Blamey declined to write his memoirs for the noble reason that the war was over and he had no wish to damage any of those who fought.

There are three types of military historians: journalist historians, who show little respect for the facts in order to tell a good story; academic historians, who have the time and facilities to unearth new and valuable information, but mainly at the political and strategic levels; and soldier historians, who are the only ones one can trust at the tactical level, for they have been taught to understand that key factor – ground. Peter Pedersen at the Australian War Memorial is one I have always admired for the latter quality, and now we have Rowan Tracey, who I hope goes on to write further.

**Major General G. L. Maitland, AO, OBE, RFD, ED (Retd)**

**North Turramurra, 2 July 2010**

I found Rowan Tracey's essay very interesting as I am sure did many of your readers. I have recently taken over as Chairman of the Field Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey Memorial Fund and I will make sure that a copy of the essay is placed in our library.

**Major General D. J. McLachlan, AO (Retd)**  
**Melbourne, 12 August 2010**

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### **A flag for all Australians**

I was dismayed by the responses of Captain E. A. Flint and Lieutenant Colonel "Bushy" Pembroke [*United Service* 61 (3) 7, September 2010] to the letter by Major K. D. Myers [*United Service* 61 (2) 7, June 2010] advocating 'A flag for all Australians'.

I have just returned from Turkey, where their distinctive flag is revered in a way ours never will be as long as the prominent quartile is dominated by the flag of a foreign country. I personally have great admiration for the Canadian flag. It stands for the country. Yes, the former Canadian ensign was not as symbolic as ours. Nonetheless, our flag is still nothing but a foreign ensign (Anyone who objects to the "foreign" tag can not have experienced the treatment meted out to Australians at Heathrow). Is it not time that we had a flag that stands for our country and ours alone? I am with A. B. Patterson after his Boer War experience:

"The English flag, it is ours in sooth,  
We stand by it wrong or right,  
But deep in our hearts is the honest truth,  
We fought for the sake of a fight.

And the English flag may flutter and wave,  
Where the World-wide Oceans toss,  
But the flag the Australian dies to save,  
Is the flag of the Southern Cross."

The flag will be my flag when the foreign flag is removed from the corner.

**Lieutenant Colonel J. Howells, RFD (Retd)**  
**Penrith, 14 September 2010**

I am indebted to Captain Ernie Flint and Lieutenant Colonel "Bushy" Pembroke for their comments on my

letter, but they did not convincingly address the issue of the flag identifying Australia and reflected a passion for the past, not the present.

I agree that the Australian National Flag is good looking, but contrary to Colonel Pembroke's assertion, it fails to adequately identify Australia – it confuses. This confusion was again demonstrated at the Commonwealth Games in New Delhi in September where, to clarify the nation, in large letters, 'AUS' was superimposed over the flag for medal winners. Is not the prime aim of the flag to clearly identify the country?

Since 1945 as the population of Australia has increased from 7 to 22 million, immigrants have diluted our Anglo-Celtic origins. Canada and the United States each have chosen a flag that does not depict any immigrant country of origin – a wise step towards national unity. To my detractors, I put the question, what is wrong with the kangaroo as a unifying symbol? It has already been recognised on our coat-of-arms and coinage.

Let us promote the design of a flag for all Australians now, rather than wait for a situation to emerge which forces the issue.

**Major K. D. Myers, RFD, ED (Retd)**

**Asquith, 25 October 2010**

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### **The Fovant Badges**

When World War I broke out, there was need to find accommodation for the New Army in Great Britain. The authorities took over thousands of acres of agricultural land for use as training areas and transit camps for troops leaving for, and returning from, the battlefields in northern France. One of these was at Fovant in southwest Wiltshire. The village became a military camp, with barracks, a hospital, parade areas, shooting-practice ranges, a camp cinema and two YMCA huts. Thousands of men from Britain and overseas lived and worked for a while in the area, passed on to the Western Front and returned from it. Many never returned, giving their lives on the battlefields in France. Others died of their wounds in the hospital or as a result of the influenza epidemic of 1919 and lie buried in Fovant and nearby churchyards.

Many units while stationed in Fovant carved their unit badges in the chalk ridgeline behind the Fovant rifle range. Australians carved the 'Rising Sun' badge of the Australian Commonwealth Military Forces. These badges, including the Australian one, are still extant and are maintained by The Fovant Badge Society, financed by donations from the public and Old Comrades Associations of units long disbanded. Australian authorities continue to provide support to the maintenance of the Australian badge. Nevertheless, the Society has an ongoing need for funds and welcomes donations. [Further information: [www.fovantbadges.com](http://www.fovantbadges.com)]

**Wing Commander G. L. Cottee (Retd)**

**Pymble, 30 April 2010**