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AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE POLICY

A STUDY OF EMPIRE AND NATION (1897-1910)

L. D. Atkinson

This continent has naturally many varied and conflicting interests. Its artificial subdivision has built up many rivalries, local hostilities and petty prejudices that still remain to be overcome. It is a mistake to regard our constitutional partnership as practically operative .... At present it is only a legal contract. We have remitted our problems to Parliament unsolved, and our antipathies unweakened, imposing on the Government and the two Chambers the real task of nation-making.

ALFRED DEAKIN, June 1901.
The conflict between colonialists and nationalists in the federation movement had been observed by John Quick and Robert Carran. They realized that the conflict must continue in the first years of the Commonwealth. The states would strive to preserve their rights and influence; the central government would seek to establish its authority and identity. This interplay of centrifugal and centripetal tendencies had been provided for in the federalist and nationalist features of the constitution. Yet the business of the central government, they implied, was the pursuit of national policies. Any legal and static distinction between federal and national would not last. The constitution was best seen as a living and evolving organism.

For some years the national principles may be weak and dormant - the occasion may not rise to call them into marked activity (they predicted). But the energy will be there, and in the fullness of time, when the opportunity comes, the nation will arise alike a bridegroom coming forth from his chamber...

No conflict with the states need then arise. For the citizens of Australia would throb with new life and yield "to the irresistible pressure of nationhood".2

Alfred Deakin saw the same future for the Commonwealth. The central government, he stated, was to be no "mere departmental arrangement for the purpose of placing under one control the management of three important (colonial) departments which affect the internal intercourse, inter-communication and the general defence of Australia ... Federation did much more than merely establish a central administrative body".3 The real task of the Commonwealth was to create a nation, one and undivided.4

In another sense the Commonwealth had to establish its authority and identity. The states were reluctant to see an end of their status in the Empire. They vainly insisted that their communications with the Colonial Office go direct to London and not through the Governor-General as Joseph Chamberlain, Alfred Deakin, and Edmund Barton wished. As late
as 1906 they claimed the right to send separate representatives to the Imperial Conference. In dealing with such matters Deakin was to claim paramountcy for the Commonwealth and eventually complete authority to deal with every subject of "Imperial or extra-Australian" interest.\textsuperscript{5} Not only did the central government have to stand supreme within Australia. The stature of nationhood in the British world had to be secured by the Commonwealth.\textsuperscript{6}

When the first parliament met all this lay ahead. The first task was to establish a central administrative body. The second task was to launch those few nationalist policies on which there was agreement. Alfred Deakin saw the challenge clearly: the constitutional partnership wrought by the federationists was merely a legal contract. It had yet to operate.\textsuperscript{7}

Defence policy reflected these broad issues. A series of acts were contemplated to change the centre of authority and allow the amalgamation of colonial policies. Settled policies and practice were not to be disturbed. Defence planning was to be federalist in substance. It was to fulfil the promise of the federation movement. It was to be in accord with colonial experience. It was not to upset local loyalties. It was not to deprive the states of their due share of the revenue collected by the Commonwealth.

The foundations of Australian defence for the next decade were laid in the first year of federation when such considerations were uppermost in the minds of policy-makers. Their success in meeting the dictates of federalist policy and the requirements of national security was to be ignored in the following period of innovation.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE FOUNDATIONS OF POLICY: FEDERAL PARLIAMENT IN 1901

There is considerable sensitiveness on the part of the several States of the Commonwealth, and .. I have no desire to tread on their toes ...

EDMUND BARTON, before the Colonial Conference, July 1902.

This Bill is not for today — it is for all time.

SIR JOHN FORREST, on the First Defence Bill, July 1901.

No country can provide against every remote contingency which may be suggested. Reasonable probabilities, rather than possibilities form the ultimate basis of war preparations of every great Power.

COLONIAL DEFENCE COMMITTEE, June 1890.
The first parliament was an august body. Of the seventy-five members of the lower House only seventeen had no previous political experience. Fourteen had attended the federal conventions; twenty-two had been either premiers or ministers of the Crown. The senators of the upper House had been expressly elected to watch over state rights. Undoubtedly such men drew from their colonial experience.

There was also no doubt that the first Protectionist ministry led by Edmund Barton and Alfred Deakin would be sensitive to criticism. Even with the conditional support of the Labour Party under J.C. Watson, the government would not be certain of victory on the crucial issue—the tariff—over George Reid's Free-traders. That the Protectionists drew most of their strength from Victoria while most Free-traders came from New South Wales did much to continue intercolonial rivalry. Defence policy, no less than other legislation, was to bear the mark of the tussle between these two senior colonies. Furthermore, there existed a group of radical—nationalists drawn from all parties who, in the fluid political circumstances and with the full support of Labour, could vote against Barton on Imperial and defence issues. Such was the uncertain balance of power that Deakin informed the Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, who was in London for the Colonial Conference of 1902: "It will be extra-ordinary if we survive this session; but by the time you receive this the cable will have informed you of what we are only speculating about." ³

Accordingly, Barton assured the House before his departure that no new policy would be adopted without full parliamentary approval, and in a confidential minute he nearly bound himself to the pursuit of none without prior consultation with parliament. After giving life to the constitution by passing essential legislative machinery, Barton's ministry would concentrate upon domestic reform. Duly, it planned to provide only for "an adequate Defence Force ..."⁹. There was to be no major innovation. With this Watson, the leader of the Labour Party, agreed.¹⁰
The most important step in domestic reform was the tariff. Yet, even when that was settled, Commonwealth expenditure was severely limited; and the states were given ample opportunity to examine the action of the central government. Under Section 87 of the constitution three-fourths of the net revenue from the only taxes the Commonwealth imposed—customs and excise duties—were to be returned to the states until 1911. Furthermore, for the first five years the Commonwealth had to return to the states, month by month, the payments due to them. Because some high-tariff states might receive far less from the lower duties to be imposed by the central government, Sir George Turner, the first Federal Treasurer, felt compelled to return to them more than their constitutional share of the revenue. He also steadfastly opposed government borrowing. Sensitivity to state rights almost to the point of inaction; economy almost to the point of poverty—these, Barton explained to the Colonial Conference at considerable length, were his burdens.11

No aspect of policy could escape such considerations—least of all defence. The limit on federal defences suggested by the conventions was £750,000. This figure seems to have been based on colonial expenditure, not on the need to equip and organize forces for national defence. Even so, from 1898 the expenditure in the colonies had risen from £710,000 to £890,000. Of this, £106,000 a year was paid to the British government for the services of the Australian Auxiliary Squadron. The first Commonwealth estimates of 1901–1902 presented by the Minister for Defence, Sir John Forrest, were about £940,000.12

This prospect was enough to cause a furor in parliament. With the willing support of Free-traders and radicals, Watson successfully moved a resolution directing the Cabinet to reduce expenditure by £200,000. Apart from the naval subsidy, it was agreed, £500,000 to £600,000 was enough for federalist defence.13
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Anticipating intense and personal opposition, Forrest promised at the outset to reduce the estimates by at least £100,000. Duly, the Defence Department was informed that the reduction was to be £131,000 and to be applied immediately. Military defences were not to exceed £600,000; the cost of the local Australian naval forces was not to exceed £40,000. Later, Forrest was to boast a reduction of £171,000.\(^\text{14}\)

