

ARMY in WA

Since WW2

A paper in ten (10) parts, telling the story of the ARMY in Western Australia since WW2

The “Tiny ADF Footprint in WA and the NORTH WEST” in particular is shown to be for what it is, a camouflage of capability

Research and writing was over the past two years, culminating in the publication across the early months of 2022.

The NCC News Weekly published this story commencing with the opening article in No. 3108 January 22, 2022.

Sincere thanks is given to News Weekly Editor - Peter Kelleher

The objective of this STORY of the ARMY in WA / NW is to bring to the realities and truths behind the inept and archaic Governance and Military Leadership across the past 80 years.

It is not intended to insult or disrespect the Rank and File of our Armed Forces or suggest that any of the NON and BLUNDEROUS DISISSIONS made by ADF Chiefs and Star Ranked Public Service, and Defence Ministers, is of or has anything to do with the R&F.

By

Richard Peter Billington

5th August 2022

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NEGLECT AND EMPTY POSTURING: THE 80-YEAR STORY OF OUR DEFENCE AND TRAINING DEBACLE

PETER BILLINGTON

In response to an alarmingly aggressive China, Australia seems finally to have woken up to the urgent necessity of expanding its defence and security capacities. Part of that expansion will need to take place in relation to two areas in particular.

Those two areas in which we suffer woeful deficiencies are:

- A tiny Australian Defence Force footprint, especially Army.
- A lack of qualified tradespeople and skilled workers to service our armed forces.

This means that we are going to need more skilled tradesmen and women at a rate well above what our TAFE system of apprenticeships and similar training are at the moment capable of achieving.

Defence, national security and associated training and qualifications programs all mutually impact on

each. Today, it is beyond urgent that we find the commitment and effort that are needed to ensure that each of these issues is given the support it needs for a complete result that will contribute to the security of Australia.

The first thing to do is to bring these issues into the public arena so we can clearly see each situation and how deficits in any area will impact on our overall security.

This will require presenting and detailing the many flaws, inadequacies and complete failures in each component throughout Australia.

As an independent democracy, we must always look after ourselves and provide the necessary level of commitment and capability to do so. In many critical areas and for many years Australia has, however, allowed things to wither dangerously.

DEFENCE/SECURITY

Due to uninterested government leadership, on both sides of the political divide, coupled with a failed Australian Defence Force (ADF) command structure, for decades now, Australia has not kept our defence and security operations at the size and capability necessary to do the job.

This lack of leadership and vision has prevailed since the end of World War II, which is now almost 80 years. The result has been a chronically tiny ADF footprint across the bulk of Australia since that time.

TRAINING/QUALIFICATIONS

Our programs for training apprentices and turning them into qualified tradespeople around Australia have

The comparative tables at the bottom of this page and the next show just how precarious our position is in regard to two essential elements of defence preparedness: manpower and equipment.

Comparison of countries by number of military and paramilitary personnel

Country	Active military	Reserve military	Paramilitary	Total	Per 1,000 capita (total)	Per 1,000 capita (active)
AUSTRALIA	58,600	30,100	0	88,700	3.8	2.5
France	203,250	41,050	130,800	375,100	5.6	3
INDIA	1,455,550	1,155,000	2,526,950	5,137,500	4	1.1
Indonesia	395,500	400,000	280,000	1,075,500	4.1	1.5
Japan	247,150	56,000	14,350	317,500	2.5	2
Malaysia	113,000	51,600	267,200	431,800	13.6	3.6
New Zealand	9,000	2,300	0	11,300	2.5	2
Singapore	51,000	252,500	7,400	310,900	51.9	8.5
Thailand	360,850	200,000	138,700	699,550	10.2	5.3
UNITED KINGDOM	148,500	78,600	0	227,100	3.5	2.3
UNITED STATES	1,388,100	844,950	0	2,233,050	6.8	4.2
Vietnam	482,000	5,000,000	5,040,000	10,522,000	108.4	5
CHINA	2,185,000	1,170,000	660,000	4,015,000	2.9	1.6

Source: *The Military Balance*, 2019-2020, the International Institute for Strategic Studies



not kept abreast of demand, even in a normal economic environment. At present, Australia is short in the order of 30,000 qualified tradespeople and trained workers. Most of the shortfall is in the building and construction, and mining and resources industries.

THE WILD WEST

The state that is worst off in terms of inadequate and poorly resourced defence and trades training is Western Australia. WA is in a more serious situation than the rest of Australia.

The eastern state-centric view of

Australia's defence doctrine has left the entirety of Western Australia and the greater parts of South Australia and the Northern Territory with scarcely an ADF foot on the ground.

WA occupies one-third of Australia's area, that is 2,527,013 square kilometres out of a total of 7,688,287 square kilometres. WA's production *per capita* is far higher than anywhere else in Australia (\$100,367 a year, compared with the national average of \$74,605 (2018-19)). Yet it has, basically, no army, no air force and no capacity to increase apprenticeship training. And the WA TAFE system is simply inadequate.

These, then, will comprise the topics for a series of articles in *News Weekly* over the coming months. That the state of affairs can only be described as dire readers will come to agree. What can be done will also be presented.

The good news is that the powers that be seem to be waking from their torpor. The AUKUS agreement with the United States and Britain is a great start.

It also presents a very opportune moment to show how out of balance our ADF is with our new partners and with many other countries around the world.



Comparison of countries by amount of military equipment

Country	Military Budget (\$US bn)	Main Battle Tanks	Aircraft Carriers	AWS	Cruisers	Destroyers	Frigates	Corvettes	Nuclear Submarines	Non-Nuclear Submarines	Military Aircraft	Attack Helicopters	Nuclear Weapons	Military Satellites
AUSTRALIA	31.3	59	0	3	0	3	8	0	0	6	145	22	TC	1
France	55	222	1	3	0	3	16	6	8	0	333	67	300	7
INDIA	64.1	4740	1	9	0	10	147	8	2	14	841	39	150	21
Indonesia	8.37	103	0	24	0	0	7	24	0	4	108	14	0	0
Japan	49.7	580	4	3	3	38	6	0	0	252	606	101	TC	11
Malaysia	36.72	48	0	0	0	0	2	8	0	2	43	0	0	0
New Zealand	2.72	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	6	8	TC	0
Singapore	10.9	97	0	4	0	0	6	8	0	4	105	19	0	0
Thailand	6.99	420	1	3	0	0	7	7	0	0	160	7	0	0
UNITED KINGDOM	61.5	227	2	5	0	6	143	0	11	0	225	40	225	8
UNITED STATES	738	6209	11	42	24	68	21	0	68	0	3761	867	6125	141
Vietnam	5.68	1379	0	7	0	0	0	12	0	8	72	0	0	1
CHINA	193	5651	2	57	1	31	46	55	12	47	2793	279	290	132

Source: *The Military Balance*, 2019-2020, the International Institute for Strategic Studies

POSTURE OR IMPOSTURE? THE ADF'S FOOTPRINT IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

DEFENCE

PETER BILLINGTON

Australia's northern defences are collectively known as the Regional Force Surveillance Group (RFSG).

The RFSG is made up of three Regional Force Surveillance Units: NORFORCE (which is short for North-West Mobile Force, responsible for all of the Northern Territory and the Kimberley Region of Western Australia); the Pilbara Regiment (responsible for the Pilbara region of Western Australia); and the 51st Battalion, Far North Queensland Regiment (responsible for North Queensland).

The ADF promotes this Group as the "eyes and ears" of Northern Australia. It is employed in surveillance and reconnaissance of the remote areas across the entirety of Northern Australia.

However, in reality, the strengths and capability of these units are a disgrace. The ADF conjured up the "Surveillance Network" idea north of the 26th parallel, in order to convince the public that the ADF had the defence and security of Northern Australia under control.

Once we see what NORFORCE actually comprises, it is clear that the defence and security arrangements of these regions is hypothetical rather than actual.

NORFORCE, formed in 1981, is an infantry regiment of the Australian Army Reserve. Its Headquarters are located at Larrakeyah Barracks in Darwin. Its personnel belong to one of four surveillance squadrons: Darwin, Kimberley, Centre and Arnhem squadrons, all but Kimberley operating in the Northern Territory. An operational support squadron and a training squadron are also based at Darwin.

