

Address to the Duntroon Society by
Major General Cape

10 July 2002

Ladies and Gentlemen, I want firstly to say how honoured I am at the numbers and the quality of the audience that is gathered here this afternoon. Secondly, I would like to make my excuses. Firstly, I don't have a university degree – they weren't fashionable in the days when I graduated. I am not a historian, and I am not a researcher. In my final retirement, I still pinch myself, its 30 years this year since I retired, not since I graduated. So, my hobby now is two-fold. One is, in my view, the ignorance of the extraordinarily unusual situation in our Country in relation to our Military Force and the officers that trained and managed it. It is a very unique situation and is my hobby number one. Hobby number two is the magnificent representation in our War Memorial of what this Country has done in wars, but with a considerable absence of detail of the most unusual Military Organisation between the wars. So that is the background of what I hope to say to you this afternoon.

We have to go back to 1870, when the British forces totally withdrew, and at that stage there was a considerable concern about invasion – somebody woke up one day and found an American warship in Sydney Harbour, and that I believe was the beginning of the buildings of the Fort Denison. There was quite a doubt about what the Germans might do later on, and so coastal Defence in the Colonies after the departure of the British forces became the paramount factor. Each Colony was sovereign in its own right, and it is interesting to look at the strength of the officers of the Permanent Military Forces of the Colonies, at the introduction of Federation. There were 42 regular officers in NSW, 27 in Victoria, 22 in Queensland, 15 in South Australia, 6 in Western Australia, and Tasmania was really building it up, and they had 3. So, there was a total of 115 regular officers in the whole of the new Commonwealth of Australia.

Soon after Federation started, General Hutton came out here. He had commanded the Colonial Forces in

NSW, then gone to Canada, and came back out here in 1902 and put up a whole series of proposals of the organisation of the Military Force. There was an extraordinary attitude within the Government. Firstly, they wanted to have no Permanent Military Force, secondly they viewed with great suspicion any suggestion of a military cult and the jack-booted military – they wanted all the Force to be citizens on a part time basis. Hutton put up a first proposal, which was rejected by the Government, and it was only after much more discussion, including a meeting of all the then State Commandants in 1902 which resulted in the first Defence Act, *The Defence Act 1903*, which specifically spelt out that we would have a Citizen Force. The Permanent Force would be basically for Coastal Defence, and that the training of the Citizen Force would be in the hands of a small group, who would be responsible only for administration and training.

Hutton was instrumental in getting the proposals he had put up sufficiently altered and developed to be acceptable and resulted in the 1903 original Defence Act. The Parliamentary debates when this Act was drafted stressed that the country was not going to be subject to any jack-booted military. There would only be a Permanent Force for Coastal Defence and administration and for the Administration Service, including Ordnance and Medical etc. The Garrison artillery in 1904 consisted therefore in total of 43 officers and 900 odd other ranks, and they were the bulk of the Permanent Military Forces.

The other fundamental thing in the first *Defence Act* was that the Army would not be permitted to serve outside territorial Australia. The universal service of a Citizen Force would therefore be the basis of the Army. This really wasn't going too well for the first 5 or 6 years – there were constant debates in the Parliament, constant proposals put up by Hutton and others, until in 1909 the *Universal Serve Amendment* to the *Defence Act* was passed by the Parliament. The Act however, was not in fact implemented at this stage. In 1910 Kitchener made a full report on the status of the Australian Military Forces. One of his fundamental recommendations, which was implemented, was that we had to have somewhere to

train officers, and he proposed that the Royal Military should be established. He specified that it should be based on the organisation of the Royal Military College of Canada, and of West Point, rather than of Sandhurst and Woolwich. He considered that the organisation of these establishments was more appropriate for the Australian requirement. And so, the Royal Military College decision was taken, and the College was established here in 1911. The whole question of the training and administration of the Citizen Force was to be carried out by the college graduates and warrant officers of the Permanent Forces. I stress that it is only numerically a very small element of the total Permanent Forces, the bulk of which was in coast Defences. In 1910, as a result also of the Kitchener proposals, a compulsory military Citizen Force was established by an amendment to the *Defence Act*, and that was really the start of the CMF as we know it.

Then came WWI, and of course Australia very rightly said we must be in this, we must help the Empire. However the lawyers said sorry, the Force can't go outside Australia, and that is the origin of this extraordinary organisation called the Australian Imperial Force, an organisation that might have been the Nicaraguan Army or any other Army – it was totally separate in its organisation, in its condition of service, and it had to be voluntary and it could serve anywhere in the World. It is interesting to note that although they were strictly limited in what they could do, and none of them were in any command situations, in World War I. 133 RMC graduated served, and 37 of them were killed in action. There was a very clear ban placed and recorded in speeches in Parliament and Regulations, that under no circumstances would any Permanent Force officer be allowed to be promoted above the rank of Major, in the AIF. Right at the end, almost without permission, a few permanent officers, including a few RMC graduates, were promoted as Brevet Lieutenants Colonels, but they were never confirmed in that rank. At the end of the war and with the disbanding of the AIF which was a requirement of the Act, the Minister stressed that the PMF officers were only for instruction and administration and PMF officers who served in the AIF reverted to their Staff

Corp ranks. Indeed, 20 graduates in fact retired (1918/1919).