Lack of finance, then and later, was the most important single influence upon defence plans. National aspirations, Imperial predilections, and even the strategic thought of the politicians were affected. The figures opposite show that defence expenditure was gradually to increase. They also indicate the limit imposed by parliament. They do not show the troubles of defence planners, who were not to know from one quarter to the next what sums had been allotted to them. On the one hand they had to produce efficient forces with insufficient money; on the other, they had to be careful lest the reduction or disturbance of existing colonial forces create further political trouble.\(^\text{15}\)

The demand for cheap defence was also the means by which the radicals sought to preserve civilian control over the armed forces. Suspicions of permanent soldiers - but particularly their officers - were compressed into the single term "militarism". By this radicals meant many things. They objected to the officer who lorded it over his fellow man. They protested against the conservative classes in society forming the backbone of some militia units. They were disgusted at an unmanly display of uniform, finery, and manners which seemed to symbolize the power of class, favour, and caste. They conjured up pictures of Prussianism in Australia. They feared that unwarranted expenditure on defence would prevent social reform. Some even described the public enthusiasm for the troops departing for South Africa as militarist.

For many these sentiments were allied with a dislike of war, with a vague kind of pacifism. King O'Malley of the Labour Party was the spokesman for such people. A government could not develop the country,
he protested, while the populace was being taxed to maintain a force of
"non-producers, with their luxuries, gold braid, feathers and spurs". ¹⁶
The nation should depend upon independent Australian man who, like the
Boer under De Wet, would protect the capitals with improvised armies.

The only Labour member with a consistent military policy,
W.M. Hughes, saw militarism as a threat to civil government and civil
liberty. To rely upon permanent soldiers for the defence of the nation,
he insisted, was unmanly, undemocratic, and dangerous. The only solution
was to train and arm all citizens; the military caste would then be
destroyed. His words must have evoked the feelings of men who remembered
the facts - and the myths - of the use of troops during the shearing and
maritime strikes. Others, among them H.B. Higgins, identified militarism
with wars of reckless aggression, with glorification of bloodshed, or
with Imperial expansion. The term "militarism" had wide currency. In a
fine statement of Labour's demand for a defence policy of national self-
reliance, Watson used the word to mean merely the maintenance of a military
establishment of both permanent and citizen soldiers. Its usage reflected
reservations about Imperial policy and expressed values essentially hostile
to the professional soldier. ¹⁷

In the Australian political imagination the military future belonged
to the amateurs. The twentieth century, stated the Age in 1901, would
see neither peace nor the brotherhood of man. War in Asia or in Europe
involving Great Britain was "at all times possible". ¹⁸ This nationalist
paper had led the Australian crusade against the Boers with jingoistic
and full-blooded vigour. But the disasters of Black Week - and the later
casualties among Australian troops - shook its faith in British might.
The British military caste, the Age concluded, had proven to the world its
tragic inadequacy. In the future Australians must draw, not from British
experience, but from their own past, from the American Civil War and from
the skill of the Boers. The future belonged to the nation in arms, to
individual initiative, to the magazine rifle, to the citizen-soldier! The
day of offensive operations was gone! This was the era when a defensive
posture led to impregnability, when amateurs were better than professionals, when citizens were more realistically non-aggressive than soldiers! The amateurs among the politicians agreed. J.W. McCay from the Free-traders, R.A. Crouch from the Protectionists, and W.M. Hughes from the Labour Party—men like these had experienced military service. Variously they felt competent to voice criticism. They were in a position to affect policy. Variously they did so.19

It was often said in parliament that Australians would respond to the military—and every other—challenge in the exalted traditions of the British race which had built an Empire and brought civilization to the world. In restricting the entry of aliens into the nation nearly all politicians considered the preservation and elevation of that race. Immigration policy was the occasion for rejecting America as a model of social development and reasserting membership of the British world. It was also the occasion for restating the national demands for autonomy within the white Empire. Often a speaker would begin by attacking the interference of the Colonial Office and end by reasserting the value of the Imperial connection so long as it was in the form of an alliance which allowed full internal development.20 The ideal of a White Australia was to prove a powerful agent in nationalist politics. It encouraged the consideration of national character. It helped differentiate Australian from English liberals, international socialists, English Imperialists, and dreamers of Anglo-Saxon unity. It was later to be a basic national interest demanding defence against the coloured nations of the North.21

Contemplation of invasion was, however, premature. The Australian social and political experiment had to be conducted before it could be defended. In the meantime only a small band of Protectionist back-benchers expressed qualms about Japan and China. A few Free-traders expressly argued against such fears. Edmund Barton and W.M. Hughes saw France and Russia as the probable enemies of the Empire—and therefore the Commonwealth. Most politicians displayed no uneasiness about Australia's security. The federalist era was to see tentative reforms
in military policy, not great plans against a national enemy. The danger was still thought to come from traditional European sources as a result of the Imperial connection on a scale which the Royal Navy would minimize.22

National interests in the South-Western Pacific kept alive a concern about European intentions. South-Eastern New Guinea was to be controlled by the Commonwealth - once parliament voted the necessary money; there Australians confronted the Germans. Cabinet even mooted the possibility of gaining control of West New Guinea from the Dutch. The hope of seeing Australian influence spread to other island groups North and East was sustained by the competition between a politically influential Australian shipping firm and subsidized German and French lines. But the main source of worry lay in the New Hebrides. The leaders of each party as it came to power were to apply themselves to the problem of thwarting the French. In 1900 Henry Labouchere, the English liberal, thought the powers of the Commonwealth should be restricted to domestic affairs lest Australia embroil Britain in war in the Pacific. He need have had no fear. Cabinet was to countenance many measures to increase Australian influence in the New Hebrides but it did not consider the use of force. The Commonwealth lacked the means and the will to act in the sector which worried many politicians - except through courteous, firm, and constant pleading with Great Britain to effect its wishes. Australian policy, said Barton in 1901, would remain peaceful, limited, and inseparable from Imperial policy:

... (There) can be no such thing as a foreign policy of the Commonwealth. Foreign policy belongs to the Empire ... and we cannot affect that policy, as constitutional matters now stand, except by such representations as we can make to the centre of government ... 23

Just as immigration restriction led not to centrifugal tendencies, but to reaffirmation of the unity of the British race, concern over the Pacific islands led to a conscious strengthening of Imperial links.24
Those same links, parliament decided in 1901, could be utilized to advantage. The creation of a Commonwealth navy was deemed either unnecessary or "utterly beyond the bounds of realization". Australia must therefore not only depend upon the Royal Navy but retain its own section of the shield. The 1887 Naval Agreement was to be renewed. Edmund Barton and Sir John Forrest accepted this almost unanimous direction. Yet few other defence measures were to evoke the same storm of indignation as the resulting Naval Agreement Bill of 1903. Within two years the temper – if not the means – of parliament had changed. No other issue demonstrates so clearly how far defence planning depended upon the settlement of the fiscal issue or how far the Free-traders, in their demand for low tariff and cheap defence, insisted upon the perpetuation of colonial policies. No other shows how nationalist aspirations were gaining currency while federalist policy was being implemented.²⁵

