

## **GENERAL JOHN BAKER AC DSM – EULOGY**

The John Bakers of the world are few and far between.

John Stuart Baker was born in Melbourne on 24 February 1936 and named after his parents John Clifford Baker and Marjorie Amelia Stuart. Second in the batting order, John's sisters Margaret and Jean are with us; his younger brother David not being well enough to travel.

The Baker line stems from Ballarat; the Stuarts from Aberdeen in Scotland.

John's father was a Warrant Officer in WW11, serving at Milne Bay, working on logistics. After demobilisation, he worked on the Victorian Railways, scheduling the timetables for the trains. Our John inherited a similar build and personality to his father, even down to their passion for smoking. John's unprepossessing stature led many to underestimate him, often at their cost, a lesson they learnt the first time. For my part, he and I always saw eye to eye - physically, and in almost every other sense.

Growing up in Kensington, John attended Christian Brothers' Parade College in East Melbourne where he did well scholastically, especially in the maths and science areas, as Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston mentioned in respect of RMC. From the early days, John had his sights set on the Defence Force, perhaps the Air Force, but the flow of engineering through his family's veins led inevitably to the Army.

John met Margaret when he was a second year Duntroon cadet at a farewell function for one of Margaret's friends. Their courtship followed from that; they were married here in St Christopher's in 1959 and inseparable from that time on.

The children Jenine and John (aka Joey) were born in Melbourne in 1960 and 1961 and Noel came along in Hawaii in 1965. (Noel tried in vain to convince her father to change her

name to Noelle, but John Preferred the Christmas spelling.) They, with their spouses (Mark, Lisa and Jeff) and the six grandchildren (Elizabeth, Lauren, John, Matt, James and Nicholas) are also here with Margaret. John will speak on their behalf.

In 1980, as a Colonel in the Chief of Defence Force Staff's Office, John honed his analytical and writing skills.

This led John to ponder the relationship between the Service Chiefs, the diarchy, the military civilian interface and Joint Command. CDF covered this latter aspect in his remarks on the Baker Report. We'll return to the other themes a little later.

John drafted his written material in pencil, a rubber nearby, the crystal clear and compelling second version differing little from the first. Those who heard him speak were captivated by the absence of notes, the fluid nature of his delivery, the nature, significance and meaning of its content - Angus has revealed the secret behind John's success at public speaking.

I first came across John Baker as a Brigadier in 1985 when dealing with an industrial relations incident at Victoria Barracks in Sydney. Our paths and friendship grew from that day, although neither of us imagined then what lay in store for us.

In 1989, when Paul Dibb was promoted to Deputy Secretary, he chaired a Selection Committee for his successor as Director of the Joint Intelligence Organisation, the upshot of which was that they couldn't find anyone suitable for the position.

In a discussion over a drink with Tony Ayers - the Great Mentor, then in the form of Secretary of Defence - John Baker's name emerged as a possible candidate. Following discussion with CDF Gration, Dr Dibb raised it with Minister Beazley and Major General Baker became the first uniformed officer to hold the JIO post.

Many thought that this heralded the end of his career, not realising that the then Defence hierarchy saw this as a test of his suitability for higher office. John returned the compliment, creating the Defence Intelligence Organisation. Adding to CDF's comments, it's not too strong for me to observe that John mesmerised the Cabinet during his regular briefings on the first Gulf War, correctly predicting, with no foreknowledge, when the action would commence, the likely response, counter response and so on.

Very soon after John was promoted to Vice Chief of the Defence Force in 1992, we set off in the footsteps of our predecessors, Alan Beaumont and Paul Dibb, to cultivate the nascent Defence relationship with Japan. Some fruit of those beginnings was publicly harvested on 13 March with the signing of The Australia Japan Declaration on Security Cooperation.

Instead of going into chapter and verse about the policy discussions, I want to share a little vignette about John.

Following an inspection of the Etajima Naval Academy, the Navy escorted us past the famous floating Tori Gate, the approach to the Island of Miyajima. After checking in to a traditional Inn, called a Ryokan, we proceeded by cable car to the top of the mountain to pay our respects at the Shinto Shrine attended by the Priests and acolytes.

Returning to the Inn, we participated in a communal Japanese bath ritual, got dressed in our Yukata robes and Geta wooden "clog type" sandals before sitting down to a Kaiseki meal - a range of small traditional dishes much like what we would call a degustation menu, served by wonderful old ladies in their Kimonos. This was accompanied by many toasts with warm Sake, washed down by Japanese beer.

On completion of our repast, the procession repaired to a pub about half a mile away where we entertained the locals in our get up on the Karaoke machine. John and my duet had to be seen to be believed, but the photographic evidence exists to prove it. Late that night we returned to our abode, the only occasion I slept with a General, on our conjoint futon.

There's also a serious point underlying this tale. John used to go to some lengths to familiarise himself with the culture and customs of the nations he dealt with, not just as a courtesy, but in an endeavour to come to grips with where they were coming from as an aid to the negotiations and interactions. He understood the fundamental importance of personal relationships to the outcomes he was seeking.

As VCDF, he used to go out the side of F Block in Blamey Square to have a cigarette. At least one of the ADF's best and brightest, when confronted with a particularly difficult task, cottoned on to the value of looking out the window. When the Lieutenant General materialised for a smoke break, this officer would appear "quite by accident" with files under his arm and greet the VCDF with the regulation "Good morning Sir".

John would call him over and ask what he was working on. Following an explanation of the nature of the difficulty and John's reply on what he thought about it, the said officer would return upstairs to write up the solution.

Many were intrigued by the long pregnant pause that sometimes occurred after a question was put to John. Those that knew him best appreciated the filters in John's mind that were being applied to the issue and the considered response that followed.