The total strength today of the NORFORCE regiment is about 65 regular personnel supporting 435 Reservists. Its operational area (OA) covers 1.8 million square kilometres, encompassing the entire Northern Territory and the Kimberley region of Western Australia; the largest of any military unit in the world today.

I note that 60 per cent of the NORFORCE personnel are Aboriginal soldiers, drawn mainly from the areas they patrol so as to take advantage of their local knowledge.

Patrols ostensibly can be inserted and extracted from the area of operations by air and sea but this is actually done primarily by road vehicles, or on foot.

The regiment's mission is: "To provide the Australian Army with information by conducting surveillance operations to contribute to an effective Australian Defence Force surveillance network in the North West of Australia." Note that the mission is not to defend the North West, but to keep an eye on it and to report back to headquarters should they spot a force intent on invasion.

In the event of an invasion, the ADF has hypothesised that NORFORCE and the other RFSUs would operate in a "stay-behind" capacity (meaning that the operatives of the units would remain in the occupied territory to form the basis of a resistance movement or act as spies from behind enemy lines).

SOME PERTINENT FIGURES

Looking only at the ADF presence in Western Australia – that is to say, the NORFORCE Kimberley Squadron and the Pilbara Regiment mentioned above, the second of the three RFSUs that exist – the following breakdown of numbers of personnel are flabbergasting.

The Kimberley Squadron, based in Broome. No specific troop numbers are available – it is not part of the ADF Command's strategy to make access to the truth too easily available to the public. But simple logic based on the overall numbers stated above (NORFORCE personnel consisting of 65 Regulars and 435 Reservists) would suggest something in the order of 30 soldiers maximum at the Broome location (the remainder being at Darwin).

The OA of the Kimberley Region is 423,517 square kilometres, which equates to 14,117 square kilometres per soldier to cover and be responsible to watch over.

The Pilbara Regiment (the RFSU responsible for the Pilbara Region of Western Australia) is based in Karratha. In the 1970s, when enthusiasm and support in the region was at an all-time high, the numbers recruited for the Pilbara Regiment was around 250 soldiers.

The whole of Western Australia has zero Airforce presence, zero

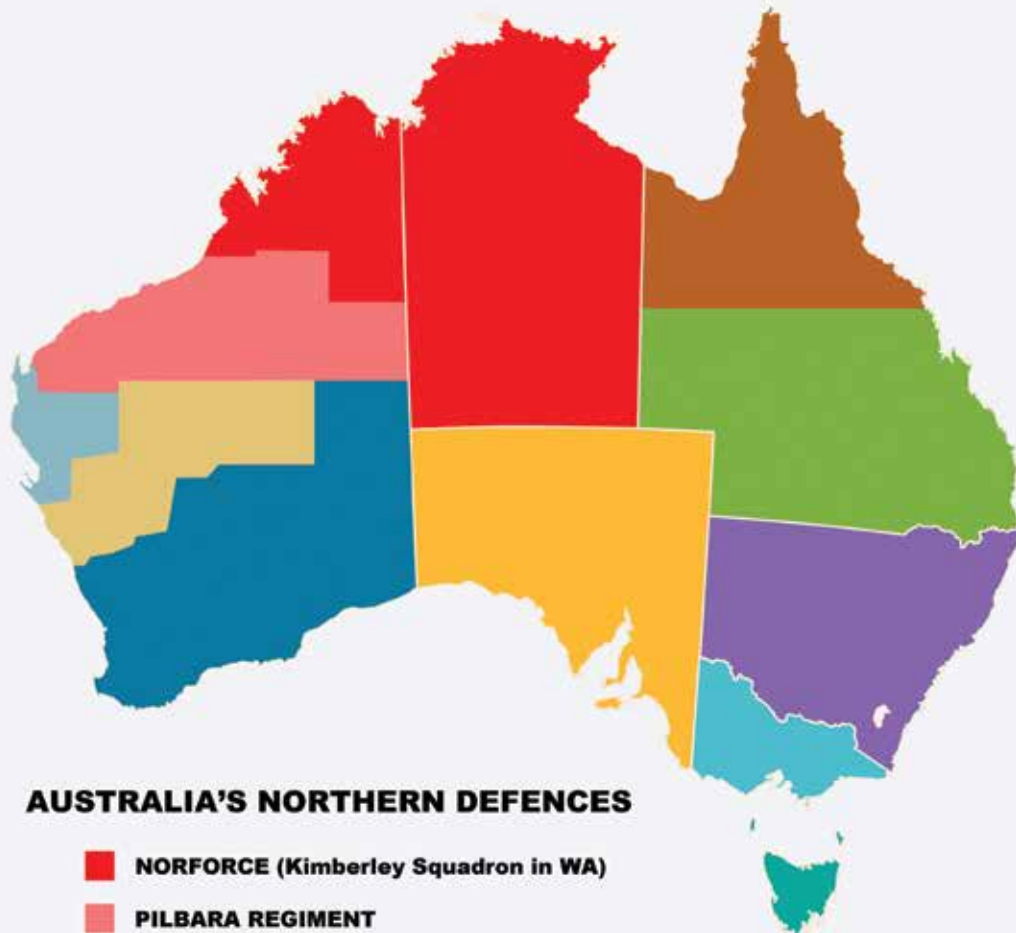
Army fighting vehicles, zero Armour, zero Artillery and one shared Magazine controlled by the Navy at Garden Island.

Since that time, interest, support and engagement in the outer locations and towns has ebbed and is now in affect nonexistent. Most of the mining towns units have been abandoned or disbanded as today most workers are FIFO (fly in, fly out), meaning there are far fewer permanent workers who live in these regions. Those that do are generally older and have not got the time or energy to run around the bush being an Army Reservist.

In the absence of any advice readily available or forthcoming from the ADF or 13 Brigade, my generous assessment would put the current total number in the Pilbara Regiment to be around 155 soldiers.

The Pilbara Regiment is responsible for the entire Pilbara Region, which is about 570,896 square kilometres. That leaves each soldier responsible

Red and pink denote zones of paltry personnel; light blue and gold of none.



AUSTRALIA'S NORTHERN DEFENCES

- **NORFORCE (Kimberley Squadron in WA)**
- **PILBARA REGIMENT**
- **FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND REGIMENT**
- **Gascoyne Region**
- **Mid West Region**

for surveillance of 3,683 square kilometres of land.

Even with this charade designed to convince us that the ADF has our back, the whole of the vast regions of the Gascoyne (135,074 sq km), and the Mid West (472,336 sq km) a huge swathe of WA, have absolutely nothing in the way of defence and security.

In these regions, there is absolutely no ADF presence but for a handful of Reservists in Geraldton.

On top of this, the whole of

Western Australia has zero Airforce presence, zero Army fighting vehicles, zero Armour, zero Artillery and one shared Magazine controlled by the Navy at Garden Island (just south of Fremantle).

The residents and companies in these regions recognise the value of the North and the West and the future they represent to Australia and are finding it hard to understand that our ADF does not. Western Australia, particularly the North West, has an incredible proportion of Australia's

mineral and resources wealth but has nowhere near an appropriate level of defence.

With the coming explosion of companies involved in the critical minerals sector, far more focus needs to be on the security of these mining areas, processing facilities and infrastructure. But right now, the ADF presence in Western Australia and the North West in particular is not a force capable of defending or holding these regions, despite the ADF posture to claim that it is.



INACTION AND GENERAL POSTURING: DECADES OF PAPER WARS

DEFENCE

PART THREE

PETER BILLINGTON

As I have shown in the first two articles in this series (see *News Weekly*, January 22, 2022, and February 5, 2022), Western Australia, especially the North West region of the state, has no real Defence presence. What tiny presence it has is made up of the Regional Force Surveillance Units (RFSU), who are overwhelmingly Reserve soldiers with just a sprinkling of fulltime soldiers.

I turn now to another symptom of the Australian Defence Force's inability to deal with the inadequacy mentioned previously. Over the decades there has been a plethora of documents dedicated to all manner of categories, relevance and status of the ADF that have been produced by specialist defence and security organisations such as the Australian Security and Policy Institute (ASPI) as well as by the Ministry of Defence and the ADF's own so-called experts.

As many as 10,000 "defence and security" articles, papers and general talkfest documents have been produced over the past 80 years. And a very large percentage of these deal with this very topic – the defence and security of northern and northwestern Australia.