That policy was to be inexpensive, non-militaristic, non-aggressive, non-controversial, founded upon colonial experience – drawing from the legacies of the federation movement, and eschewing innovation. The general dictates of the first parliament were clear. And until legislation was passed two years later its will and whims were to be felt. Within those limits, Sir John Forrest and his advisers were left to formulate cogent schemes. For more specific guidance he could refer to the scattered discussion over defence estimates and the detailed criticisms of his ill-fated Defence Bill of 1901.²⁶

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Forrest was the second of six Ministers for Defence in the federalist era. He held office far longer than any other and influenced policy more profoundly. Yet none served with greater misgiving and discomfort; and perhaps none was less appreciated by his contemporaries.²⁷
... his greatest strength lay in his apparent weakness ...
The basis of military legislation and naval policy for the period was clearly Forrest's responsibility. So low was defence in priority and so rich was the detailed recommendation of the nineties that Cabinet allowed him considerable latitude. With no institutional source of military advice he was able to draw on a wide range of opinion. When uncertain he could consult with Barton and depend upon the experienced assistance of Robert Collins, the Secretary of the Department of Defence, who had for a decade held an equivalent position in Victoria. In the sphere of naval defence - which we will examine closely in Chapter Seven - this arrangement was successful. His first submissions recommending the renewal of the Naval Agreement were lucid and comprehensive arguments drawn from radically conflicting views. There the issues were clear, the principles easily grasped, and the solution consonant with his attitude to Empire. Moreover, he was able to arrive at his conclusions confidentially, free from parliamentary scrutiny - the outcome was not revealed until after the Colonial Conference of 1902.  

The drafting of the first Defence Bill was a more tortuous process. Early in 1901 a committee of military commandants drew up a draft which assimilated the colonial acts and rested upon Queensland legislation, a course recommended by the Colonial Defence Committee, discussed at the Colonial Conference of 1897, and adopted by the Federal Military Conferences. Uneasy about the result, Forrest and Collins referred the matter to prominent citizen-soldiers and Victorian protectionists. At the same time representations were being made to Barton. To the drafts Forrest amended the military committee objected strongly. In all some six attempts were made before the hastily prepared bill was presented to parliament. It seemed to settle many issues.  

The final draft clearly established the supremacy of the Minister for Defence and Cabinet over the forces of the Commonwealth. Two officers responsible to the Minister and answerable to parliament in their annual reports were to be appointed: one to command the military and the other the naval forces of the Commonwealth. At the insistence of
the Victorians, a clause was inserted empowering the Commonwealth to build, acquire, arm, and maintain its own vessels. The military forces were divided into four categories: the active forces, comprising all permanent, militia, and volunteer units; the reserve forces; the rifle clubs; and the cadet corps. The states were converted into military districts each under the authority of a commandant. At Cabinet's insistence it was possible for both Imperial and Australian officers to rise to that position, and, further, the way was left open for militia officers to rise to the same high rank as permanent ones. Though the military committee was distressed at these last two features, its views on discipline were to prevail over the advice Forrest had solicited. All members of the defence forces were to serve under the Army Act in peace and war subject to changes the executive might make by regulation and to the proviso that no man would be liable to corporal punishment. No member could be sentenced to death except for mutiny, desertion, or treason and only then after confirmation by the Executive Council. 30

Most Australian males could be subjected to military law. For the Commonwealth possessed the power to expand the active forces in "times of emergency" by the conscription of all men between the ages of eighteen and sixty years. A British subject who resided in Australia for six months was also liable to be called to arms by proclamation. Resistance involved penalties ranging from a fine of twenty pounds and imprisonment for two years. These provisions had caused Sargood and other Victorians who had offered comment considerable misgiving. But Forrest, Cabinet, and the military committee were agreed upon their importance. 31

The military committee had also been adamant about the need to organize, in peacetime, units for overseas service. Forrest seems to have wavered on this point in the face of conflicting advice. Barton appears to have been more concerned with finding an acceptable political solution to a reasonable and long-standing military demand. In any event, the bill empowered the Commonwealth to send the permanent forces beyond Australia in times of emergency. Furthermore, the Executive Council could call out
all the active forces and the members of the rifle clubs - but not the cadets - for service "anywhere within the Commonwealth, and also without the Commonwealth for the defence thereof ...". They could be placed under the authority of the British regular forces, as the Australian naval forces could fall under the command of the Royal Navy. Individuals could also volunteer to serve in any special Australian unit raised to augment Imperial forces "or to occupy or to defend any place beyond the limits of the Commonwealth". But members of existing Commonwealth forces could be compelled to serve overseas for the defence of the Commonwealth; they could individually refuse to do so only if the operation was not in some sense a defensive one. Permanent and citizen-soldier units could, then, be trained and organized in peace to serve anywhere Cabinet might see fit. Individuals could avoid service only if the war was officially deemed to be offensive in nature. With the power to expand the active forces by conscription, the Commonwealth government could, by declaring a state of emergency, compel most Australian males to serve overseas.32

On matters of broader principle the final draft of the bill was silent. What was the government's naval policy? How were the military forces, with which the bill was primarily concerned, to be used for defence? What was the government's defence policy? It was clear from Forrest's second reading speech of the 9th of July 1901 that neither he nor the Cabinet had faced these questions.33

Parliamentarians were not impressed with his assertion that the measure would meet all present and future needs. Throughout July and August the second reading was prolonged. Awaiting more important issues to debate, one speaker after another declared defence to be the most important of issues and at leisure, often to a somnolent audience, listed their reservations. The most telling and acute attacks were conducted by the radicals and a handful of Free-traders, in the main Victorians. In all fifty-two amendments were proposed. During Forrest's absence Barton noted suggestions and sentiment. By September the Cabinet was willing to make substantial changes to the bill.34
Many speakers did not share Forrest's guarded enthusiasm for the militia forces. They preferred to see volunteer rather than partially-paid units and the organization of rifle clubs rather than complete dependence upon either. Accordingly, the bill was altered to make the rifle clubs an integral part of the defence force financed by the government and in part controlled by their own representative council. Nor was parliament content with Forrest's assurances that control by the Executive Council was satisfactory. The power of the professional commanding officers and the authority of the Commonwealth to act through them was curtailed. A Council of Defence was to be formed which would consist of the General Officer Commanding the Commonwealth Military Forces, the Naval Officer Commanding, all district commandants, and two officers of the citizen forces. It would be responsible to the Minister who could be challenged in parliament on the basis of its reports. This body, it was suggested, would ensure that an inexperienced Minister could not be reduced to a nonentity by one masterful and tactful soldier, and that no central authority could unduly disturb the forces in each state. Forrest allowed a further amendment restricting the service of units of the citizen forces to the state in which they were raised, except in the event of emergency. While this precaution was consistent with a general territorial principle in raising troops and with the need not to unsettle citizen-soldiers, it betrayed also a suspicion of the national government.  