The atmosphere of the Washington Conference coming up was such that things military were in a tremendous decline in terms of popularity within the community. In the October of 1920 there were less entry's into the RMC than there were slots to be filled, so 'out of fashion' was the idea of wars and armies and such things in the 1920s. In October 1920, the Staff Corps as such was established, and all the Regular Officers were put into this one Corps. The Australian Instruction Corps was formed for warrant officers and the like. So the period of the 20s was one of an extreme lack of interest in things military. Then, in 1929 the depression arrived. The first thing the new Labour government did was to abolish compulsory military training, and retrenched 65 Staff Corp. Attachments to the British and Indian Armies were stopped, and for those who remained, the requirement of eight weeks leave without pay was introduced. Then, when things really got tough in compensation, unlike the ones that had gone in 1922.

In 1930 RMC of Duntroon was moved to Sydney. When our class joined we lifted the total strength of the Corps of Staff Cadets to 26 – there was no First Class – I was sitting up here at a graduation parade 5 or 6 years ago and 108 marched off and they left about 200 parade. I said to some young General sitting beside me "Isn't that impressive? A total of over 300: When we joined in we lifted the total cadet strength to 26!" He looked at me, you could have written it on his forehead with lipstick if you had lipstick, his reaction was 'the poor old bugger, he's forgotten the nought, there couldn't have been less than 260 cadets'.

The 1934 entry had three years in Sydney, and then we came back to Duntroon in 1937 as First Class, and the strength of the Corps had lifted then to 57. The main point I want to make is the attitude of the community, and the treatment that Staff Corps officers got, particularly in relation to rank and pay. At our Sports Ball, we always used to give members of the staff funny little presents. Amongst the line up at

our Sports Ball in 1937 was Major Rourke who had just been gazetted as a Major in the Staff Corps. He had been a major in the AIF in 1917, and he had been wearing a crown on his shoulder from then, but paid as a Staff Corp Lieutenant and later Captain, so we gave him two more crowns. But to think that a staff Corps Officer was treated in that way is almost unbelievable.

In a speech in Parliament when arrangements for the raising of the Second AIF were being made it was stated that no permanent officer would be permitted to rise above the rank of Major. However, this was totally blown up when the Japanese joined the war in 1942. When the Japanese War became evident that was vastly changed and we ended up in the War with the majority of formations, divisions and brigades in the then Second AIF being commanded by regular officers of the Staff Corps.

It was most desirable that Australia took part in the occupation of Japan and this totally foxed the Government because once the War was over the AIF had to be disbanded. The Defence Act did not permit Regular Field Force units. The only units you were allowed to have were Coast Artillery other than administrative and training people. So in 1948 the Defence Act was once again amended to provide what was then the Interim Army, and subsequently it was all sorted out and the Act was changed to permit the raising of a Regular Army and that is the beginning of our Regular Field Force.

A surprising number of people don't know that and won't recognise it, but it is fundamental to our military future. We have to remember firstly that we were the first country to have very emotional ideas about the structure of our Defence Force, and even whether we should have one at all, and it was definitely carrying on from South Africa the theory that if you gave an Australian a rifle and a horse he was the best soldier in the world. This might have been true for him but it didn't say much for the staff organisation and the command organisation that was to train and administer him.

With the requirement for the occupation of Japan, an Interim Army was formed. 34 Brigades were formed with 65, 66 and 67 Battalions and we went up there and did our job. That period I believe was unique in the history of the British Empire. You can then go back and look at the constant efforts that were made from the UK to take command and control of the Dominion Forces in peace and in war. They were constantly and very rightly resisted by our Government. Later on when the Australian Regiment was formed they were redesignated as 1, 2 & 3 RAR and 3 RAR went off to Korea straight from Japan. The point I want to make is the total different situation Staff Corp Officers found themselves in the end of that. I remember, in 1948, a group of us sitting in the Mess down at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne saying whatever is going to happen to the Interim Army. Before we knew that the Regular Army was going to happen and a couple of my vintage resigned without a pension or anything because they reckoned that the chances of being treated the same way as our forbearers after World War I was pretty high.

I will never forget this. Genera Rowell who was DCGS came over and was chatting to us and said "What are you fellas talking about?" and we told him, because these are the things you remember so much and I will never forget that he looked at the six of us sitting around, and he said "I would like you gentlemen to know that we will never ever let happen to you in 1949 what happen to us in 1919."

Six months later, we were all gazetted back into the Staff Corps with our AIF substantive ranks. He was absolutely true to his word. A total difference in the approach to the Staff Corps officers who were still in the system after the war, to realise that we were not going to be treated as what subsequently became, a Regular Army. But I do believe that this history, I quoted to you Henry Rourke, the other was H.C.H. Robertson who was a Lieutenant Colonel in 1914, and he didn't get this rank and pay in the Staff Corps until 1937.

So all I can say to you all have inherited a situation now, and the graduates of this Establishment have inherited a situation as a result of 100 years of

extraordinary unusual, difficult and in some cases, unpleasant treatment of those who sort the profession of arms in the Permanent Forces of Commonwealth after federation.