From white papers and posture reviews to opinion pieces, the list is overwhelming. Throughout these documents and writings, along with the bureaucratic rhetorical dross (which we will get to in a future article), there have been many worthy propositions and proposals, recommendations and the like. Yet, there has been no increase or change in the strength and capability of the ADF to defend the entire country in all this time.

Yet successive prime ministers and ministers of defence, as well as the ADF chiefs and some analysis experts have clung to the archaic view that the vastness of the continent is security enough. That may well be true for the East Coast, but when that



vastness is your home, you look at it a lot differently!

The picture invoked by this view is of an invasion force bumbling around in the Outback and dying of heat and exhaustion while the ADF scrambles to "save the rest"; perhaps with it in mind to cede everything north of the 26th parallel!

HISTORICAL INACTION

The aim here is to demonstrate that it is not through unawareness of the problems or through lack of presentation of solutions that these

problems persist.

The fact is they simply have not been acted upon.

What better way to start the painting of this picture of official inertia than with the 80-year-old speech to Federal Parliament in 1940 by the Member for Northern Territory, Adair Blain. (Quoted by Dr Nathan Church, of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security Section of the Australian Parliamentary Library, in his 2015 paper, "The Australian Defence Force in Northern Australia".)

Dr Church wrote: "The issue of a military presence in northern Australia has been an enduring one for Australia's parliamentarians. In 1940, Adair Blain (Member for Northern Territory) declared in the House of Representatives that:

"In a spirit of political complacency, we are burying our heads in the sand and leaving the North West to defend itself. We are [relying] upon its remoteness for security ... There are cogent reasons why the Government should concentrate upon the effective control and defence of the North West of Australia, particularly when we realise that the influence of the Axis powers may extend, and we may even have more enemies than we have today."

In 2019, Benedict Brook wrote at news.com.au: "The Government has said it recognises the 'vital importance of Northern Australia

to our national security' despite a damning report saying our northern border was riddled with holes that an invader could exploit.

"An analyst has highlighted 'crazy' levels of military under-investment in Australia's North. And a single road sums up the problem. Leading from a strategically important air base on the Cape York Peninsula, the road is little more than a dirt track and could become impassable in a heavy storm."

The report he was referring to is "Strong and free? The future security of Australia's North" by Dr John Coyne of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI).

Dr Coyne wrote in the August 2019 report: "The strategic importance of Australia's North to Australia's defence has long been recognised by government and policymakers."

Yet, he goes on to note: "Despite strategic policy commitments to Northern Australia, there is a growing body of evidence indicating that the gap between strategic policy and the Australian Defence Force's (ADF) activities and presence in the North is widening. This is symptomatic of a gap in Australia's northern development policies. ...

"I argue in this special report that there's a need to reconceptualise Northern Australia, defined as those areas north of the 26° South Parallel, as a single scalable defence and national security ecosystem ... this ecosystem should be developed to deliver integrated support to current and future ADF and national security operations," (page 6).

(The 26° South parallel is a line that divides Australia from east to west. It begins at Sunshine Coast, to the north of Brisbane, serves as the boundary between South Australia and the Northern Territory, and runs into Shark Bay in Western Australia, north of Geraldton.)

Dr Coyne also noted in the report that boots on the ground in the Northern Territory were at an 11-year low (p19).



CONVERSELY: A GENERAL REMARK

In 2000 the Army had 49 star officers and 11 two-star generals to manage a full-time force of 24,500 troops. By 2005-06 the force had grown to 25,500 and the star ranks had expanded to 53, including 10 major generals.

Between 2006 and 2010, the number of generals in the Australian Army had more than doubled to 25, while the rest of the Army had grown by 10 per cent. It was said at that time that, on a per-capita basis, Australia had one of the most bloated "generals' clubs" in the Western world, with 77 army officers at the star rank of brigadier and above.

Those comprised 52 brigadiers, 22 major generals and three lieutenant generals.

All these to manage a 55,000-strong force.

The Department of Defence defended the increases in 2010, saying at the time that they were "on par with changes in equivalent ranks in other government departments". (see Ian McPhedran, "Number of generals in Australian Army doubles", The Courier Mail, March 3, 2010)

Today, the Australian Defence Force employs 192 star officers to manage an 87,973-strong force. These include one general (four stars), eight lieutenant generals (three stars), 41 major generals (two stars) and 142 brigadiers (one star).

By comparison, the United States Army (including Reserves) has a soldier-to-general ratio of 3,632 GIs for each brass hat, compared with just 458 ADF personnel per general in Australia.

The director of Strategic and Defence Studies at the Australian National University and former senior defence official, Hugh White, told The Courier Mail at the time that the expansion of the generals' club reflected an institutional weakness within defence.

"There is no policy or objective reason for the rank structure," Professor White said.

Lieutenant Generals are paid between \$242,000 and \$250,000 a year, Major Generals \$189,000 to \$208,000 and Brigadiers between \$127,000 and \$184,000.

In the context of the present article, these figures all speak eloquently of a bureaucracy looking after its own.



A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE 2012 POSTURE REVIEW: ZERO STARS

DEFENCE

PETER BILLINGTON

In an attempt to get the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to actually quote the Army's manpower in Western Australia, I submitted an FOI application on September 27, 2020, requesting information related to the Army Reserve Units in WA:

1. The name and location of each unit.
2. The structural strength of each unit.
3. The present/actual strength of each unit.
4. The number of any permanent Army personnel in each unit.

All manner of security reasons have been given to explain why this could not be provided; now the request has been sent for external review.

Most of the information requested has already been found in documents and interviews already in the public domain in any case. Possibly a simple matter of bureaucratic buck-passing and self-protection. Possibly something more. Yet, the picture that the ADF deliberately sets about painting in publicly accessible documents and statements is that the ADF is strong and capable. The inference is that the ADF clearly wishes the public to draw the conclusion that it has nothing to hide. So, why the dawdling with my FOI request?

Well, the conclusion I have drawn from having read closely the documents that have been produced from public consumption involves the terms "wool", "eyes", "mushroom cultivation" and "manure". I devote the rest of this article to exposing the deficiencies of these documents.

ROTTEN TOMATOES

What the ADF feeds to the public can be found in two principal documents: the "Australian Defence Force Posture Review" of 2012 and the "2016 Defence White Paper".

The 2012 review was commissioned by then Defence Minister Stephen Smith and written by Allan Hawke and Ric Smith.

- The time between media release and publication was less than nine months. No wonder it is a shabby document:
- Its terms of reference relate back to previous documents and therefore old assumptions and views are structuring the outcome from the start.
- Two men only were put to the task to dictate the defence and security of the whole nation into the future.
- A few months only were dedicated to producing a document that was obsolete before it was written.
- It is principally the opinions of two men with no direct knowledge of our vast North and North West.

Consequently, the whole of Chapter Four, "Securing Australia's North", is a disgrace, full of obfuscation and preposterous hopes and assumptions.

This document, which forms the springboard of defence planning even now, is a dubious and flawed document that should never have been put to print. Yet it is still being held up as the centrepiece of Australia's defence and security strategy.

About the only thing it gets right is the title, because it certainly does posture.

Some of the broad-brush statements about existing bases and force capabilities are astounding and simply incorrect. The document is littered with statements that enhance the truth and boast above reality.

I quote *in extenso* from this document so that the reader may determine for himself whether I am right to be critical. The document largely speaks for itself, albeit with a "bureaucratese" accent. My comments (in italics) largely serve to

PART FOUR

punctuate the drivel with expressions of disbelief.

DEFENCE FORCE POSTURE REVIEW 2012

CHAPTER FOUR: SECURING AUSTRALIA'S NORTH

4.1 As the 2009 Defence White Paper observes, securing Northern Australia presents challenges for defence planning because of the region's expansive size, its relatively underdeveloped infrastructure and its substantial economic resources.

The economic importance of Northern Australia has increased since the 1970s and 1980s.

Clearly the vastness, rugged terrain, lack of infrastructure and population, and huge economic importance of the North West were recognised at least since 1970. So, why has nothing happened to improve our land forces: feet on the ground soldiers in the North West. We have in fact fewer now than in 2012.

