

## **PAPER 1 - THE TANGE AND SUBSEQUENT REORGANISATIONS**

### **AN OVERVIEW**

Defence has always been a target for the bureaucrats and the Treasury, the former looking for ways to increase their sphere of influence, the latter seeing the Services as an easy area for limiting outlays without the government of the day suffering much risk of any loss of votes. In both cases, the security of Australia and the welfare of Service members have not rated highly as factors to be considered.

With WWII approaching, the Government decided to form separate departments for Navy, Army, Air Force, and Supply on the grounds that the span of control was far too great for one department to handle. It was a wise move, as we needed prompt, disciplined, focussed, and well-planned action rather than bureaucratic administration. The failure of the Aircraft Production Commission was a salutary lesson as to how unsuited bureaucracies were to working within a defence environment.

This wartime organisation persisted after the war, working under various pressures. In 1957, under the guise of a perceived need for better coordination, Lt Gen Sir Leslie Morshead conducted a review which recommended the amalgamation of the four Defence Departments into one single department reporting to the Minister for Defence. This recommendation was rejected by the Government, but a Chiefs of Staff Committee was introduced to provide better coordinated, high-level advice.

Following some changes during the 1960s, including a reduction in the power of the Service Chiefs and the formation of a Policy Planning Branch, both aimed at ensuring a more coordinated approach to strategic assessments, the Secretary of Defence, Sir Arthur Tange, undertook a major reorganisation during the period 1973-76. DR T.B. Miller, a well-respected analyst at the time, warned that the move would result in a *'giant step along the road to Public Service (as opposed to Parliamentary) control of the armed forces'*. Neil James in his review of the recent biography of Sir Arthur Tange (*Defender* magazine, Autumn 2006) also makes some points worth noting:

*"...not covered at all well is the divide-and-rule approach of some mandarins – and their subjective resentment of the direct command and control relationship between responsible Ministers and their Service Chiefs. More generally, the long standing opposition and delay of effective 'jointery' (because joint command of the ADF threatened the claimed 'neutral arbiter' role enjoyed by public service powerbrokers) is similarly not discussed.*

*The telling fact that Australia, alone in the Western world, amalgamated the Service departments (in 1974) long before constituting an effective joint-Service, strategic- level command structure (in 1989) is simply not mentioned.*

*...Tange used the opportunity of the impatient Whitlam Government, and the anti-military atmosphere after the Vietnam War, to force through without due process the abolition of the statutory Service (and Supply) Boards – and the direct Minister to Service Chief (and vice versa) strategic, financial and moral accountability (and mutual knowledge) this entailed."*

The Defence Efficiency Review/Defence Reform Programme of more recent years proceeded along lines similar to the Tange review, with a consequent total disregard for the Services and their needs.

Following the Tange changes, those 'two-star' appointments in the RAAF, now with responsibilities to both the Secretary of Defence and their Service chief, in areas such as material acquisition and logistics were made 'two-hatted' – a concept that conflicted directly with the principle of unity of direction so central to military efficiency and effectiveness. The concept, which soon proved to be wasteful of resources, encouraged internal conflict and entrenched authority within the bureaucracy without accountability. It was ineffectual and only led to civilian 'double-guessing' those with prime, functional, military accountability.

In terms of force structure, the central problem which was to have been solved still remained, and will probably be with us always:

*Who gets what slice of the resource cake?*

Even today, with the Service Chiefs now 'under control', this central problem remains, so the Tange solution would seem to have been an expensive failure. Dr Allan Hawke, on taking up the position of Secretary, Department of Defence in 2000, 26 years after Tange, had to admit that his department was grossly incompetent. However, this only resulted in 'more of what we have' – more bureaucrats and more Service functions transferred to them, resulting in a continuing dysfunctional bureaucratic organisation and much weakened armed services.