Objections to service under the Army Act were allowed. In peacetime it was not considered just to discipline Australians under British military law. The bill was amended so that permanent troops and citizen-soldiers on duty would be subject to the Commonwealth Defence Act and regulations. The punishment meted out by courts-martial was restricted to a maximum fine of fifty pounds or a sentence no longer than two years. Military tribunals were encouraged to fine or demote offenders rather than gaol them; the findings of all courts-martial, even at regimental level, had to be confirmed by the Executive Council. The discretionary power of commanding officers was also limited. Once an emergency had been declared these restrictions no longer applied. Then military personnel would be subject to the British Army Act and the King's Regulations. All naval
personnel when on board Royal Naval ships or on active duty fall under the Naval Discipline Act and Admiralty Instructions.\textsuperscript{36}

More distressing to parliament was the power held by the executive. Once a state of emergency had been proclaimed, observed the radical-liberal H.E. Higgins, men could be conscripted, Australians sent overseas against their wills for a cause in which they did not believe, citizens in uniform could be shot for disobeying their superiors, and district commandants could act against rioters and strikers on their own discretion. What, he asked, constituted an emergency. "War — where? It means 'invasion' — of what? It means 'national emergency' — what kind of national emergency?"\textsuperscript{37} Given the theory of military offensive to defend Australia and the extent of imperial commitments, a clash between Britain and Russia on the North-West frontier could result in conscripted expeditionary forces being sent to India. Every man, he said, had the right to volunteer to fight in a war he considered just; but no government should possess the power to compel a man against his conscience. While defended by the Royal Navy, Australia's ideal was peace. To realize this the government had to stay within the limits of the Constitution Act: an emergency must be defined as the actual or apprehended invasion of the Commonwealth. With fiery eloquence Higgins struck at the heart of the bill, revealed the absence of explicit policy, and embarked upon a painful struggle that was to be ultimately victorious. He also clarified the issues for J.C. Watson and gained the support of Labour parliamentarians. Other radicals were to follow suit. As one was to put it: "Essentially Australia is forming a defence force, not an army."\textsuperscript{38}

Could the government distinguish between those emergencies which involved Australia's security and interests and those which resulted from imperial policy and were therefore primarily the concern of the British government? Barton, Deakin, and Forrest had each cautiously indicated that the South-Western Pacific might legitimately be the Commonwealth's sphere of operations. But, as Barton had explained, Australian interests in that area could only be upheld by imperial policy. With the control of foreign policy went the responsibility for the direction of military
forces. Australian action abroad could only result from a decision in Whitehall. What, then, of participation in an Imperial war beyond Australia's sphere of interests? Had the despatch of colonial forces to the Soudan, to Chinese waters, and to South Africa set a precedent for the Commonwealth? Insofar as Australians believed they belonged to the British nation they might, as in 1899, feel compelled to fight even if the danger was not imminent. Yet it was also clear that a conflict between British and European powers could constitute a clear and present danger to the Commonwealth. The definition of "national emergency" was a problem of policy, politics, and semantics which Cabinet had not yet faced. Soon it would be compelled to do so. Meanwhile, it was moved by the misgivings among its supporters.

For Forrest accepted many of Higgins' proposals. Emergency continued to be defined as "war, invasion, national emergency, or the proclamation of any danger thereof". Nor would Forrest allow deletion of the clauses empowering the Commonwealth to call all men to arms. But when Higgins, followed by Labour members, challenged the right of state commandants and local commanders to act on their own initiative - presumably against both surprise attack and civil disturbances including riots and strikes - Forrest deleted the clause. He also heeded Higgins' demand that the power of parliament over the executive be strengthened and that military operations be limited to Australian soil. The Executive Council was deprived of its wide discretionary powers. When the House was in session it could declare an emergency only after express and prior parliamentary approval. It could send no member of the defence forces - either permanent or citizen-soldier - beyond the limits of the Commonwealth, not even for its own defence, unless he "voluntarily agreed to do so". An emergency might still result from Imperial crises. Individual Australians might serve abroad. But Australian forces were to be for home defence.39

The most general criticism levelled at Forrest was his lack of policy and vision. Where was the complete reorganization of all military and naval forces "on a national basis" in accordance with the experience
of the Boers, the democratic traditions of the Swiss, and the obligation of the Commonwealth to defend the nation against invasion, bombardment, raid, and predatory commerce destroyers? What role would the Commonwealth play in naval protection? What was the function of all Commonwealth forces? With great vituperation W.M. Hughes, interested primarily in compulsory military training for all Australian males, posed these questions. He condemned the bill as "a jumble, a scissors and paste compilation - and a most unhappy one - of the provisions of the existing State Acts". Barton explained that the measure was a machinery bill which in no way could - or should - determine policy. Policy was for Cabinet to decide; the task of parliament was to present its views.

The criticisms were nevertheless valid. Without a clear conception of existing or future policy, Forrest had presented an enabling bill. In response parliament had indicated what it would or would not allow. The whole discussion was without a solid basis. Naval defence Forrest had yet to consider closely; a military adviser had yet to be appointed. The measure was not passed. Even the amendments examined above were not formally debated. The Defence Bill barely reached the committee stage, was put to one side, and later withdrawn. The Commonwealth forces continued to be administered by the Defence Department under state legislation. The effect of discussion was to lay down further limitations and restrictions within which policy-makers could attempt to work. Until legislation was passed, the will of parliament would continue to be important.

The stance of Sir John Forrest ensured that. A member of the first ministry by virtue of his status as premier rather than any firm commitment to Protectionist policy, he accepted the portfolio of defence in the mistaken belief that it would be neither demanding nor controversial. He proved extremely sensitive to the criticism from radicals, who sneered at his love of England and attitude to Empire, and from those Free-traders with whom he had much in common. He repeatedly apologized for controlling such an expensive department. His attempts to placate his critics by reducing the estimates caused confusion. He frankly admitted his inexperience in military affairs, yet he was to make insufficient attempts
to understand the plans of his local naval and military advisers. Yet, in viewing him as a weak, incompetent, and Imperialist Minister, his detractors failed to take measure of the man and his work. His inexperience was no greater than that of the majority of parliamentarians. Unlike them, he was in a position to learn. Not only was he nominally responsible for the Defence and Naval Agreement Acts of 1903 that remained the foundation of Australian defence until 1910. He was—as we shall see—to play an important role in moulding the naval arguments and limiting the military basis on which they rested. Perhaps his greatest strength lay in his apparent weakness, the discomfort he betrayed in the House during the first years. He was a faithful and diligent agent of parliament. It was no fault of his that its mood was gradually changing even as he translated its will into policy.

For all that, Forrest was no innovator. Nor was he expected to be. It was generally accepted that the Commonwealth could do little more than provide for garrison troops, field forces, and reserves, maintain the local naval forces it could afford, and purchase Royal Naval protection. Centralized control of the colonial forces and the renewal of the Naval Agreement had become the traditional solution to the problem of security.

It was a solution wholly in line with the traditional strategic advice of the Colonial Defence Committee.

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From the late eighties that body had provided recommendations and comment for the guidance of Australian government. After 1904 its authority, arising in part from the permanent membership of the directors of naval and military intelligence, was enhanced by its absorption into the Committee of Imperial Defence. Then known as the Overseas Defence Committee, it could report direct to the Dominions or to a full meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence. Outside the province, but not the influence, of these committees were the briefs prepared by the War Office
and the Admiralty for each of the Imperial Conferences and the private discussion that often followed the official gatherings. And though the defence of the Commonwealth was peripheral to major concerns of Imperial defence, the maintenance of British power in the Far East and the naval provisions of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty inevitably involved the disposition of the Imperial Squadron based at Sydney. Advice from London was then as authoritative as it was abundant.  

