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CONTRIBUTED PAPER

Informing and influencing the defence and national security debate: the Royal United Services Institute of New South Wales



an edited version of an address to the Royal Commonwealth Society (New South Wales Branch)
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The Royal United Services Institute of New South Wales is an independent, apolitical, not-for-profit, public education association in the field of defence and national security. Here, its president outlines the evolution of the organisation over its 127-year history and describes the research, education and social programmes it now conducts and the services it provides which underpin them.

Key words: Royal United Services Institute; United Service Institution; New South Wales; defence; national security; research; education; international dialogues; Ursula Davidson Library; *United Service* journal; e-newsletter.

The Royal United Services Institute, formerly known as the United Service Institution, has been providing defence-related education in New South Wales for 127 years. As the needs of the armed forces and the society have changed over that period, the programmes and services offered by the Institute have evolved to satisfy those needs. In this paper, I will outline the evolution of the organisation over its 127-year history and describe our current research, education and social programmes and the services that we provide.

Our History

The United Service Institution of New South Wales (the U.S.I.; or the Institution) was established in 1888 (Sutton 1989). It was loosely modelled on the United Service Institution established in London in 1831 (Kent 1996) but without any formal links to London. Its focus was military-related education and has remained so over the intervening 127 years. Initially, its mission was to promote the study of naval and military art, science and literature. All officers of Her Majesty's² naval and military forces in the Colony of New South Wales were eligible for membership (Richardson 1890). From its inception until the Great War, it held regular meetings in Sydney, the proceedings of which were published annually in the *Journal and Proceedings of the United Service Institution of New South Wales*. It also established a library of military literature and a topographic (map) room (Sutton 1989).

During the two world wars, most members of the Institution were absent on war service and the Institution maintained only a skeleton programme of activities, which expanded moderately between the wars. A museum of military artefacts was established in the early 1930s, but was transferred to the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in 1952 (Sutton 1989). Following World War II the Institution experienced a renaissance – indeed, a golden age. In 1947, it changed its principle publication from annual proceedings to a quarterly journal named, *United Service*. Its principal

function became the education of officers of all three services, including the coaching of army officers for promotion examinations. Separate branches were established in Sydney, Newcastle and Wagga Wagga and membership rose to 2800. By the early 1970s, however, the Army assumed direct responsibility for the training of its officers and the Institution's training function lapsed (Sutton 1989).

The Institution became a foundation constituent body of the United Services Institute of Australia in 1974. New South Wales brought its rules into line with the new national constitution in 1975 and opened its membership to anyone with the defence of Australia at heart (Sutton, 1989). The grant of the prefix "Royal" was approved for the national body in 1979 (Sutton 1989); and up until 2003, it conducted an international seminar in Canberra once every three years³. Today, the national body is a federation of seven, self-governing, state and territory United Services Institutes. It provides certain administrative services, as well as co-ordination and collective representation for its seven members where desired, as in negotiations with government.

The New South Wales Institution was granted permission to use the prefix "Royal" in 1990 and was incorporated in New South Wales in 1991. Its name was changed to "Royal United Services Institute of New South Wales" (the R.U.S.I., or the Institute) in 2008 to bring the historic name into conformity with the name of the federal body⁴.

The Institute Today

Today, the Institute remains an independent, apolitical, not-for-profit, public education association, but it has a broader charter than formerly, namely the education of the wider community. Any interested person may become a member. Our aim is to promote informed debate on, and

³The proceedings of these seminars were published in the *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute of Australia*, which ceased publication with Volume 25, December 2003. The final RUSIA Triennial International Seminar was held in Canberra on 9-10 October 2003 on "Global Security in the New Millennium" (Evans (2003).

⁴Constitution of the Royal United Services Institute of New South Wales, Incorporated, which was made on 26 March 2013, Clause 1.