The evolution of the Defence structure and its impacts upon the organisation of the Services have been long and painful, involving the wholesale de-skilling of the technology-based services, especially the RAAF, and a long-demonstrated inability on the part of the bureaucracy to do those functions which used to be done within the RAAF with little fuss and largely as a matter of routine.

One might well argue that the Tange reorganisation was flawed and went ahead pretty much out of control. Unfortunately, this was not corrected, but was perpetuated and deepened with the DER/DRP. The evidence over the past 32

years may well suggest that the management of Australia's Defence is well beyond the capability of a closed-shop, centralised, and remote public service bureaucracy to manage in any detail, and that the Services need to be re-skilled and, as a minimum, have their in-service support responsibilities returned to them.

### *Some Tange/DER/DRP Implications in Retrospect*

Before the Tange reorganisation of Defence, there were four ministers within the Defence Group of Departments (ignoring Supply), those of Defence, Navy, Army, and Air. Each minister had a secretary and a small civilian staff. There were thus four ministers within Government to argue and manage service and defence matters. These ministers were supported somewhat by the comprehension of those members of Cabinet, Government, and Parliament who had spent time in the Services or in the Defence Departments. In short, there was a reasonably informed base of knowledge for the discussion and resolution of Defence and Service matters. It is important to remember that there was usually a close bond of understanding and a strong sense of shared responsibility between the Service Minister and his Secretary and the Service Chief, and there was generally a good measure of faith and confidence in those relationships. There was also a fairly strong sense of unity of direction. The span of control of each of the ministers was probably just right.

The pre-Tange arrangements may be summarised as follows:

- There was a direct command and control relationship between the Minister and his Service Chief.
- There was a direct Minister to Service Chief (and vice-versa) strategic, financial, and moral accountability.
- There was thus a high level of direct accountability.
- There was an effective span of control.
- There was a trust born of mutual knowledge and responsibility.

The single reason given for pressing for changes in the Defence group of departments was a perceived need for greater 'jointery', that is, the ability of the Services to work together when joint planning and operations are required. Judging from the lack of real improvements in 'jointery' post-Tange, the reason given now seems to be more of a Trojan Horse. While Australian Defence Force elements certainly need to act in an effective and cohesive manner when required, there is an overwhelming difference, in technological and skills terms, between the three Service arms which, if not recognised fully, will impact adversely their individual capabilities as well as the effectiveness of their joint operations. The lack of such recognition is probably behind many of our current Defence difficulties.

Finally, despite continual bureaucratic structural changes, 'jointery' has remained a major problem to this day.

The Tange changes reduced the Defence presence in Cabinet, Government, and Parliament to one Minister (with an assistant, largely ineffectual in important Defence matters), a Secretary, and an 'army' of bureaucrats. In conjunction with a marked reduction over the years in the number politicians having any military background, this has resulted in a drastic reduction in the strength and quality of the debate and management of Military matters in Cabinet, Government, and Parliament. Instead of ministers arguing their cases from a position of direct involvement with the Military, we now have one minister, demonstrably incapable of managing, or even influencing significantly, the complex, monolithic bureaucracy that is now the Department of Defence. As he generally brings no background of expertise in Defence matters to the appointment, and is wholly occupied in avoiding or minimising current and latent catastrophes, he becomes to a large degree the spokesman and apologist for the bureaucracy, his sole source of advice. The system thus drives the Minister who will, understandably, recognise that he is largely incapable of making any real and lasting improvements to his Department. The bureaucratic system thus drives the Minister to 'holding the line', hopefully so that no great catastrophes occur on his shift that might well impact his future political career or last appointment.

This situation has arisen to a large extent because politicians on all sides did not have sufficient background or the time/interest to inform themselves in any detail as to the practical and obvious implications of the Tange proposals and those of the Defence Efficiency Review and the subsequent Defence Reform Programme. The structural changes that were imposed on the Services, who were completely unable to make their voices heard, have led to a situation where the Military has come under civilian control, rather than civil control through Parliament, as should be the case.

*Air Cdre E.J. Bushell AM (Retd)*

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