4.3 Primary responsibility for dealing with more likely security risks lies with industry, law enforcement and domestic security agencies rather than Defence, although the ADF could be required to assist with specific counter-terrorist incidents (for example, offshore siege resolution operations) or in responding to major natural disasters.

The ADF is not responsible for security! A preposterous statement.

Even if the Army were only there to help in the event of a disaster, surely it must have the manpower to do that at least. Yet, it is strength-less; rendering it useless even for that.

Zero stars and stale popcorn



4.10 Under Operation RESOLUTE, the ADF maintains a considerable presence in support of Border Protection Command to provide security for Northern Australia.

The word “considerable” implies a great many, which is in this case an overstatement.

4.10 cont. Army’s Regional Force Surveillance Units conducted 208 patrol days: ... 24 days by the Pilbara Regiment.

A record of days that a few soldiers were out on patrol covering a little bit of the massive land area, is not a very realistic way of suggesting it is securing Australia’s North.

4.12 Despite this level of activity across the north as a whole, there is a perception in the resource sector and local communities in the North West that the ADF has an insufficient presence. Concern is sometimes expressed that the current level of ADF presence is not commensurate with the large and rapidly growing economic importance of resource development in the North West.

This is partly the result of the less visible offshore focus of operations against people smuggling and illegal fishing in accordance with government priorities.

This is, without, doubt the most disingenuous statement in the entire document. It suggests that the greater part of the ADF presence is out of sight over the ocean’s horizon and that the locals and mining industry are just mistaken about a lack of Army presence. This is preposterous.

4.13 There is, in fact, a greater level of ADF activity in the Northern approaches than is realised by many in the community.

Has the Army no awareness of the land

area involved here in comparison with the few soldiers wandering around in this great vastness?

4.13 cont. Nevertheless, an enhanced and more visible presence in the North West is warranted. This is needed to shape international perceptions (particularly to dissuade any perception that our vital national assets could be “easy targets”) and to reassure the Australian community and industry that this vital region is adequately protected. It would also help ensure the ADF’s familiarity with the North West’s operating environment and vital assets and infrastructure.

Well, that is a series of revealing admissions; like a sulky schoolboy admitting maybe he could do better.

4.14 An enhanced presence can be achieved through targeted initiatives involving existing bases and infrastructure, exercises, operational activities, planning and civil engagement.

Bureaucratise in spades. Still sulking.

4.15 It is important that the ADF presence in the North West should include shaping and deterrence activities relevant to ADF Principal Task One (deterring and defeat attacks on Australia) in addition to peacetime security tasks such as border protection.

At least here it makes reference to the principle task of a defence force: “deterring and defeat [sic] attacks on Australia”. The big question, of course, that goes unanswered throughout this screed, is whether our Defence force is capable of “deterring and defeat [sic] attacks on Australia”.

4.16 Establishing new major bases in the North West is not necessary for an enhanced presence in that region, as long as the ADF can deploy and

support operations from its current bases and use existing facilities and infrastructure such as ports, airfields and roads when necessary. Defence should conduct regular assessments of civil infrastructure and logistics capacity which might be called upon to support operations in the North and North West in a range of contingencies.

This opinion has no foundation what so ever. Question: If you don’t have bases and soldiers on the ground, how can your presence be enhanced? Maybe smoke and mirrors.

Being able to speak out both sides of your mouth is a great asset in a conjurer.

The Chapter ends:

4.38 Defence should take steps to communicate better the level of ADF activities and presence in North West Australia to counter perceptions that the North West is undefended, for both deterrence and reassurance purposes.

Recommendation 11 Activities under this plan should be coordinated with the Consultative Forums and other forums with industry participation such as the Australian Maritime Defence Council and the Offshore Oil and Gas Security Forum.

The posturing is maintained to the end, to make the public believe that WA’s North West is crawling with troops. What a disgrace.

The most remarkable thing about the sample extracts above is that they are the very words of the ADF. They are better than fiction because there is no way you could make this stuff up.

Next time, we will take a look at the “2016 Defence White Paper” and we will see that it provides similar grounds for ironic humour and profound alarm.

HOLDING FIRM IN THE DECEPTIVE POSTURE: THE 2016 DEFENCE WHITE PAPER

DEFENCE

PART FIVE

PETER BILLINGTON

Holding true to its aim of puffing itself up to present to the public the appearance of strength and capability, the ADF's "2016 Defence White Paper" makes expert use of the rhetorical flourishes and the broad strokes couched in opaque bureaucratese that have served so well to cover its nakedness in the 2012 "Australian Defence Force Posture Review".

It is also worth itemising a few gems from other documents before and since. In September 2000, the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade presented its report, "From Phantom to Force: Towards a More Efficient and Effective Army". The "Future Land Warfare Report 2014" provides an interim instance of the same sort of verbal assault on an unarmed population; and the latest instalment in this bombardment of officialese, the "2020 Force Structure Plan" packs a punchline none of us saw coming.

2016 DEFENCE WHITE PAPER

One select paragraph should illustrate the character of this White Paper. The item of interest appears in Chapter Four.

Land Forces

4.51 The soldier is at the heart of land force capability. The last decade of operations has seen substantial investment in equipping soldiers with leading-edge equipment to help them to achieve their missions. The Government will invest in a program for continuously improving the personal equipment soldiers use, including their weapons and targeting equipment, digital communications systems, body armour and self-protection equipment (including for chemical, biological and radiological threats), and night-fighting equipment.

There is no point focusing on equipment if we have not got the soldiers to use it.

If soldiers are the heart of capability, which they are, then we need many, many more with their feet on the ground in Western Australia's North West.

PHANTOM FORCE

"From Phantom to Force" is a forgotten gem and is remarkably clear, for once, when it comes to outlining strength deficiencies.

Chapter Six deals with "force structure". Force structure describes how military personnel are organised for the operations expected of them and according to the nature of the territory of the conflict. The Chapter is headed up with a quote attributed to Ernest Rutherford: "We haven't got the money, so we've got to think."

First up, an admission:

6.1 It [is] clear that force structure "hollowness" has been a persistent feature of the Army organisation. Hollowness is the maintenance of organisations that are insufficiently resourced to be operationally useful.

This makes it crystal clear that the strengths or otherwise of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) have nothing to do with actual requirements and capability but are dependent on the funding: that is, the amount allocated for Defence by Federal Parliament.

6.1 cont. This problem persists in the Army. It consumes resources while not delivering capability in meaningful time frames. It has created the paradox that the Army can actually increase useable capability by reducing its organisational size.

Again, the matter of too many stars and not enough supporting actors (see Part Three of this series in the February 19, 2022, edition of News Weekly).

6.13 Headquarters 2nd Division has five subordinate brigades. All the brigades are light infantry brigades staffed predominantly by reservists. The brigades are:

- 4 Brigade – based in Melbourne, staffed at approximately 40 per cent of operational strength with subordinate elements drawn from across the state of Victoria;
- 5 Brigade – based in Sydney, staffed at approximately 30 per cent of operational strength with subordinate elements drawn largely from the Sydney and southern NSW area;
- 8 Brigade – based in Newcastle, staffed at approximately 32 per cent of operational strength with subordinate elements drawn largely from the Newcastle and central NSW region;
- 9 Brigade – based in Adelaide, staffed at approximately 35 per cent of operational strength with subordinate elements drawn from South Australia and Tasmania; and
- 13 Brigade – based in Perth, staffed at approximately 30 per cent of operational strength with subordinate elements drawn from Western Australia.

Although these are historical figures, more than 20 years old, nothing has improved in the interim. Every brigade of the 2nd Division is severely undermanned. Of direct interest to us, based on the fact that WA was at only 30 per cent of operational strength (on current figures, there are only 2,010 soldiers in WA), then there is an immediate need to increase our strength by 4,690 soldiers, to a total of 6,700 soldiers.

Notice also the admission that the brigades are composed mainly of Reserve soldiers, with only a handful of permanent staff.

obfuscate [ob-fuh-skeyt]

verb

1. to confuse, bewilder, or stupefy.
2. to make obscure or unclear; to obfuscate a problem with extraneous information.
3. to darken.

A POWERFUL DOCUMENT

The “Future Land Warfare Report 2014” is frightening in its power of obfuscation. Read on at your own risk.