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²Great Britain's Queen Victoria

improve public awareness and understanding of, defence and national security. In furtherance of this aim:

- we contribute to the national debate on defence and security policy and make submissions to government on specific policy issues;
- we conduct public lectures and seminars on contemporary aspects of defence and security and less frequently on military history;
- we conduct a biennial international defence and security dialogue specifically aimed at informing the government's "white paper" policy development process;
- we organise visits to defence-related establishments and battlefield tours; and
- we conduct social activities for members periodically.

I will now describe some of those activities and the professional services that underpin them in more detail.

Our Research Programme

A recent change in our *modus operandi* has been the formation of three special interest groups – on strategy, military history and defence industry. These groups, which consist of member volunteers, undertake research on specific topics to build up our in-house expertise on the topic. This research informs our education programme, particularly our seminars; and enables us to make submissions to government on those issues.

Indeed, policy contributions have been a key output of this research. Historically, the Institute simply sought to inform the defence and security debate. Over the past decade or so, we have increasingly sought to influence government policy on selected issues where we have the expertise, based on our in-house research, to enable us to develop a sound, contemporary opinion. Each submission made to government is subsequently published in the Institute's quarterly journal, *United Service*, and on our website. Since the Institute adopted this policy under the presidency of Vice-Admiral David Leach in 2002, submissions have been made to government on the following issues⁵:

- Australia's maritime strategy (Leece *et al.* 2003);
- network-centric warfare (Treloar *et al.* 2003);
- re-building the Australian merchant navy (Leach *et al.* 2004);
- Australia's Defence Force Reserves (Roser *et al.* 2006)⁶;
- Army Reserve modernisation (Roser and Leece 2011);
- Australian Defence Force posture (Roser, Short and Leece 2011);
- 2013 Defence White Paper (Roser, Leece and Treloar 2012, 2013a, 2013b);
- the first principles review of Defence (Roser 2014); and
- 2015 Defence White Paper (Leece *et al.* 2014).

Our Education Programme

Our education programme this year will be built around a series of ten lunchtime lectures and two seminars, supplemented by evening lectures, visits to defence

establishments and battlefield tours. The aims of the education programme are to:

- assist members to maintain their awareness of contemporary defence and security issues;
- contribute to the continuing professional education of members and others who are professionally active in the defence and national security community; and
- promote, within the wider Australian community, awareness and informed understanding of contemporary defence and security issues.

We have been conducting two seminars a year since 2014, one on strategy and the other on military history. On strategy, we alternate between grand strategy (our international dialogues) in the uneven-numbered years and military strategy/operations/grand tactics in the even-numbered years.

Our 2014 seminar on military strategy focused on 21st century amphibious operations, with a view to enhancing both the professional and community knowledge bases on this vital subject prior to the introduction of two amphibious assault ships into the Defence Force. The proceedings were published in *United Service* in September 2014 (Leece 2014a, b). This seminar was complemented by the 2014 military history seminar which focused on the centenary of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force and the lessons that it can still teach us about operations, including amphibious operations, in our neighbourhood (Leece 2014c).

Our 2015 seminar on grand strategy was our 3rd International Dialogue of which more later. Our 2015 seminar on military history took the form of a centenary commission of inquiry into the failed 1915 Gallipoli August Offensive. With Institute members role-playing the parts of commissioner, counsel assisting, and the senior officers from the Turkish and Allied sides, it was educational and entertaining. The participants drew on research since the official histories were written to re-examine the high-level causes of the failure and deduce lessons of enduring significance for Australia. A summary was published *United Service* in December (Fraser 2015) and the full proceedings will be published as a monograph later this year.

Our 2016 seminar on military strategy will be held at Parliament House, Sydney, in May and will focus on Cyber and Space, which have joined Sea, Land, and Air as major domains of warfare in the 21st century. We have assembled an expert panel led by Mr Stephen Meekin AM, Deputy Secretary of Defence, to explain, explore and debate the key issues. The seminar proceedings will be published in *United Service* in September. Our Special Interest Group on Military History is currently planning a seminar to mark the centenary of the Western Front battles of 1916 – to be held this September.

