



## **1999 RUSI SA BLAMEY ORATION**

**By Major General Des Mueller, AO  
Commander Support Australia**

In other than the most primitive or celestial of societies, there must lie the ultimate sanction of force. It is not in itself the foundation of society, but no nation state has succeeded in existing without it and the manner in which it is exercised is a defining characteristic of the fabric of any community. In applying military power, the choice of ends, and also the choice of the broad limits within which any set of means is to be employed, are decisions that do not fall to the profession of arms. These are matters for government which should be informed by prudent military advice. The profession of arms therefore requires a broad background of general culture for its mastery. The methods of organising and applying military force at any given stage in history are infinitely related to the entire cultural pattern of society.

What a society gets in its armed forces is exactly what it asks for, no more and no less. What it asks for tends to be what it is. When the community looks at its defence force it is looking in a mirror. If the mirror is a true one, the face that it sees there will be its own. Whether the Australian Defence Force today represents such a true mirror is a question that must be asked - and the answer is, in my view, neither clear nor certain. At the core of Australian society are monocultural institutions that reflect a strong British heritage. They include the Australian Defence Force. Surrounding this core is a shrinking penumbra of pastoral and industrial magnificoes - so called "old money". Outside of this group is the new middle class, sometimes referred to as the cognitariat. They are all knowledge workers, true children of the Information Age. They are internationalists, they see themselves as part of a global workforce and they are driven by a desire to run their own lives. They are loyal to their professions but not to their organisations, which they generally do not remain with for very long. They are, however, the "shakers and movers" of society. Beyond them is the old middle class and the traditional working class, an increasingly confused and some would say, disenfranchised group. Culturally, they are highly diverse, which poses an interesting dilemma, as they represent the principal recruiting base for Navy, Army and Air Force which are not yet distinctly Australian institutions.

Recognising that we are on the brink of the next millennium, it might be opportune to reflect on the sort of strategic circumstances this nation will have

to confront early in the 21st century. Global fabric was rendered from 1914 to 1918 by war on a hitherto unimagined scale. The 20th century had not got off to an auspicious start. In spite of widespread anti-bellucism in much of Europe and North America, an even greater conflagration erupted in 1939. When it ended much of Europe and some of the Asia-pacific lay in ruins, and in some respects civilianisation was permanently diminished. The Second World War was essentially won or lost, depending on which perspective is taken, in central and Eastern Europe where as many as 37 million combatants and civilians died as a direct consequence of the most appalling campaigns in history. The treasury of western art and architecture suffered enormous and irretrievable loss. Glories that later generations should have been able to behold, were wiped from the store of human culture. As Clemenceau observed:

"artists ... can give this world some beauty but to give it reason is impossible".

Although the nuclear deterrent might have heralded the end of war on a grand scale, it did not excise conflict from the human condition. From 1945 until the present day there have been of the order of 180 conflicts, principally in the third world, in which over seven million combatants have died. This is comparable to losses in the First World War. Perhaps three times that number of civilians have suffered a similar fate. Indeed, they are increasingly the principal objective of combatants, an unhappy fact to which recent events in the Balkans and East Timor are brutal testimony. The proportion of civilian casualties in contemporary conflicts is generally accepted to be of the order of 75 percent. The 20th century has been one of unprecedented violence. It represents the failure of politics on a grand scale.

In the next millennium the world around us will change at an increasingly rapid rate as the information age gathers pace. Australia will enter this maelstrom as a nation that delivers 1.1 per cent of world Gross Domestic Product. By comparison the United States accounts for a staggering 26.2 per cent, Italy 4.1 per cent and Russia, surprisingly, a mere 1.3 per cent. If strategic power grows out of economic strength, the implications of those figures is self-evident. In 1914, just seven capitals, London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, St Petersburg, Tokyo and Washington determined the fate of practically the whole world. In the 21st Century that diplomatic process is likely to be increasingly dispersed across scores of capitals.

The ability of governments to control the behaviour of its citizens will continue to be dramatically diluted in a vast number of societies. The omnipotence of modern information technology means that power over public opinion is increasingly beyond the control of governments of any political persuasion.

And we will continue to experience economic integration on a global scale. The first period of economic globalisation lasted from the mid-nineteenth century to 1914 when the First World War, the Bolshevik Revolution and the Great Depression brought it to an end. The contemporary era of economic globalisation gained full flight with the collapse of the Cold War.