Conclusion

77. This Future Land Warfare Report is designed to invigorate and refocus the Army’s capability-

based and concept-led approach to modernisation, while also informing the Chief of Army’s modernisation priorities. The contemporary security environment continues to challenge our common assumptions. Accelerating technologies in which information and precision dominate also make it increasingly difficult for

the Army to marry this technology with its core tasks in what is an increasingly cost-conscious Australian Defence Force. Against such a backdrop, this analysis of future land warfare and its implications for the Australian Army is critical, given that an intimate understanding of these implications remains at the heart of the Army’s operational art and pervades its doctrine and training.

U.S. MARINE ROTATIONAL FORCE-DARWIN

The United States has come in for a considerable amount of criticism over the last 30 years for allowing its military forces to weaken to such an extent that it has since the end of the Cold War gone from being in a position to fight two major wars at once – with a good chance of winning both – to being capable of winning only one major war and being barely capable of holding its own in a second today.

But even that shrunken force compares well with the ADF. The ADF commitment based on feet on the ground soldiers is embarrassing to say the least in the presence of just one group of the American Marines that rotate through Darwin.

The Marine Rotational Force-Darwin (MRF-D) brings a contingent of U.S. Marines and their equipment to Northern Australia every dry season. While in Australia, the MRF-D undertakes a range of combined exercises and training with the ADF and regional partners.

The MRF-D has grown in size and complexity since the first rotation of 200 U.S. Marines through Darwin in 2012; that number had reached 2,500 Marines by 2019. It is now a highly capable force that provides significant opportunities to enhance interoperability with the Australian Defence Force.

The American Marines also bring a range of equipment with them, including eight Osprey aircraft and an artillery battery of six M777 Howitzers.

The Veterans’ grapevine confirms that the U.S. Marine contingent is now around 3,800. The indications are that this number of U.S. Marines is in the order of twice the number of ADF personnel in the Northern Territory.

Is it any wonder that comments have been coming from U.S. Congressmen that Australia needs to be seen to be standing up for itself?

That’s a lot of words just to imply that the ADF is underfunded.

This conclusion, which is expressed in same verbose spirit of the entire document, simply makes you wonder for what reason has it been produced and for who’s benefit.

The constant use of catchy generic terminology does nothing for a person with a clear and open mind. It has the effect on the reader, whether the writer deliberately aims at it or not, of undermining his desire to read further.

2020 FORCE STRUCTURE PLAN

Are you ready for this? I don’t think you are; but here goes ...

10.8 Army is entering a period of significant modernisation, while also balancing an expanding commitment to regional partnerships. Under the 2020 Force Structure Plan, Army will initially experience modest growth of around 50 personnel to 2024. Government will consider additional growth beyond 2024 to strengthen a wide range of Army capabilities including intelligence, cyber and electronic warfare; aviation and land combat capabilities; special operations; and vital health, engineering and logistics support functions.

This recent announcement that the Army will grow by 50 personnel by 2024 gives me no confidence that the ADF can do defence, but it sure can do comedy.

A PROPOSAL TO REVIVE CADET TRAINING: INEXPLICABLE SLUGGISHNESS INTERVENES

DEFENCE

PART SIX

PETER BILLINGTON

You help where you can.

The Australian Defence Force's "2016 Defence White Paper" had one paragraph that was clear and concrete enough to be acted on, so it was.

Paragraph 6.58 reads: "The Government, in partnership with the community, will continue to support the ADF cadet program. This personal development program for young people builds personal skills including leadership and teamwork, and promotes Defence as a potential career pathway for its participants. Cadets are an important element of Defence's engagement with the community and the program plays an important role in building community awareness of Defence and the roles of the ADF."

The paragraph makes four very good points about the cadetship program:

1. Community partnership is essential.
2. It can provide personal development for young people.
3. It encourages young people to consider Defence as a career possibility.
4. It engenders greater public awareness of the ADF and its roles.

Thus, taking this paragraph to heart, in 2019 the Royal Australian Engineers Association of Western Australia (RAEA of WA) initiated and established a scholarship for the Australian Army Cadet (AAC) Corps of WA.

At that time, the RAEA of WA committed to two scholarship awards each year for an initial five-year period. The scholarships are awarded each year to two incoming Senior Cadets as they take up appointments as a Regional Cadet Under Officer and as a Cadet Regiment Sergeant Major. The scholarships are valued at \$500 each per year.

Since it established the scholarship program, the RAEA of WA has developed a comprehensive proposal to establish an Army Cadet Apprentices School (ACAS). In August 2020, it produced a brief setting out all the aspects of the proposal. That brief has been promulgated far and wide to many federal and state government ministers and senior WA MLCs and MLAs. Also, of course, it was sent to the WA headquarters of the AAC and Army HQ Canberra.

However, for some reason not yet advised, the proposal has hit a brick wall in the form of an edict from Chief of Army Lieutenant (then Major) General Richard Burr to HQ AAC WA, that no communication whatsoever is to be had with one Peter Billington (that is, the writer of this article, who is also the RAEA of WA representative driving the ACAS proposal and the scholarship program).

This is a funny way to encourage community involvement with the AAC, as paragraph 6.58 quoted above recommends.

In fact, the Chief of Army's position has far greater repercussions than just freezing out conversation. It has had a negative impact on people and organisations that already were or were thinking of becoming contributors to the AAC in WA.

CRICKETS AIN'T CRICKET

The story is simple enough. A group of old "sappers", which included me, here in the West reckoned on promoting the concept of combining the discipline and character of the Army Cadets with the training of apprentices that is critically needed – particularly in the building trades – here in WA.

A detailed brief of the proposal was compiled and circulated far and wide in late 2019 and early 2020, including to the WA Government, the AAC of WA and Army HQ Canberra.

No correspondence has been received from the AAC of WA, not even to a series of "reminder" emails sent over the course of 2020. (See page 20 for a related issue on official communication practices.)

The first we heard of any response had to come via the "grapevine" (old soldiers talk to each other and to younger soldiers!) that an edict has come from AHQ Canberra that we were to be blocked from any further opportunities to advance the ACAS proposal.

Confirmation of this edict was finally received in phone discussions and face-to-face meetings. In a meeting with RAEA of WA president Ian Johnston on November 10, 2020, an AAC WA officer, admitted: "It is not the RAEA of WA that has been blocked out, only Peter [that is, me]."

Well, they say the squeaking wheel gets the oil; in this case it is the coldest of shoulders. The word cloud that comes to mind here includes "nose", "face" and "spite".

Bear in mind, we are, I am, the public, as are 99 per cent of the people who actually organise and run the AAC in WA. By normal standards of courtesy, this attitude is well below par. It does nothing to engender public confidence in the ADF.

Moreover, why is the Chief of Army, a general, personally involved in a matter that is just a proposal? How does he have time for such a low-level issue?

Recall that the RAEA of WA and I were responding to paragraph 6.58 of the "2016 Defence White Paper" and had made connections and commitments with some very generous businesses in the building and construction industry to be part of any programs we got going.

Consequently, due to the Chief of Army's "freeze", there has been no movement on this and the business owners and interested philanthropists are now reluctant to be involved.

Position Establishment	Central WA	North Western Australia	Perth Metropolitan Area	Perth Outer Suburbs	South Western Australia	Total
HQ 13 BDE	s33(a)(ii)					
A SQN 10 LH						
11/28 RWAR						
16 RWAR						
13 CSSB						
109 SIG SQN						
WAUR						
9 REGT RAA						
NORFORCE						
THE PILBARA REGT						
s22						
Total	s33(a)(ii)					

Headcount	Permanent	Reserve	Total
HQ 13 BDE	s33(a)(ii)		
A SQN 10 LH			
11/28 RWAR			
16 RWAR			
13 CSSB			
109 SIG SQN			
WAUR			
9 REGT RAA			
NORFORCE			
THE PILBARA REGT			
s22			
Total	s33(a)(ii)		

FREEDOM TO ASK FOR INFORMATION

It is perfectly understandable that a nation be circumspect about advertising its defence preparedness. That is part of the reason that FOI (Freedom of Information) requests need to be carefully sifted and sometimes redacted so that important confidential information does not escape into the public arena.

The reader will recall that in Part 4 of this series (*News Weekly*, March 5, 2022), I noted that in September 2020 I made an FOI request for some information on troop numbers in Western Australia. I also noted that since making my request, I had found most of the information I required through public means – mainly the internet.