Our lunchtime lectures, all of which are open to the public, are held usually on the last Tuesday of each month in the Mitchell Theatre, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney, from 1.00 to 2.00 p.m. From noon on lecture days, a sandwich lunch is available for those who wish to socialise with friends and network before the lecture. Most of our lectures deal with topical defence and security issues, but there are usually one or two lectures on military history each year. The Autumn Semester lectures will be:

- January: The formulation of Australian Defence Policy – Mr Neil James of the Australian Defence Association and National Vice-President of the RUSI of Australia;
- February: Future challenges for Australia's alliance with the United States – Mr Tom Switzer, United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney;

⁵Please note that the submissions are made through the Institute, but in the name(s) of the expert(s) who prepared them. The Institute, itself, does not express an opinion on defence policy.

⁶This study was not submitted directly to government but was used to inform Reserve aspects of later submissions.

- March: Climate change, national security and the Australian Defence Force – Admiral Chris Barry AC RAN (Ret'd), of the Global Military Advisory Council on Climate Change;
- April: The Battle of Fromelles 19-20 July 1916 – Lieutenant Colonel Peter Sweeney RFD (Ret'd), RUSI Military Historian & Battlefield Guide (to be confirmed);
- May: Military Strategy Seminar on Cyber & Space as outlined above – there will be no separate lunchtime lecture; and
- June: Raising and training an army in the 21st century – Major General P. W. (Gus) Gilmore AO DSC, Forces Commander (to be confirmed).

Our International Defence and Security Dialogues

Our Special Interest Group on Strategy has now held three International Defence and Security Dialogues.

The 2011 Dialogue focused on the Global Security Outlook and the keynote address, the Blamey Oration, was delivered by Vice-Admiral A. K. Singh, formerly commander-in-chief of the Indian Navy's Eastern Fleet (Singh 2011). The proceedings were published in *United Service*, before being submitted to the government to inform the Defence white paper process.

The 2nd International Dialogue in 2013 focused on Melanesia. The Blamey Oration was delivered by Professor Richard Herr of the University of Fiji (Herr 2013). A key member of the international expert panel was Major General Sitiveni Rabuka, CF OBE OStJ, a former prime minister of Fiji and chairman of the Great Council of Chiefs. The nine-person expert panel identified several key measures that Australia should adopt in helping to build security and prosperity in Melanesia, including developing the neighbourhood taskforce model for delivery of peace-keeping and disaster relief (Leece 2013).

The 3rd Dialogue, held last May, focused on Australia, Indonesia and Regional Security. The Blamey Oration was delivered by Mr Dennis Richardson AO, Australia's Secretary of Defence (Richardson 2015). The principal Indonesian participant was Lieutenant General Agus Widjojo (Retired) of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Jakarta. The international expert panel identified five major opportunities for, and one major constraint on, strategic co-operation between Australia and Indonesia over the next 20 years (Leece 2015) and these have been flagged to government.

Planning has commenced on the 4th dialogue, to be held in May next year. Its focus will be on Managing Strategic Tensions in the South and East China Seas.

Our Social Programme

We periodically conduct special social occasions for members to enable them to interact socially and to network professionally. This year, these will include a President's Reception in May, the 128th Anniversary Dinner in August and the Christmas Luncheon in December.

Our Supporting Services

Our Research and Education Programmes are underpinned by a number of services which are vital to the success of each programme. They consist of:

- our Ursula Davidson Library, which was established in 1889 and is a public library containing a nationally-significant collection of military literature, including

books, journals, maps and other manuscripts dating from 1799 up to the present day – it is used principally for research;

- our highly-attractive website, which gives the Institute global reach and typically attracts more than 1000 serious users from Australia and overseas each month;
- our e-notices of forthcoming Institute events, which are issued twice monthly;
- our monthly e-newsletter, which keeps members and non-members abreast of current defence, national security and Institute news; and
- our quarterly professional journal, *United Service*, our principle education tool, which we publish both in hard copy and online – it is now in its 69th year of continuous publication and it enjoys a wide readership, not only throughout Australia but also internationally, especially via the online editions – as an indication of its global reach, journal papers were downloaded on average from our website last year in more than 50 countries each month.