It was also consistent. Strategic appreciations from Whitehall repeatedly established that the scale of attack upon the Australian littoral would be small. The greatest probable threat from the enemies of the Crown would come from raiders. Before 1890 it had been calculated that the enemy might despatch, at most, three or four cruisers – two of which could be armoured and capable of lowering torpedo boats – and a landing party of 3,000 men. By 1901 this calculation was considered excessive; and by 1905 even more so. In 1906 it was adjusted. Then, the likely attacking force would, at most, consist of three or four unarmoured cruisers or armed merchantmen capable of landing a total of 1,000 troops at any one place. Even in 1913 raids by the same number of vessels, accompanied by two armed transports capable of landing 2,000 men, was thought the probable danger.  

Australian policy-makers were familiar with these conclusions. Some were also familiar with the general principles upon which they were based. Fewer were aware of the full implications of the changing emphasis in the methods of naval warfare which assured the security of the Commonwealth.

The maintenance of British sea supremacy, began the traditional argument, was basic to all schemes for the defence of the Empire. The Admiralty undertook to prevent organized invasion and to keep maritime communications between colonial ports and the rest of the world free from sustained interruption. Preparations for an expeditionary force would have to be on so great a scale that the Admiralty would quickly learn of them and make a corresponding redistribution of its forces. Should local sea
superiority in any sector of the Empire be temporarily lost, no responsible enemy commander would hazard invasion because his lines of communications would be threatened as soon as Royal Naval superiority was regained. Moreover, Australia lay some 4,000 miles from the foreign naval bases capable of fitting out large-scale expeditions and their attendant screens of armoured vessels; improvised bases in the Pacific islands would be inadequate and vulnerable. Invasion was not a danger Australians had to face; stoppage of overseas trade need not be of concern.

Sea supremacy depended, however, upon amassing capital ships to meet those of the enemy. This was implicit in the Admiralty's continued demand for unfettered and undivided strategic control. But it was also realized that weaker naval powers might give first priority to the destruction of floating commerce and to raiding portions of the outlying Empire. Intermittently from the eighties the French and the Russians put great store in this guerre de course and ships were built precisely for this kind of warfare. Close blockade and the masking of enemy ports once served the purpose of hindering the escape of the main fleet and preventing the despatch of commerce raiders. But the advent of steam, the mine, and the torpedo boat raised doubts about the efficacy of close blockade. Raiders, indeed units of the main fleet, it was feared, could slip away eluding their pursuers from the many ports scattered around the globe. Unease and doubts about close blockades were substantiated by the naval manoeuvres of 1901 and were not settled until 1911. How to meet the danger from the enemy's main fleet, his commerce marauders, and his raiders? This was a problem made no easier by advances in naval technology, alterations in the balance of naval power, and changes in tactical thought.46

From the sixties, among other measures, special port and coastal defence vessels were constructed to ensure localized protection. Ironclads of shallow draft and limited operational radius were to deter or destroy the raider. Sir William Jervois had been influenced by such views; the Protector and the Cerberus were the result in the Australian colonies. The increased speed and armament of enemy vessels soon rendered such a scheme ineffective. The answer in Admiral Tryon's day was the maintenance of
close blockade, the division of the main fleet into squadrons on different naval stations throughout the world, and the limiting of light cruiser squadrons to various sectors for coastal defence. The Australian Auxiliary Squadron was conceived in these terms.

During the nineties naval theorists like Sir John Colomb and Captain A.T. Mahan insisted that the issue in any naval war would be decided upon the high seas, far from the coast, in mighty conflicts between concentrated battle fleets. The Royal Navy might be one, as the seas were one, but, they warned, victory could not come to the nation whose strength was dissipated and restricted. Swift, homogeneous battle fleets were the key to security. The concentration of the British naval strength, it was argued, would compel the enemy to concentrate his might. He could not afford to allow his capital ships to be destroyed piecemeal by his more numerous opponents, or let his cruisers stray far from the main fleet. Thus any power which was foolish enough to rely primarily upon guerre de course would have his commerce raiders hunted down and destroyed by a superior enemy; if it did not build battle fleets, it could not wage war.

The construction of heavier, faster, more powerful vessels of all classes and in particular the advent of the armoured cruiser lent substance to the theory that was well understood by the Colonial Defence Committee. Yet there were, in the nineties, official reservations. Moreover, the Royal Navy was not fully organized to conduct such operations if only because the guerre de course nightmare loomed larger than the theorists allowed. Australians were expected to feel secure under the naval shield. Yet the principles of naval strategy were not explained to them. Moreover, they had in the Australian Auxiliary Squadron a reminder of outmoded strategic thought. At the 1897 Colonial Conference the opportunity to introduce the premiers to the new theory was missed. At the Imperial Conference of 1902 the omission was corrected. Then Lord Selborne presented and expounded the doctrine of fleet concentration. Its rigorous application was left to Admiral John Fisher who became First Sea Lord in 1904.47
... swift, homogeneous battlefleets were the key to future security ...
Fisher envisaged a navy composed primarily of the Dreadnought battleship, the armoured cruiser, and the sea-going destroyer. The proliferation of ships with greatly varying capabilities was to cease and the scrapping of the obsolescent to begin. Squadrons outside European waters were depleted, leaving only vessels with the speed for swift concentration and the fire-power for major engagements. No vessel was henceforward to be tied to any one zone. Strength was to be strategically concentrated in the North Sea and the Mediterranean whence enemy fleets or raiders must come. By planning to meet the battle fleets of Germany and Austria, the Admiralty would protect Great Britain, her mercantile marine, and her Empire.48

Naval actions in the Russo-Japanese War seemed to vindicate the doctrine of fleet concentration. Armoured squadrons were kept assembled to meet armoured squadron; the issue was decided by concentrated battle fleets at sea. The significance for the Commonwealth was clear. Previously any escaping marauders — armoured or unarmoured — of weaker naval powers could use their short life before certain destruction to prey upon colonial shipping. Now, explained the report of the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1906, an enemy would be compelled to use his armoured cruisers for major fleet actions, operations against British squadrons, or the protection of his own commerce — in short, in engagements against other warships. Raids on the Australian littoral could be conducted only by small numbers of unarmoured cruisers which left their ports before the outbreak of hostilities or escaped the blockade.49

The Admiralty could not, therefore, guarantee security from small numbers of enemy cruisers which might attack strategically valuable installations, destroy shipping, or create widespread alarm and confusion. But such a threat could be limited. Raids were hazardous operations for the enemy and, at best, of secondary military importance. The commander would know that his movements prior to the outbreak of war would be noted by naval intelligence; once hostilities began, the difficulties of refuelling at sea, either from captured colliers or at rendezvous points
from merchant auxiliaries, were formidable; every attack would betray his movements to the sweeping British cruiser squadrons detailed for commerce protection and deplete his restricted supply of ammunition; every engagement might mean damage to his vessels at great distances from his naval bases; sustained operations would tend to exhaust his crews and seriously impair the efficiency of his ships. The days when a defended port might fear for its safety or be compelled to pay ransom belonged to the past. The enemy commander would not risk his vessels against shore batteries, especially since close bombardment was found to be of little value and a waste of precious ammunition. The bombardment of undefended coastal towns was considered a barbaric and foolish act which could call forth reprisals. If, then, the Commonwealth maintained fixed defences and garrison troops at strategic points to protect harbours, graving-docks, coal-mining machinery, and cable stations, military objectives of value would be denied him. Furthermore, the defence of naval bases, coaling stations, and key harbours would provide the necessary refuge for coastal shipping once the alarm was sounded. 50

An enterprising enemy commander could, of course, land his small groups of troops close to the batteries and hope that they could be temporarily disabled. Or he might seek out unprotected or inadequately defended strategic points. But since he would remain in open waters to evade capture as long as possible, clearly his greatest threat would be to floating commerce.