At that time, I first was rebuffed with a blanket rejection and then was granted an external review of my request. More obfuscation and dragging of heels, I concluded. But, as it now turns out, how wrong I was to judge so peremptorily!

Since that article was published, the external review of my request was concluded and a document (redacted lightly) was released to me. Now I can reveal that ... well, see above.

Thank goodness common sense prevailed.

ARMY CADET APPRENTICE SCHOOL: A PROPOSAL TO REVIVE AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM

DEFENCE

PART SEVEN

PETER BILLINGTON

The following is the substance of the proposal for the establishment of an Army Cadet Apprentice School (ACAS) that the Royal Australian Engineers Association of Western Australia (RAEA of WA) made to the Army in Western Australia in 2019, as mentioned in Part Six of this series (see *News Weekly*, April 2, 2022).

Whether the proposal has merit and is realistic or not each reader will decide; but whether it should be subject to the cold-shoulder treatment that has been meted out to it by the Army – as was outlined in Part Six – is not an adequate response.

The authors of this proposal themselves predominately came through the Army apprentice school that existed at Balcolme in Victoria. Our experiences and knowledge are the cornerstone to the contents and reason for this paper. So, the proposal consists very much in seeking to restore what existed before with whatever adjustments need to be made for the different times.

HISTORY OF APPRENTICE TRAINING

In previous times, both federal and state government organisations produced an abundance of well-trained and reliable tradespeople for most industries. Railway workshops, the Public Works Department, the State Housing Department, and the Commonwealth Department of Housing and Construction in every state, are examples of such.

Then, of course, there were the great ADF recruit and apprentice training facilities, such as the Army Apprentices School, RAAF and Navy apprenticeship schools, which were all highly successful.

The Army Apprentices School (AAS) ran from 1948 to 1995. The school produced thousands of highly trained tradesmen, technicians, administrators and professionals in all the disciplines of most industries,

especially the building, electrical, mechanical, electronics and communications industries. These highly trained soldier-tradesmen served Australia well both in their service years and their subsequent civilian-life jobs.

Graduates of the AAS were the backbone of the Royal Australian Engineers and the Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers corps. There was no better way to impart knowledge, skill and discipline and focus on the task at hand, than going through the AAS system.

None of the Army, Navy or Airforce apprentices schools were broken. They all just fell victim of a long period of ill-conceived economic rationalisation that was adopted by both sides of politics. They had been highly successful over many decades, producing excellent, well-trained trades people and service personnel.

PROPOSAL

The two key aims of the ACAS proposal are to build solid character and offer effective apprenticeship training. And, while the focus here is on Western Australia, the perceived need that it seeks to fill applies across Australia.

This proposal envisages an alternative high-school model that incorporates life, living, learning, trade and working role, teaching, security and belonging.

It is believed that a high-school system with the spectrum of a complete village is something that should be seriously considered. Such a facility would have grounds enough to incorporate most aspects of life and living in addition to the normal academic and training functions of a school.

The schooling provided should encompass apprenticeship training, in particular for the building trades, as well as skills for the agricultural and resources industries.

All young people need routine, boundaries and a sense of belonging. A great part of the task is to get kids to want to belong to something and want to care for what they are being provided with. They need encouragement to look after everything around them, which includes all other people and property.

So, the idea is of a high-school system that is foremost based on military-type rules, principles, discipline, and dedication and, above all else, personal pride and discipline. With these standards in place, it is reasonable to expect that the normal function of teaching high-school-aged children can only be enhanced.

Teaching at such a high school would concentrate on subjects that lead to real careers and employment paths. It would offer a combination of the standard high-school curriculum and a complete trade training capability equal to and perhaps even better than the existing TAFE trade training system. The difference being that all students would be Australian Army cadets.

Such a system would be far more intensive than current TAFE trade training because the pupils would be enrolled on a totally live-in basis. The same as for private colleges or the past Australian Army Apprentice School or, indeed, for the British Army Apprentices School system, which started some 170 years ago.

The Army Cadet Apprentice School (ACAS) would be run under the banner of the Australian Army Cadet Brigade. The objective is to establish a base from which to train and form young people, tradespeople, engineers and professionals, all with a great attitude and sound work ethic and always with the intention to inculcate in them the understanding of belonging to “this place” from where they started.

Such a military-style school could serve as a means of dealing with some of the perennial problems with today’s teenagers and young adults.

WHAT WAS

The following is an extract from the *Army Journal*, November 1970 (No. 258), which outlines the principals, methods and teaching (mutatis mutandis) that worked in the past and the success of which the current proposal hopes to replicate:

The Aim

The aim of the Army Apprentices School is to train boys [and girls] to become soldier-tradesmen for service in the Regular Army. The mental and moral qualities are fostered, which are essential in a good soldier and citizen. And which provide fitness for higher rank. Towards realising the aim, the curriculum is designed to provide educational, military, physical and technical training. All this to fit apprentices for service as highly skilled soldier-tradesmen.

Scope of Instruction

The Army Apprentices School curriculum is designed to provide highly skilled soldier-tradesmen for the Army in the trades of: fitters and turners, vehicle mechanics, carpenters and joiners, plumbers and pipefitters, bricklayers, electrical mechanics, electrical fitters, radio mechanics and other trades as may be determined by AHQ. Subsequently, on graduation, soldier-tradesmen have the opportunity to further their technical training. Some become armourers and artificers; others specialise in electronics and radio mechanical spheres.

Trade Training

The trade training is given to apprentices by an integrated military and civilian instructional staff organised into wings. These wings are concerned with metal trades, building trades, electrical trades, motor vehicle training and drawing instruction. The school is fully equipped with the necessary workshops and classrooms to facilitate such instruction. ... Successful apprentices qualify as soldier-tradesmen after their four years of training. They spend a final period under Apprentice Masters in units of the Royal Australian Engineers, Royal Australian Corps of Signals, and the Royal Corps of Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. The qualifications thus gained by the soldier-tradesmen are recognised by the apprentice commissions in all Australian states.

Educational Training

The General Education Wing of the school is staffed by officers of the Royal Australian Army Educational Corps. The wing has the task of preparing apprentices for qualifications up to Leaving Technical Certificate standard. Trade mathematics, trade science and Army First Class Certificate subjects in mathematics and English are taught to all apprentices. Such instruction is mandatory for the successful completion of trade training.

Apprentices who have the necessary qualifications and incentives are given instruction to matriculation level.

The Battalion of Apprentices

The overall command of the school is exercised by a lieutenant colonel. In order to give apprentices the best control and guidance, apprentices are grouped into four Apprentice Companies, which make up the Battalion of Apprentices, commanded by a major, the Supervisor of Military Training.

All apprentices who are in their first year of training are grouped in a company. This enables the military staff to devote their particular attention to the newcomer who requires considerable guidance and man-management during his settling-in period. ...

Great care is taken to select only the most suitable NCOs for posting to the school, as apprentices, owing to their age, require a special type of treatment.

The school thus has to assume heavy responsibilities for apprentices beyond those normally encountered in military units, where members are adults.

Discipline

The apprentices are subject to the same military code of discipline as the rest of the Army.

Conclusion

The foresight shown before 1948 when it was decided to train soldier-tradesmen has yielded great dividends in skilled manpower and leadership material for the Army. The Army Apprentices School is now well established with a proud tradition of over 21 years' service. It has attained the potential for further expansion to satisfy the increasing needs of our growing modern Army in the provision of soldier-tradesmen.

ARMY CADET APPRENTICE SCHOOL: REPLACE THE DISFUNCTIONAL TAFE SYSTEM

DEFENCE

PART EIGHT

PETER BILLINGTON

Recently (April 7), Minister for Defence Peter Dutton announced a \$1 billion over 10 years to upgrade Reserve and Cadet facilities around the country. The investment, according to Mr Dutton, will support the growth of the ADF Cadets by 10 per cent over the next year.

This is most welcome and hopefully is just the start of redeveloping cadet apprenticeship training as was outlined in these pages (*News Weekly*, April 16, 2022) and has been proposed by the Royal Australian Engineers Association of Western Australian (RAEA WA) since 2019.

As Assistant Defence Minister Andrew Hastie commented of the investment: "As a former cadet myself, I know first-hand that cadets provide young Australians with opportunities to lead, grow and serve our country. It is a vital part of Defence's contribution to building Australia's future leaders."

