

UNSW-Defence 50th anniversary lunch
Canberra 18 July 2017
Sir Rupert Myers Speech

Professor Frater
Professor Jacobs
Vice Admiral Ray Griggs
Mr Brendan Sargeant
Former colleagues and students
University and Defence members

Thankyou Rector for your gracious welcome and for doing me the great honour of arranging this excellent luncheon with such distinguished and experienced people to mark the passage of 50 years since UNSW began its relationship with Defence.

Looking back I see an amazing array of activities related to the preparation of defence force officers for their service to the country. I suppose any period of fifty years will have seen many changes, by governments and by various entities wishing to see change but the changes which have occurred in the attitude to preparing officers for service have been extraordinary and as it happens my University has been in the middle of them. Over the years I too became heavily involved.

I have to admit that my experience with Defence was very modest indeed. But by a strange happenstance I did serve for a short while in the Army. When the Second World War broke out I was a metallurgy student at Melbourne. When I completed my finals I enlisted in the Army and did my initial training at Puckapunyal. I expected to be deployed overseas within the year. A few months later I was instructed to report to the CO. Rather apprehensive, I did so. He had been instructed by the manpower authorities to tell me to report to a special unit which the Defence Department's Signals Directorate was setting up in Melbourne University to work on tungsten and tantalum - metals needed

for radio and searchlight uses, and for a then secret project - Radar. And that is where I spent the rest of the war.

I suppose a little experience is better than none!

The association between the government's defence interests and educational bodies, mainly universities, goes a long way back even before UNSW became involved and these certainly informed early attitudes. But the increasing complexity of defence interaction on an international scale during the 1960s focussed attention on just how best to prepare officers for their role as defenders of the national interest and advisers to government.

Emerging from this foment of conflicting ideas came a letter from the then Minister for the Army, Malcolm Fraser, to UNSW sounding out the University about its possible involvement in officer education. I think he could not have selected a better target than the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Philip Baxter. Sir Philip was a nation building kind of character - and a big thinker if there was ever one! Like Fraser, he was also a big man with an imposing presence.

At the time I was one of two Pro Vice Chancellors, the other being Professor Al Willis who subsequently played an outstanding part in managing our relations with Defence until his retirement in 1978. The three of us were all strongly inclined to support helping. We took the matter to the Professorial Board which agreed despite some opposition from those who doubted an academic education could be delivered in a military environment. I should admit, however, that personally I had just one reservation in my mind. I wondered whether we might be thought of as usurping a role which might most appropriately be played by our national university. I needn't have worried because it turned out that they were not at all interested. In fact, some of its faculty were openly hostile to Defence.

In Malcolm Fraser's letter he captured what we thought was the essence of the issue, namely and I quote:

"Today's senior commander in war must be not only a military tactician but must also be prepared, and have the intellectual capacity to deal on equal

terms with, allied commanders, diplomats, politicians as well as leaders of commerce and industry."

These sentiments, which I had heard expounded in meetings with Sir Arthur Tange, greatly impressed me. Tange was another formidable figure with a tough negotiating style but I thought his approach for the education of officers was insightful and sincere. He wanted the best thinkers the military could produce and thought a university education would help them to reason and to analyse.

Fraser wanted to know whether UNSW would be prepared to consider the courses being offered at the Royal Military College Duntroon with a view to according to them some form of affiliated recognition. We discussed the matter in the University, there was a good response from the Professorial Board with little reservation and a proposal was put to the Council which approved in principle the forming of an association with RMC which would lead to the awarding of the University's degrees subject to certain conditions.

The University, as it happens, was experienced in working with affiliated educational bodies - it had colleges in Newcastle and Wollongong, eventually they became separate universities, so the notion of establishing a Faculty of Military Studies at Duntroon was not beyond our expertise. Sir Philip's later decision to invite former vice chancellor and much admired senior government adviser, Professor Sir Leslie Martin, to be the first dean was an inspired choice. The special problems associated with delivering a university educational programme alongside military training were really challenging. This was uncharted territory. I have great admiration for Sir Leslie and the excellent commandants who worked wonderfully together. I also want to praise subsequent deans and rectors for the great way they, with the academic and training staff, created a really fine institution within Duntroon which students admired and benefitted from throughout their careers.

At the same time the Navy was also talking to the University about the delivery of first year courses at Jervis Bay with midshipmen completing their degree at the main campus. We were equally keen to cooperate. For more than 15 years,

the midshipmen lived in and around Kensington and many made a wonderful contribution to life within the residential colleges.

Following the affiliation agreement signed with the Army and the association agreement signed with the Navy – 50 years ago today, many different ideas emerged as to where the education of young officers might go. A new university, an academy and a college of the UNSW. These were some of the options considered. Numerous inquiries and reviews followed. Prime Minister Fraser faced a revolt from his backbench who wanted the existing arrangements to continue. Some universities were doubtful of the wisdom of establishing a degree conferring body but the notion of an academy combining academic and military training gradually emerged.

Sir James Killen, the Minister for Defence in the Fraser Government who had always been supportive of the idea of a combined academy, wrote to me as the Vice-Chancellor of UNSW asking if we would explore the feasibility of an arrangement whereby the University would ensure the academic integrity of the new institution that was to open in 1986, perhaps by means of the establishment of a college of the University. After a comprehensive discussion in the University, and with the Council supportive, I wrote to the Minister saying that there is general acceptance of the belief that the experiment with the Navy and the Army in particular had been very successful. We felt it was indeed possible to work cooperatively and fruitfully with both civilian and military officers to develop first class educational programs at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Although some of my fellow vice-chancellors were still sceptical, I told Sir James that I was confident that the goodwill and understanding that had been generated over the previous fifteen years would stand us in good stead as we proceed to the next important stage.

A formal agreement was finally drawn up that the Minister and I signed ... without formality. It was my last official duty before I retired from the University in 1981. At last UNSW had a college of which it could be proud in Canberra. Personally I was very happy with that arrangement and the Canberra-based faculty made it clear that they were proud to be associated with UNSW.

It is hard to believe that 50 years have passed since UNSW and Defence quietly entered into an agreement that was meant to be short-term – no more than 10 years perhaps. If I might say so I think that the University is entitled to be really proud of its contribution to the nation through the education that it has provided to Australia's uniformed personnel. We did not realise then how significant the 18th July 1967 would be. It is my hope that the relationship will continue for the next fifty years as we all face a world of uncertainty but maintain our faith that education is integral to a better future not just for our graduates but those who will be the beneficiaries of their learning.

Again, thank you for thinking of me and for allowing me to reflect on decisions that continue to give me great personal and professional satisfaction.