The Admiralty had made some provision for this. The naval forces in Far Eastern waters were strengthened and reorganized after 1902. Sydney was to be one key base, and the Imperial Squadron on the Australian Station was considered one of the units of the Pacific fleet. At times of crisis it was to concentrate with other British squadrons near Singapore under the command of the Admiral on the China Station. His primary task was to compel any large enemy force to engage him. Until the outcome was decided merchant shipping would have to fend for itself. With the aid of the increased speed of modern vessels and wireless telegraphy merchant ships could, it was thought, avoid contact with the enemy by leaving the charted trade routes.
If threatened, they could hasten to harbours of refuge. However, the raiders would be at constant peril from British squadrons once the Admiral was certain that no major engagement had to be fought. He could then use his own initiative. Depending on the strength of the enemy he could either distribute his cruisers along the trade routes or concentrate them in groups to sweep the seas or to act against the raiders once they had revealed themselves. No commerce raider, it was asserted, could for long escape detection and destruction. Until the major engagements were fought, or until the raiders were destroyed, the British mercantile marine could afford a total loss of two to four per cent of its strength. 51

The scale of attack, and the extent of the Commonwealth's responsibilities, were clearly dependent upon the strength and the nature of probable enemies, particularly East of Suez. Until 1904 France and Russia, either singly or in combination, were considered the probable enemies. The French could despatch cruisers from Saigon and the Russians could send cruisers and some of their many armed merchant auxiliaries from Vladivostock. Until 1904 British naval forces were maintained in the Pacific at a strength to meet such contingencies. By 1905 the Entente Cordiale and the defeat of Russian sea power by the Japanese removed both threats and, with them, fears of commerce destruction in the Far East. From 1901 the Admiralty had considered Germany as a likely enemy; from 1906 she became the probable and sole contestant for British sea supremacy. Her naval forces in the Far East were not strengthened until after 1909. At no time was Japan considered a probable, or even a possible, enemy. In the light of European activity in China the navalist press in Britain had, from 1898, demanded an alliance with Japan to maintain Britain's naval strength in the Far East. In 1902 the Anglo-Japanese Treaty was signed and British interests in Asia — and Australia — were secured. It was renewed in 1905 and 1911. Apart from an examination of the vulnerability of Hong Kong in 1909 and 1911 by the War Office, Japan was eliminated from strategic thinking from 1902 until the end of the Great War. At no time either was the United States considered an enemy. Indeed, Admiralty plans were explicitly based on the assumption that Great Britain could never maintain its naval power against both the United States and Germany. 52
From 1900 until 1907, then, Australian security was assured by the outcome of the Russo-Japanese War, the naval programmes of the Admiralty, and the course of British diplomacy. It was a period of diminishing risk. British authorities in Whitehall recommended the continuation of the Naval Agreement, but in a form which fitted the doctrine of fleet concentration and the conditions of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. They denied that the creation of an Australian navy was either strategically necessary or politically wise. They reaffirmed the need for fixed defences and garrison troops.  

Justifications for the Australian field forces, on the other hand, were as difficult as they were various. During the nineties the Colonial Defence Committee had argued that a field army was necessary to resist landing parties which might occupy undefended portions of the coast, and conduct mobile operations anywhere within Australia to meet - or to deter - any larger enemy landing should local sea superiority be temporarily lost. After 1901 it was also suggested that the organization of field forces as a trained nucleus for volunteers in times of danger would demonstrate the warlike spirit of Australians and convince the prudent enemy that raids of any scale would be extremely hazardous. Yet, at best, these were uneasy justifications for an army of the size that would give ample training to the men and sufficient command experience to the officers. The strategic solution lay in the preparation of Australian units for offensive operations with the British Army. Two areas of probable conflict suggested in 1902 were India and China; the first to meet a Russian threat to British territory and the second to confront the Russians and help fulfil the military provisions of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. In more specific terms, the formation of an Imperial military reserve was suggested to which the Commonwealth would contribute nine thousand men ready for active service anywhere in the Empire.

The political difficulties of inaugurating such schemes were immense. By 1906 the Colonial Defence Committee was compelled to accept the fact that Australian forces could not be overtly organized and trained
for overseas service. Federal parliament had made this clear in the Defence Act of 1903. So it was that in the federalist period the field forces were under constant ministerial and parliamentary scrutiny. Why was an Australian army necessary, it was asked. The firm strategic answer was not acceptable.

Yet until 1907 the Commonwealth freely used the facilities of the Colonial Defence Committee, the Committee of Imperial Defence, and the Imperial Conference. Every defence proposal was sent to London for approval – partly to guide Cabinet but primarily to keep check upon local advisers. Every key document was published and discussed – if somewhat cursorily – in parliament. In 1906 Alfred Deakin asked the British authorities to draw up a complete and integrated scheme for the defence of Australia. However, when the Commonwealth proceeded to inaugurate plans for a national citizen army and an Australian navy, it did so largely despite the traditional strategical thought from Whitehall.

For the validity of arguments prepared at the centre of the Empire rested upon a number of assumptions that had to be accepted by the Australians on the periphery. They had to be in no doubt that the numbers, strength, and distribution of British warships would affect the general and local sea superiority of the Royal Navy over all possible enemies. They had to accept and understand the doctrine of fleet concentration. They had to feel certain that all possible was being done to protect the Australian littoral and floating commerce. They had to be convinced that the difficulties facing the commander of an enemy raiding force were as great as the Admiralty believed. They had to realize that total security was impossible and that it was wiser and cheaper to calculate probabilities, not plan on the speculation of possibilities. They had to grasp that probabilities could be calculated only on the basis of what a professionally competent and prudent enemy would do. They had to accept the protection of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. And, above all, they had to feel that their national security was not neglected nor their national aspirations stifled by the policies of Whitehall.
In the federalist era some of these assumptions were accepted on faith; some were left unexamined. In providing for the adequate defence of Australia both Cabinet and parliament were prepared to be guided by advice from London. Traditional strategic thought justified traditional solutions even if it was also to provoke nationalist indignation.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE COMMONWEALTH AT WAR: POLITICS AND PRECEDENTS

(We) all belong to one nation and to one Empire ... one great aggregated nation ... not only for common honour, but for common safety.

EDMUND BARTON, January 1902.

We have no right to provide for the naval or military defence of Afghanistan or Canada .... We ought not to have any class (of troops) which might be called ... to take part in quarrels of which they may or may not approve ... We do not want our men to join in (another) opium war. We do not want our men dragged into war against their conscience.

H.B. HIGGINS, July 1903.

(In South Africa the) sons of Empire have since stood shoulder to shoulder, fought together, and died together. Their blood ... "has flowed in the same stream, and drenched the same field. When the chill morning dawned, their dead lay cold and stark together; in the same pit their bodies were deposited; the green corn of spring is now breaking from their intermingled dust; the dew falls from heaven upon their union in the grave. This is the true bond of Empire ..."

THE TIMES, 13th January 1900.