Hear, hear! Complete agreement from this corner of WA. Let's hope these encouraging words are backed up with solid planning and reliable assessment of the country's actual needs so that the money promised now is well spent and becomes part of a continuing investment rather than serving as a mere sop for a certain segment of voters with an election in view.

INEFFECTIVE TAFE SYSTEM

Mr Dutton also said: "In addition to the more traditional skills developed through the program, future cadets will also be engaged in STEM-focused activities including cyber security, virtual reality simulation, robotics and flight simulation."

That, too, sounds terrific; and I feel sure that he will take it the right way when I say that, speaking at least for Western Australia, the existing TAFE system that trains our apprentices is a shambles.

There are really only two TAFE colleges in WA that actually teach apprentices, including in the building

trades. This is so because, although there are about 50 TAFE campuses throughout all the metropolitan and regional areas of WA, the actual instructing and examining is all done by the North and South Metropolitan TAFEs in Perth.

Nearly all trades people who have completed a trade training certificate come through the North and South Metropolitan TAFEs in Perth. A few others come through the Bunbury, Kalgoorlie, Geraldton and Albany campuses. The bulk of the other TAFE campuses throughout the state have little or no success. Remote TAFE campuses produce very few completed apprenticeships.

Why is this so? A principle drawback of the TAFE system as it exists at present is that it is a scheme based on hosting.

The idea is that Group Training Organisations (GTO) gather young people under the banner of an Apprentice Trainer who will give the apprenticeship on-the-job training. However, the GTO is just a company keeping the names of young people on a list from which they are allocated out to a subcontractor/tradie when there is the opportunity.

As a result of insufficient oversight, the result is that most apprentices will go through the hands of numerous subcontractors as they study to complete their apprenticeship. And this is the prime reason that so many apprentices drop out.

Each time an apprentice goes to a new subcontractor or tradie, it is on the young apprentice to adjust to the personality and work standards of the new boss. This is the same as changing your job, where each time there is stress and apprehension.

Most of us will experience this only half a dozen times in our entire working life. Many young apprentices experience this more than that each year of their three-year course.

Within some of the GTOs, it is not uncommon for an apprentice to go out to a subcontractor for as short a period as a day or two. There are cases

where apprentices have been shunted around 30 or more times and are still going as they have not yet completed their three-year apprenticeship.

The most salient result of this is a dropout rate of 50 per cent.

In support of this, one of the biggest builders in WA says: "The information we have here is that 35 per cent don't make it through the first year and only 50 per cent of those that start will complete."

This is not the way to handle on-the-job trade training. Furthermore, the cost for maintaining and running these campuses must be enormous.

Thus, a high-school system that combines regular academic education and trade training, as is envisaged in the RAEA WA proposal for a revitalised Army Cadet Apprentice School, would alleviate the need for these costly and ineffective TAFEs.

BENEFITS FOR THE ADF

The ADF has a dismal public profile and suffers from a lack of general public interest, especially among the young, and especially when it comes to choosing a career.

None of the existing "touch and see"-type programs have adequate durations and therefore do not cover enough aspects of real Army life to be of much benefit in enticing prospective recruits. A single day or week for people to experience "the life of a soldier" is not even close to what is needed to put someone on the path to want to join the Army.

To garner interest and foster a desire to be part of any activity it is necessary to set in place a continuous means of encouragement.

The Army Cadet Apprentice School (ACAS) would do this. The military experience that students would gain through their years at the ACAS would be just as profound as their trade training. And they would certainly be greatly encouraged to consider the ADF as a possible career choice for their future.

A BIGGER FOOTPRINT FOR WA: A SECOND ARMY AND A GARRISON TOWN

DEFENCE

PART NINE

PETER BILLINGTON

If the major parties have been able to agree on anything at this so-called “khaki election”, it must have been to talk a bit about defence and security, throw some money in the air and refuse to take a long, strategic look at the real needs of the country. For no one in government or striving to govern or among the Defence elite themselves have gone anywhere near the critical question of what do we require in our armed forces to ensure that we make Australia a porcupine: too dangerous to attack.

Well, in our modest way, we offer the suggestions herein.

THE PROBLEM

Look through the writings of Security and Defence experts and Australian Defence Force (ADF) papers and structure/posture reviews, and you will find many passages about how difficult the conditions are in the north of Australia.

These are the same conditions that our mining and resource industries and our cattle industries and the like operate in and do their jobs to contribute greatly to Australia's wealth. However, our ADF and the experts who write about the ADF contend that it is impossible to maintain and operate a military force in such country.

On July 9, 2015, Dr Nathan Church of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security Section of the Parliamentary Library published a research paper entitled, “The Australian Defence Force in northern Australia”.

The Executive Summary to that paper reads:

“The Australian Defence Force (ADF) regards northern Australia as strategically important, both for national defence and as a forward base for regional engagement. The ADF presence in northern Australia also directly contributes to the economic and social development of the region.

“A substantial amount of new ADF

assets will either be based or operate in the vicinity of northern Australia, requiring new or upgraded facilities. These include new strike and patrol aircraft, as well as the landing helicopter docks (LHDs), Australia's largest ever warships. The increasing presence of U.S. Marine rotations within northern Australia will also require additional infrastructure and base capacity.

“However, future growth in the ADF's northern Australia presence is constrained. Climate factors affect the ADF's ability to operate in the region and maintain its infrastructure, while northern Australia's distance from major population centres increases resource costs and can impede retention of personnel. Accordingly, the most cost-effective improvements will likely come through more efficient defence sustainment provided by local northern Australia defence industries.”

So, here is an expert stating that the ADF is constrained due to climate factors and that the troops will not be happy because they are far away from major population centres.

Dr Church also, very sensibly, writes that a new operational base in northern Australia is needed.

If these are serious hindrances, then it is proper to ask, what thought has been put into doing something to overcome them?

CLIMATE FACTORS

Assuming that Dr Church is referring to Darwin and the Northern Territory and not to the North and North West of Western Australia, then he does have a point. However, I point out, with a touch of professional pride and awareness, that it is not usual for a Defence Force to decide the climatic conditions under which it operates; or how far it is from the nearest sporting arena.

But, as it happens, in the case of our Army, we do have an alternative to sticking all our Defence assets

into the extreme tropical climatic environment of Darwin and the NT: establish a major Army capability outside these locations.

GARRISON TOWN

However, to accommodate the climatic and social needs of the modern ADF, the suggestion is to establish an all-capabilities, massive “garrison” town in the Pilbara in WA. It could be located to the east of the Exmouth Gulf, at or about the same latitude as RAAF Base Learmonth (currently a bare base).

This garrison town would have every Corps and aspect of the Army. It would be planned and constructed around the principles and requirements of an entire army. And it can serve as the headquarters of a Second Australian Army, whose responsibility will be the entire state of Western Australia and more.

The initial strength envisaged for the Second Army is in the order of 10,000 soldiers. Anything less than this would be detrimental to the structure and capability of the Second Army to operate, build, grow and carry out its state-wide northern regions responsibilities.

In addition to the garrison town's military facilities, the concept of a normal large regional town anywhere in Australia should be followed and all amenities required be incorporated into its development.

The fact that mining companies have created many towns in the North West of WA in the past shows that this can be done.

The largest of these towns include:

Tom Price – Rio	(Pop 4,000)
Paraburdoo – Rio	(Pop 2,000)
Newman – BHP	(Pop 4,000)
Dampier – Rio	(Pop 3,500)

All of these towns were planned, built and provided with every amenity and facility equal to and in many cases better than many towns in Australia.

SECOND ARMY SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE AND DEFENCE CAPABILITY

Critical elements of the Second Army would include the following:

★ The initial and a substantial component of the Second Army to be made up of Royal Australian Engineers (RAE). This is to enable the Second Army to construct much of its own infrastructure. All earthworks and site works and site establishments including accommodation and amenities buildings would be foremost.

★ Air Force upgrades and additional facilities as required to service and support the Second Army, specifically:

RAAF (Bare) Base Learmonth to be upgraded to be a standalone fully operational air base at least equal in capability to Tindal in the Northern Territory.

RAAF (Bare) Base Curtin, east of Broome, to be upgraded and built to be a fully operational air base. The Air Cavalry could be based at and operated from both Learmonth and Curtin.