Daily foreign exchange trading in 1900 was measured in millions of dollars. In 1992 it was 820 billion a day and by 1998 it was up to 1500 billion a day. But substantial parts of the world economy, such as agriculture remain highly protected.

Marshall McLuhan's "global village" is already reality. But this reality is not without its difficulties. There is growing ecological damage which governments are both unwilling and unable to solve. The influence of the sovereign nation state is continuing to decline while regionalism and atavistic tribalism threaten to become rampant. It is this latter point which perhaps will sow the seeds of many conflicts early in the next century. The Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, pointed out in the 1998 Ditchley Foundation lecture, that most wars nowadays are civil wars, or at least that is how they start. They often ebb across international borders and can lead to the birth of new states. What started as an internal conflict becomes an international one. Communities who formerly lived in apparent harmony suddenly find each other so threatening that they can no longer do so. If a conflict rages within the borders of a nation state, conventional wisdom would require us to let it rage, even if it escalates and the human consequences multiply. Some would argue that we should remain as disinterested but compassionate bystanders, unless the conflict begins to spill over into neighbouring states and becomes a threat to international peace and security. Ostensibly, there should be a clear distinction between domestic and international conflict. But in practice, it is not quite as simple as that.

Although the United Nations Charter protects national sovereignty even from intervention by the United Nations itself the charter also carries an important rider that allows even national sovereignty to be set aside to allow for intervention if it stands in the way of preserving international peace and security. The charter, after all, was issued in the name of "the peoples", not the governments, of the United Nations. Koffi Annan highlighted the crime in French law called "non-assistance a personne en danger" - failure to assist a person in danger. Much has also been said about "le devoir d'Inqerence" - the duty to interfere. This latter phrase is attributed to Bernard Kouchner one time head of the charity, Medicine Du Monde. Both these concepts assert the overriding right of people in desperate situations to receive help, and the right of international bodies to provide it, if necessary by crossing national boundaries, with or without the consent of governments.

One can perhaps postulate that should Australia choose to deploy military forces in the next millennium in pursuit of its national interests, it is likely to do so as part of an international coalition intervening in a conflict that threatens peace and stability. This is the essence of the *raison d'etre* for our current deployment in East Timor. But this must not cloud the importance of the need for Australia to work diligently at building a sensible and constructive relationship with the Republic of Indonesia. It has a population of over 200 million and in strategic terms, is our most important neighbour. The cultural differences between our societies are enduring and must enter the calculus of our relationships.

It is against this background that Defence must manage the delivery of the logistic support required by the combat and training forces. After a long and at times difficult gestation, it was decided in 1997 to integrate into one organisation the logistic expertise and resources of Navy, Army and Air Force to better provide for the sustainment of our combat and training forces. The new organisation was titled Support Command Australia and its mission is to provide the materiel support required by the Australian Defence force to train, fight and win. Materiel support embraces engineering, maintenance and repair of platforms and combat systems; inventory management, procurement, warehousing, transport and disposal.

There are over 7,000 people in Support Command Australia - Navy, Army and Air Force and Australian Public Service located in many places around our harsh and ancient continent. Support Command Australia manages an inventory valued at over \$3 billion, which makes it one of the largest in Australia; it supports over \$23 billion worth of specialist military equipment and its annual operating and capital budget is about \$2 billion dollars. It is, by any measure, a large enterprise and it strives to ensure every dollar is spent wisely and well.

Much of what Support Command Australia inherited is fragmented. Logistic business processes, information systems and organisations are therefore being progressively rationalised and improved. Standardisation of common processes is being pursued where it is feasible and cost effective to do so, especially within the Defence distribution chain. The need for these changes is characteristic of any Industrial Age organisation that has yet to complete the transition to the Information Age where:

- Knowledge is recognised as the principal capital asset;
- Compartmentalised, discrete and simple tasks are replaced by integrated cross-functional, customer facing teams; and
- What is managed is what is measured.

Support Command Australia is driving this transition stimulated by an awareness that throughout the Western World, Defence logistic business systems are generally a generation behind best practice in the private sector.