Shoot straight you ------! Don't make a mess of it.

BREAKER MORANT before a British Firing Squad, February 1902.
Despite the widespread support in and out of parliament, the
decision of the Cabinet to despatch military contingents to South Africa
in December 1901 was far from inevitable. Indeed the caution, hesitation
and reluctance with which Barton faced the problems of participation in an
Imperial conflict reflected the basic assumptions of state policy in this
period. Assembling the legislative machinery to give life to the
Constitution and domestic reform were of far greater importance than
involvement in an Imperial war. To disturb party alignments, to use
finance for raising contingents, to be charged with unconstitutional action,
were great risks to run. Prudence demanded no hasty move. The campaigns
in South Africa could be brought to a conclusion without further Australian
assistance. Colonial contingents already in active service would satisfy
both national and Imperial sentiment.

Yet from the outset the Cabinet could not ignore the war. A
federal election had to be fought - and the first parliament was to sit -
in a public atmosphere of intense Anglo-philia. Moreover, public indigna-
tion at the plight of Australian troops caught in the machinery of British
military justice demanded some comment from the national government. The
assumption by the Commonwealth of the powers over defence and external
relations inevitably brought a number of relevant issues to the attention
of Cabinet. The newspapers from which the Barton ministry sought support
became restive. Finally, there remained the doubt of Joseph Chamberlain's
attitude. He had manipulated public opinion in Australia against Barton
and his colleagues during the passage of the Constitution Bill in London.
Would he, despite the assurance of Colonial Office support for the newly-
created national authority, act in the same fashion again?

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Did Edmund Barton wish to contribute Australian men and money to the British cause in any Imperial war? Professedly impatient with evasion the Age posed this question during the federal elections in 1901. In general terms Barton gave his answer on this issue so marginal to the campaign. He stressed the unity of the Empire founded upon mutual respect and cooperation. Though Australian forces were for defence and not to be used in wars of "needless aggression" it was essential to defend the "integrity of Empire". ¹ So long as Great Britain could be expected to defend Australia in peace and war, the Commonwealth must offer assistance in times of grave crisis. The impregnable alliance for defence — not expansion — was founded upon reciprocal obligations. In private conversation with a prominent pro-Boer, the Rev. Dr. Rentoul, he said:

The purpose of the defence force will be, as far as this Ministry is concerned, the protection of Australia, even if the blow be struck at a distance. ²

These pronouncements offered no assurance about the policy of Barton's ministry on the war in South Africa, though they were later construed as a pledge for involvement. ³

George Reid was silent on the matter during the election campaign. His views in involvement in Imperial wars were well-known. Yet they had changed in a significant fashion since 1899. To parliament during 1901 he had declared that Australia would send troops abroad during any grave crisis because "our institutions are guaranteed by the strength and glory of the British Empire". ⁴ The distinction between just and unjust wars was no longer prominent. Political experience during the South African War had taken effect. Furthermore, Reid knew that to appeal to Free-traders in Australia was to tap reservoirs of Imperial loyalty. ⁵

There was no official Labour policy on defence or Imperial relations in 1901. Nevertheless, it could be calculated that of the sixteen Labour members in the lower House, at least five would vote against any participation by the Commonwealth in South Africa. In any case, Watson summarized the general sentiments of Imperialists in his party during 1901. He believed in the civilizing power of the Empire; but
... a policy of dignified restraint ...
Australia's contribution to defence, he insisted, should be adequate self-defence. The Commonwealth's best interests lay in her own development. Given that the radicals like Higgins, Crouch, and Hume-Cook in the Cabinet's own ranks might resist, as they had threatened, any further involvement in South Africa, the government had obviously to tread warily. For the issue could upset party alliances and success would depend on support from the Free-trade opposition.

Such were the sentiments expressed in the elections and the temper of the first parliament. Cabinet was not interested in participation; there were larger issues to be settled. Yet so long as Australians were serving in South Africa questions of national honour arose.

When in March 1901 the departments of Defence and External Affairs came under the control of the Commonwealth, Barton found himself the national spokesman for Australian affairs in South Africa. A few months later, he asked the Imperial authorities to strike a service clasp for the action at Elands River. This was one of the very few — perhaps the sole — action in which only Australian troops were involved. They had fought bravely and been commended by both British and Australian writers. More important, they were not members of the colonial forces but hastily trained bushmen, the stuff that goes to form a national stereotype. Lawson found it easy to weave the experience at Elands River into the lore of mateship. Yet the Colonial Office declined to oblige Barton. The Commonwealth would have to be satisfied with the clasps struck for general campaigns, not particular actions. Honours were to be given to Australian troops as soldiers of the Crown and not as those of an emergent nation.

On two other occasions Barton found himself involved in events more notorious giving rise to nationalist indignation. Both had elements of romance and melodrama. Both concerned the fate of Australian troops at the hands of British military courts-martial. Though neither was directly crucial to the development of defence policy, each exerted an imponderable influence. The first of these was the Wilmansrust affair.
During June 1901 a detachment of some three hundred Victorians — all members of the Fifth Victorian Mounted Rifles — under the command of two British officers were surprised and routed from their camp at Wilmansrust by a Boer commando. The Boers slipped past poorly positioned outposts and charged the ill-prepared and disorganized bivouack at dusk. Within ten minutes of the first shot the British commander had surrendered; fifteen Australians were killed and forty wounded; eighty capitulated. The rest had fled in confusion. At leisure the Boers removed pom-poms, plundered ammunition and stores, and retreated, leaving the prisoners on the veldt. The zeal of the enemy had been as great as the incompetence of the Victorian detachment. The attack had been swift and economical, the prizes great — demoralized Imperial troops, the booty of war, and the capture of those prestige items of the nineteenth century, the guns.

It is in the nature of guerrilla warfare that spirits should respond to any sign of fortune's favour. This incident, it is said, had a profound effect upon Boer morale at the Council of War which met eight days later, particularly upon the Transvaalers. And out of that meeting sprang the conviction to fight on. It is hard to resist the speculation that the peace which federal Cabinet had hoped would come to South Africa during 1901 was postponed by the action of Australian troops at Wilmansrust.

The day following the encounter Brigadier-General Beatson, the British officer to whose column the Victorians were attached, mustered the dazed survivors and in a rage declared that the Victorians were "a fat-arsed, pot-bellied, lazy lot of wasters" and "a white-livered lot of curs". Noting that an Australian officer was scribbling down his words, he added, "You can add 'dogs' too", throwing in the observation that all Australians were the same. A little later the officer in charge of the Victorian Mounted Rifles accepted Beatson's apology through a staff officer. But the damage had been done. Great was the indignation. All the officers felt that gross negligence had been shown by the Imperial officers who led them; that lives had been needlessly thrown away; and that Beatson
was unfit to command. The unit was further humiliated by the court-martial of two privates for cowardice. After this some of the men refused to march under Beatson. Three privates were court-martialled and sentenced to death for inciting mutiny. On the 11th of July Kitchener—doubtless aware of the possible political implications of the case—commuted the sentences to ten years' imprisonment in one case and one year in the other two. They were sent to England in August.