★ Several Forward Operational Bases or Fire Support Bases throughout Western Australia. These bases would be structured and manned on the principle of quick and effective battle response to any situation within their area.

★ Air Cavalry. Helicopter groups in place of or complementing Armour. It is a well-established fact that heavy armoured vehicles, tanks especially, find the going tough wherever they are, let alone in our extreme geographical conditions. The main base for the whole Helicopter wing in the Second Army to be at the garrison town.

★ Forward Operational Bases to have at least four dedicated helicopters with all back-up, maintenance and replacement from the garrison town headquarters. Personnel Carrying/Fighting Vehicles. A large contingent of personnel carrying and fighting vehicles will be needed to match the requirements of the Second Army. Serious consideration should be given to manufacturing the personnel carrying vehicles in WA as an opportunity for the Australian Defence Industry (ADI) to get some runs on the board.

★ Small Patrol Boats. The fleet's main headquarters base should be in Exmouth Gulf. Establish several forward operational bases with, say, three boats at each. Indicative locations would be: Onslow, Dampier, Port Headland, Broome and Derby. Total boats required would be equal to having at least six at base, three at each forward operational base and six to cover rotation, servicing and maintenance.

★ Observation and Reconnaissance Posts. Several observation and reconnaissance posts, especially in the remote Kimberley coastal areas which have access issues where ground vehicle movement is restricted, need to be established. These bases to have high-speed troop carrying inflatable boats (two per base) and an all-weather helipad. Each base to be made up of an oversized section, comprising Signals, Engineers, Infantry and Navy. Suggested base locations are: Beagle Bay, Cockatoo Island, Cape Bougainville, and Cambridge Gulf. The control and support headquarters to be at the garrison town.

★ Fuel Dumps. Underground concrete storage tanks across the whole North West of WA for both air and ground vehicles.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S SECOND ARMY: YOU KNOW I'M RIGHT – LET'S JUST DO IT

DEFENCE

PART TEN

PETER BILLINGTON

At several points throughout this series of articles, there has been reason to advert to the fact that, over the last 80 years, successive governments from both sides of the political divide (as well as Australian Defence Force leaders) have failed to develop – let alone implement – a realistic strategy to defend this country.

In relation to Western Australia, which has been the focus of this series of articles, the consequence is that the whole of the North West of WA, with its much vaunted and valuable mineral and resource industries and infrastructure, is vulnerable and defenceless.

CLEAR AND PRESENT INEPTITUDE

Not one of our ADF chiefs over this time has thought to formulate a detailed plan of the entire ADF in terms that set down locations, or quantified assets and manpower; both what we have and what we need.

Even amid the up to 50,000 pieces of “defence and security” articles, papers and reviews there have been no assessments of what is required to develop an overall defence strategy.

What we have had, rather, are *ad-hoc* reactions to political circumstances in which a government is suddenly wakened out of its slumber and sets to throwing money in huge chunks, hither and thither (such as is occurring right now). Billions for F-35 jets; billions for submarines; billions for frigates.

Well and good. But to aid in what overall strategy? (Ukraine, meanwhile, has shown that we could do worse than invest in drones from the local electronics store).

While the United States (through NATO) and Western Europe have the vivid testimony of a hot war on their

doorstep, we have to pay attention to the alarming developments in our own neighbourhood; developments that we have been warned about in the ancient stratagems of Sun Tzu (for instance: “To fight and conquer in all our battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting”).

The communist Government of China has built no holiday resorts in the South China Sea and its plans for the Solomon Islands and Papua will not involve hotels and sun and surf and piña colodas. But now that we are aware of what the Chinese communists *are* doing there, we must act urgently in our own interests to develop our defence capabilities.

The massive build-up and investment in the defence and security of the entire country (in particular the North West of WA) now just has to happen. The cost now is absolutely a secondary consideration. Ultimately, a country will have the military capabilities and defences that it is prepared to pay for. Still, it is what the spending delivers rather than the spending itself that really counts.

The bottom line, if it is not too late to emphasise, is that our military forces should always be funded, supplied and supported at least to be in a position to be capable of defending the entire country. That is not the case at this moment.

NATION BUILDING

Australia is in a pickle at the moment due to the impact of the covid19 pandemic. A recovery strategy has to be developed to generate jobs and build the economy up again.

There are many examples from the past of huge projects being tackled both to create jobs and to deliver a facility or service for the betterment

of the country and the people. The biggest and most relevant project that Australia took on and achieved was the Snowy Mountain Hydro-Electric Scheme.

Its aims were several: to shift water from the coastal regions towards the interior of New South Wales and Victoria, thereby providing vast inland areas where rainfall is unreliable and droughts are frequent with reliable water for communities and irrigation; to generate electricity to keep up with the needs of a developing nation; and to attract migrant workers to Australia to boost the population (in the immediate postwar years, hundreds of thousands of people displaced by World War II came to Australia).

The American Society of Engineers in 1967 nominated the Snowy Mountains Scheme as one of the engineering wonders of the world.

Not far behind the Snowy Mountain Scheme for boldness and magnitude, not to mention usefulness, would sit Sydney Harbour Bridge. Another on the list would be the Goldfields water pipeline (see box).

Australia needs a big project right now to replicate the effects that the Snowy Mountain Scheme had on development, the economy and employment.

The building of an entire Second Army in Western Australia is just that project. And if ever a federal government should commit to such a nation-building project, it is now.

CAN WE AGREE ON THE NEED FOR A SECOND ARMY?

The first task is to achieve an appreciation of where Australia, Western Australia and the North West of WA sit in the scheme of all things defence and security.

Australia is in a bad position and has been for decades. But until the whole population of the country perceives that fact, there is no way forward. Australia is in the situation of a drug addict or alcoholic (that is, of someone who cannot be helped until they admit they have a problem.) This, as John Blackburn has affirmed in these pages (“I Love My Complacent Country: But, Wake Up, Australia”, *News Weekly*, April 16, 2022), seems to be Australians’ cardinal sin (“She’ll be right, mate”).

AND THE INCUMBENTS?

Astute readers will note that the ADF has not been mentioned in this discussion. This is because it should not be included in the process of the establishment of a Second Army.

This is so because the decision to establish a Second Army must be a democratic decision. The decision must be free of interference by an organisation that is part of the public service and might threaten to veto anything that the public agrees on.

The ADF will be advised, ordered and instructed on the decision and will be part of the organising body of stakeholders. But it will not lead or control the planning and building phases of this proposition.

There are many other reasons for this exclusion; not the least being that the Australian Defence Force has had 80 years to come up with a plan for the defence and security of Western Australia and the North West of that state and has repeatedly failed to do so.

THE GOLDFIELDS WATER SUPPLY SCHEME

In the past, our forefathers took on and delivered projects with only a little of the technology and equipment we have at our disposal today.

The greatest West Australian example of such a project in the past was the building of the Water Supply Pipeline to Coolgardie and the Kalgoorlie-Boulder region.

The project was commissioned in 1896 and completed in 1903.

During the early 1890s, thousands of prospectors had travelled to the dry desert centre of Western Australia in search of gold, but there was no existing infrastructure for the supply of water. Water condensers, irregular rain, and water trains provided some stop-gap solutions.

In 1896, the West Australian Parliament authorised the raising of a loan of £2.5 million to construct the pipeline. The pipeline would carry 23,000 kilolitres of water per day to the Goldfields from a dam on the Helena River near Mundaring in Perth.

The scheme consisted of three key elements: the Mundaring Weir, which dammed the Helena River in the Darling Scarp creating the Helena River Reservoir; a 760-millimetre diameter steel pipe that ran from the dam to Kalgoorlie 530 kilometres away; and a series of eight pumping stations and two small holding dams to control pressures and to lift the water over the Darling Scarp.

Some members of the West Australian Parliament as well as the local press derided the scheme based on a belief that the engineering task was too great and that it would never work. There was also a concern that the gold discoveries would soon dry up and the state would be left with a big debt to repay with little or no commerce to support it.

They were wrong and the pipeline continues to operate today, supplying water to over 100,000 people in over 33,000 households as well as mines, farms and other enterprises.

Australians and in particular West Australians have the skill and ability, all they need is the will, which comes with support and approval.

Source: Wikipedia