Since Federation, Australia's defence has been a forum for interminable debate between the followers of Henry Lawson and those of Banjo Patterson.

Lawson was a nationalist, a bush tragic, who would tug his forelock to no man, but without fail he would doff his hat to a veteran of the Great War.

Patterson was a man of Empire, a bush romantic and a proponent of expeditionary forces.

Like General John Monash, John Baker was wary of extremes. He understood the perspectives of both Lawson and Patterson, but he was decidedly more comfortable sitting above the salt at Henry Lawson's table of ideas.

Let me illustrate this with a few examples.

John supported the Tange reorganisation wholeheartedly. John saw the need for a Chief of Defence Force who could exercise command over the entire Defence Force in the national interest rather than a CDFS who was simply the Chairman of the Committee of Service Chiefs. He was critical of the enmity between the three Services. He bemoaned the conflict between the military and the civilian side and the hostile destructive debate that it fuelled. John didn't see any alternative to the Diarchy, but worried whether the powers that be understood the criticality of its personality basis and the propensity for it to become unstuck if they didn't. He felt Tony Ayers epitomised the model of how others in the Diarchy should behave.

John believed in and promoted the centrality of the United States' Alliance and the political significance of this obligation to both sides of the Pacific.

He appreciated the importance of Indonesia and the necessity of good working relationships with the senior reaches of their Defence Force, something which, he remarked, was demonstrated most clearly in East Timor in 1999.

John supported the ANZAC spirit, saying that “in battle there was no one you would prefer to have alongside than the New Zealanders and I made that clear” referring to the view that he put to Government while cavilling at the Kiwi’s Defence posture in 1996.

In recent times, he, I and others have had cause to debate privately the need for a new Defence White Paper and welcome the prospect of that outcome in 2008. The strategic basis should logically flow from developments since the Defence 2000 White Paper, hopefully accompanied by the hard earned lesson of the Government and Defence sticking closely to the associated Capability Plan and its financial envelope.

Combined with his temperament and prodigious capacity for work one can appreciate why John made such a difference and the rarity of his formidable skill set. Unpretentious, understated and a complete lack of pomposity underpinned his devotion to duty. Those that tended to pomposity in his presence usually had cause to reflect later on the way he pricked their balloons.

A former Minister once spoke about the special nature of service in the Defence organisation - once you’ve been there it remains in your mind, your heart and your soul forever. John exemplified that in what he did after stepping down as CDF retaining his appreciation of his proper place in the scheme of things. The Minister for Defence could do himself and the nation a favour by resurrecting the Baker/Blunn Review of the Defence Act and implementing its recommendations.

General Sir John Monash, a fellow engineer, a fellow Melbourne University graduate, said:

“...The engineer must above all things be a man of the world ... meaning a man of broad education and outlook, free from petty bias and prejudice, full of sober common sense, of human sympathy and understanding, in nothing an extremist and in nothing a faddist. He must understand men and how to organise,

direct and lead them to attainment through the arts by which a man can inspire in his subordinates enthusiasm, loyal service and obedience...This rests upon the force of example through a loyal, disciplined and optimistic temperament, qualities founded upon earnestness, habits of industry and strength of character”.

That description might well have been written about John Baker.

But, above all John was an accomplished leader. Let me draw on Monash again:

“A successful leader must be indifferent to praise or blame; must have the capacity to persevere calmly and dispassionately with the business at hand, undisturbed by the menace of imminent calamity or by the exultation of success. He must have determination and steadfastness of purpose. He must have confidence in himself and the correctness of his judgement. His capacity to appreciate the working of the minds of others must be automatic and swift. His personality must be of a kind which inspires confidence in others...”

John Baker could well have written and said that; that’s what he stood for; that’s how he deported himself and that’s how he lived his life - an exemplar to us all, a gentleman in the finest and every sense of that word

As an intellect, John Baker stood not in the shadow of, but alongside Monash. Others who have shaped Defence since Federation would not have been strangers in their company. Vice Admiral Sir William Creswell, founding father of the Royal Australian Navy; Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams, founding father of the Royal Australian Air Force. General Sir Brudenell White, an outstanding soldier who was also the first Chairman of the Public Service Board and two Defence mandarins Sir Frederick Shedden and Sir Arthur Tange.<sup>(1)</sup>

Monash and Baker would have opened the batting for the Defence First X1. But, when it was their turn to field, and some

perplexing spin bowling was called for, John Baker would have deferred to Tange and Shedden

On retirement, John's prognosis was six months. His will to the fore in his work pursuits and on the golf course, he fought valiantly. I so much enjoyed our matches with Alan and Justine Beaumont and the get togethers afterwards at Royal Canberra with Margaret and Maria. The Christmas Party which John and Margaret always hosted at their home was a not to be missed occasion. Nine years later, full of wonderful family memories and professional accomplishments John succumbed peacefully to his fate, lucid, passionate and private to the end.

We're all the poorer for John's passing. Those gathered here today - and many others - will remember him with affection, respect and love. General John Baker can rest in peace in the knowledge of his contribution to the profession of arms and the Australian nation.

As a young boy growing up in Melbourne, John Stuart Baker, like all of us, would have marvelled at the sparkling cascade of the night sky. If the Southern Cross had pointed to his destiny, it was to a life of selfless service that would see him unfold as one of Australia's finest sons. His life enriched us all.

(1) I have purposely avoided comparisons with other role models who are still alive.

(2) I am indebted to my former colleagues and great friends, Lt Gen Des Mueller and Emeritus Professor Paul Dibb for their input and assistance with this tribute.

Allan Hawke  
13 July 2007