

# Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies New South Wales

*Promoting understanding of defence and national security  
since 1888*

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## President's Column

Welcome to the Winter 2020 issue of *United Service*, a highly professional journal that is now in its 73<sup>rd</sup> year of continuous publication. This issue contains a diverse range of topics including: a briefing on military assistance to the Australian community during the recent bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic; an assessment of the reforms of the Chinese People's Liberation Army; the strategic challenges facing the South Pacific island nation-states and Timor Leste; and the role of Royal Australian Navy beach commandos in World War II.



Shortly after the bushfire crisis over the Christmas period, we were faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, where, at the direction of the Federal and State Governments, we were required to undertake a significant period of social isolation, not experienced since the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1919.

Some 2000 Australian Defence Force personnel were utilised in Operation COVID-19 Assist in augmenting State planning and contact tracing teams, assisting police in monitoring health orders and running an emergency ward in Tasmania.

Associated with the self-isolation, our cultural institutions closed, including the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park. Whilst this meant that our members were not able to attend our stimulating programme of lunch-time lectures on defence and security issues in the Anzac Memorial Auditorium, we have been able to record a number of presentations and these are accessible on the RUSI NSW YouTube channel –

<http://www.rusinsw.org.au/YouTube>.

I am aware that for many of our members, the extended period of self-isolation has been difficult and many have not been able to participate in key events including family birthdays and Anzac Day marches. Members that I have spoken to express great stoicism and determination in these trying times.

I am pleased to advise that the restrictions are being eased and that our home in the Anzac Memorial will re-open on 8 June 2020.

The work to revitalise the Board of our national body, the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies–Australia, is ongoing. All RUSIs across Australia are now represented on the National Board, except for WA and the ACT. Communication between the National Board and the RUSIs has improved. I strongly support this work – a strong national body is essential for the long-term viability of the RUSIs.

Finally, I wish to congratulate, our Vice-Patron, Rear Admiral Jonathan Mead, AM, RAN, Commander Australian Fleet, who will be appointed as Chief of Joint Capability on promotion to Vice Admiral from November 2020.

**Paul Irving**