Membership

Since our membership peak of 2800 in the period from 1950 to 1970, our membership numbers have declined as our Great War members and now our World War II members have passed away. We have received a steady stream of new, younger members, but their numbers have not been nearly sufficient to replace those we have lost through attrition. Our membership currently stands at around 600, of whom less than a quarter regularly attend our activities.

Surveys of the non-attendees – who include serving service personnel, those in full-time civil employment, country members and those who through age or ill-health are now unable to travel to the city – indicates that they maintain their membership because they look forward to receiving the newsletter each month and journal each quarter; and see their modest annual subscription (\$45) as a means whereby they can support the ongoing work of the Institute.

Most of our more active members simply enjoy the range of quality lectures, seminars and international dialogues, having a browse in the library, and reading the monthly newsletter and the quarterly journal. They also look forward to visiting a Defence establishment and to having a glass of wine over lunch in the mess.

Outreach

We also endeavour to maintain our fraternal links. The first United Service Institution was established by the Duke of Wellington in London in 1831 (Kent 1996) and the model soon spread to India and later to the British colonies in Australia and Canada, although each institution remained independent of the others. Today, in addition to maintaining close links with the other constituent bodies of the Royal United Services Institute of Australia, we also maintain fraternal links with the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, London, and the United Service Institution of India in New Delhi.

Whenever any of our office-bearers are passing through London they pay a courtesy call on the RUSI. Further, two of our members are life members of the USI of India and regularly visit Delhi; and Vice Admiral A. K. Singh, who presented the Blamey Oration at our 1st International Dialogue, continues to be a corresponding member of our Special Interest Group on Strategy.

The Future

Looking to the future, discussions with the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park South are at an advanced stage with a view to the Memorial inviting us to transfer our library and as many of our research and educational activities as practicable to the Memorial. They would be housed in a new education centre being constructed as part a Great War Centenary Project scheduled to be completed in time for the centenary of the first Armistice Day on 11 November 2018. It is expected that the move would enhance the Memorial's scholarship and the Institute's interaction with the wider community. It is an exciting prospect for both organisations and I hope that it can be realised. There are many details to be resolved first, though, and the outcome is not guaranteed.

Conclusion

The Institute, now in its 128th year, continues to play a vital role in informing the defence and security debate and in contributing to the development of Australia's defence and security policy. No longer simply member-focused, we reach out to the wider Australian community and, indeed, to the global community via our journal and our popular website.

Maintaining these services, however, is really stretching our resources. Membership subscriptions and our modest investments alone are quite inadequate to accomplish this. Accordingly, we welcome the assistance of new members, sponsors and bequests for the ongoing support of our work. If you would like to help in one or more of these ways, we would be delighted to hear from you.

The Author: David Leece has been President of the Institute since 2013 and Editor of *United Service* since 2005. He was Secretary from 2002 to 2007; and Vice President from 2007 to 2013. He became a citizen soldier in 1960 and served, mostly part-time, in the Australian Army for 37 years. Commissioned into the Infantry Corps in 1962, he subsequently commanded a United States Marine Corps Reserve rifle company (1967-69, on secondment), the 17th Battalion, Royal New South Wales Regiment (1978-81), and the 8th Australian Infantry Brigade (1988-90). He also held senior staff appointments on Headquarters 2nd Division, Field Force Command and Training Command. In civilian life, David was a research scientist in the NSW Department of Agriculture for 20 years; and then for 22 years was a senior executive in the State Pollution Control Commission and the NSW Environment Protection Authority, becoming Executive Director and Chief Scientist. Concurrently, he was a Deputy Commissioner of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission (1990-2002). Post-retirement, he was a part-time Assistant Commissioner of the Natural Resources Commission (2004-09). He was awarded the Public Service Medal in 2001 for outstanding public service in the Environment Protection Authority.

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