Until the end of the Cold War, many Western Defence organisations had escaped sustained and rigorous scrutiny of their business systems. The end, in 1991, of nearly five decades of ideological and strategic conflict between East and West, prompted Western governments feeling the economic pressures of globalisation to examine how Defence went about logistics, the so called "business of war".

Without exception they uncovered business systems indicative of logistic organisations whose survival, in the absence of competition, was guaranteed; a complacency bred from having captive combat and training force customers; and an insularity caused by navies, armies and air forces wittingly or unwittingly erecting boundaries that isolated themselves from each other and the wider business community.

Reform within Support Command Australia is intended to wash away the legacy of that outdated view of the world. In broad terms, its reform program has four pillars:

- Firstly, changing its leadership and culture to a more contemporary paradigm;
- Secondly, establishing arrangements to better manage its knowledge capital;
- Thirdly, establishing a performance management framework by cascading a balanced scorecard through all levels of the organisation; and
- Finally, developing a stronger relationship with industry.

It must be emphasised that if its part in Defence reform is to be more than just a management change characterised by downsizing, merging and restructuring, it must above all else build a culture appropriate to the spirit of the age. There is overwhelming private and public sector experience to support this assertion, hence the substantial level of resources invested in a comprehensive, on-going culture building program.

Support Command Australia is tackling the problems posed by the imbroglio of business processes and logistic information systems that it inherited. Overcoming the legacy of a lack of discipline in developing these is a formidable intellectual and technical task, but the potential benefits are prodigious.

Support Command Australia is market testing all its activities except those deemed to be core business. All warehousing, transport and maintenance activities are being market tested, while activities such as Integrated Logistic Support, life cycle engineering services, inventory management and project management will be partially or wholly market tested.

Relationships with industry are sometimes less than ideal, even allowing for the foibles of the human condition and the wild spirits of business. The traditional arm's length relationship is all too often characterised by mistrust, adversarial behaviour and a lack of mutual understanding. Both Support Command Australia and industry have to change the elements of their respective cultures that shape how they deal with each other. Failure to do so will prevent Support Command Australia and industry from maximising the contribution that industry can and should make to the development and maintenance of Defence capabilities.

Where long term contractual arrangements for service delivery are involved, it will be necessary to establish comprehensive partnering arrangements between Defence and industry. These arrangements require complementary joint management arrangements, mutual transparency of both financial and non-financial performance indicators, benchmarks for service delivery standards, risk sharing and agreed formulae for sharing the benefits of improved performance.

As we take our first tentative steps into the 21st Century, we must never forget that the pen is, and always will be mightier than the sword. The path of human

history has been mapped by great and noble ideas, not by violence. Only when the very survival of those ideas is threatened, can the option of state condoned violence be entertained. John Maynard Keynes argued that:

"Ideas are more powerful than commonly understood, the world is ruled by little else ... sooner or later it is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil".

One can ask how Thomas Albert Blamey would have adapted to the Information Age. In many respects it is a fatuous question as all men and women are shaped by the spirit of their particular era. Blamey was the product of an industrial age society that the American historian, Barbara Tuchman, described as "the proud tower". It collapsed in August 1914.

Blamey's record in peace and war exemplified an inordinately talented administrator, often on a grand scale. He possessed a powerful mind, a forceful personality, a creative imagination and an ability to recognise the potential of technological change.

These attributes were the foundation of his rise to Brigadier General on the Headquarters of General Sir John Monash's Australian Corps in 1918, as Chief Commissioner of the Victoria Police from 1925 to 1936, a period characterised by controversy; and ultimately as Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Military Forces and Commander Allied Land Forces, South-West Pacific area in 1942.

But Blamey, remembering the precepts that shaped him, would possibly not survive let alone prevail in high office in our society. An excessively autocratic style, a likely aversion to some contemporary industrial and human rights now enshrined in the fabric of society, a possible inability to withstand the intense scrutiny of the modern media and a failure to recognise that for those in high public office, private life cannot be separated from public life - would together deem him unable to deliver the achievements he realised in the first half of this century.

He must be judged in the context of his times as a distinguished army commander and effective police chief commissioner. It can, however, be argued with some justification that if he had been born about seven decades later, contemporary society would have moulded his extraordinary talents in such a way that his contribution to today's Australia would have been seen as no less worthy than it was earlier this century.