Reports of the affair were released in the Australian press towards the end of August 1901. A series of fiery questions were asked by both Labour and radical liberal politicians in parliament. The event was seen as an example of blatant militarism. The authority invested in the gold braid and spurs had been used vindictively and unjustly against Australians. The honour of Victoria and the Commonwealth was said to be at stake. Promptly on the 3rd of October 1901, Barton telegraphed Chamberlain for information; the implied demand for investigation of the case was clear. Eight days later the Judge Advocate-General in London gave a complete pardon to the three privates convicted for inciting mutiny.9

Public indignation did not settle. In private Barton once again asked the Colonial Office to provide accurate information about Beatson's behaviour before the Victorians. In public he assured Australians that honour had been satisfied because Beatson had been superseded in his command. The honour of the Imperial government was also upheld. According to Chamberlain the three privates had been released because "there were legal flaws in (their) convictions, they having been tried under the wrong section of the Army Act".10 Much later he reported that Beatson denied any insult to the Australians. He did admit to talking strongly about the case to his own staff, but not in words to justify Barton's persistent enquiries. The furore ended only after radical members had spoken privately with members of the Cabinet and after Melbourne had received the returning contingent with a great demonstration.11
The second episode involved the execution of Lieutenant Handcock and Lieutenant "Breaker" Morant. Nationalist suspicion of Imperial indifference to an alleged grave miscarriage of justice, hostility to British military authority, the elevation of an act of vengeance into the mystique of mateship and the presentation of the case as the sacrifice of a gifted, reformed, and manly bushman to the dictates of foreign policy gave the story great currency at the time and have kept it alive since.\textsuperscript{12}

In the second quarter of 1901, when British columns were attempting to clear the large Boer commandos from the wild and remote countryside around Pietersburg some 180 miles North of Pretoria, the Bushveldt Carbineers were formed. This was an irregular Imperial force comprising highly-paid South Africans, Cape Dutch, and volunteers from the Yeomanry and colonial troops. The chain of command was obscure. Major R.W. Lenehan of the New South Wales Mounted Infantry and previously of the Field Artillery in that colony was appointed to command the force, but he was often in Pietersburg or trekking between units. Officers tended to view their commands as independent, answerable finally to Lenehan. The detachment at Fort Edward was commanded from June to August by a British officer, Captain Hunt; his friend and companion was an Australian, Lieutenant H.H. Morant. Among the other officers were two other Australians, Lieutenants P.J. Handcock and G.R. Witton.\textsuperscript{13}

Towards the end of October Lenehan, Morant, Handcock, Witton, and some of the non-commissioned officers of the Bushveldt Carbineers were placed under close arrest by British officers. After a preliminary enquiry they were brought before a series of courts-martial which began on the 16th of January 1902. In substance there were four charges against the Australian officers of inciting or commanding their men to "kill and murder" prisoners of war. To each charge the Australians pleaded not guilty. As officer in command of the Bushveldt Carbineers, Major Lenehan was held responsible for the actions of his junior officers and was charged with culpable neglect in not reporting certain Boer deaths. He was found guilty on one charge and sentenced to be reprimanded. The case against Witton, Handcock and Morant was of a different order. Collectively they
were found guilty for the deaths of twelve prisoners. On some counts they were recommended to mercy. The investigation bore most heavily upon Morant. Not only was he the commanding officer of the detachment; he had sworn personal vengeance on the Boers.\[14\]

Morant's life and death had elements of high romance and tragic irony. Born of gentle English parents, the young Morant entered at first upon a naval career. At about the age of eighteen his career was ruined by a disgrace sufficiently serious to bring him to Australia in 1884. For the next decade he drifted through the outback, attempting menial jobs and leaving behind him unpaid bills and dishonoured cheques. But slowly he discovered strengths in himself. As a horse-breaker his reputation spread far and wide. He could break the wildest brumby, hamstring a heifer to avenge the goring of his horse, whip spirited horses to discipline them, and hunt down dingos with cattle dogs to finish them off "with that good old weapon the stirrup-iron".\[15\] The bush rhythm of work and bust seems to have given stability to his character. He carried poetry in his saddle-bag and was known to be able to extemporize a jingle at a moment's notice. By the mid-nineties he was a regular contributor to the Bulletin offering his poems under the name of "The Breaker".

The South African War came as a God-sent opportunity for the Breaker. Now he might redeem himself and complete the long process of restitution begun in the outback. He enlisted in the South Australian Mounted Rifles. During 1900 he proved a skilful horseman, a reliable despatch-rider for General French, was mentioned in despatches, and, after the expiration of his period of enlistment in October, was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Transvaal Constabulary. On leave in England he became a close and intimate friend of Captain Hunt. Together they entered upon a round of fox-hunting, races, and balls. More important, the Breaker was accepted into the society of his family's friends. They were to see neither Morant nor Hunt again.\[16\]
... War came as a God-sent opportunity ...
Before the courts-martial Morant admitted that the prisoners had been executed. Yet until restrained by his defending counsel, he savagely attacked both the court and the charges. Had there not been provocation? Had not his friend, Hunt, been shot in a melee with the Boers? Had not his body been found stripped and mutilated? Morant's chroniclers claim that he was rankled by the hypocrisy of a British military command: it wanted a special force for irregular warfare but would not admit that such warfare was outside the accepted conventions. Above all, it is said, he felt deeply that the British did not understand his attitude to his fellow-officers and in particular his obligation to Hunt. As one construes Morant's thoughts:

... the treatment during the weeks before court-martial of himself and his mates as though they were felons - mates! What did this court know of the law of mateship in the Australian bush, the creed under which a man in a tough place stood by his mate through thick and thin and avenged any wrong done him ... 17

The stand taken by the court was succinctly summed up by the Judge Advocate:

...(W)ar is not a relation man to man, and of itself implies no private hostility between individuals ... 18

Despite conflicting evidence, it is possible that the courts-martial recommended Morant and Handcock to mercy on the grounds of extreme provocation, good previous service, and want of experience, on all counts except the case of the death of eight Boer prisoners. 19

Kitchener reviewed these findings between the 19th and 25th of February 1901. Witton's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment because he was believed to be spellbound by Morant. He was sent to England to serve his term. Lenehan was despatched under guard to Capetown, discharged, and returned to Sydney. It was otherwise for Handcock and Morant. On the 27th of February, both were executed. Before he died, Morant wrote to Lenehan exhorting him to tell the Bulletin of the case.
"Butchered to make a Dutchman's Holiday!" was his comment. On his "crucifixion" the unrepentant Morant advised future generations of Australians:

But we bequeath a parting tip
For sound advice as such men
Who come across in transport ship
To polish off the Dutchmen!

If you encounter any Boers
You really must not loot 'em,
And if you wish to leave these shores
For pity's sake don't shoot 'em!

A few days after the execution Barton told parliament what little he knew of the case. He denied by implication any responsibility for the men since they had been employed by the British Army as individuals. There the matter could not rest. For Barton apparently found public and private misgivings so intense that at the end of March he requested official information. Kitchener replied that the affair was so discreditable that he hoped the case would be given the least possible publicity. Then followed a telegram which falsely attributed to Morant, Handcock, and Witton the cold-blooded murder of twenty Boers. This erroneous summary and a precis of the court-martial were published as a parliamentary paper nine days later. 21

Barton was correct. There was not much federal Cabinet could do about the executions. It did, however, press for the release of Witton, asking the King to exercise clemency and forwarding a long petition from Victoria organized by Witton's brother and supported by the Australian Natives Association. When Deakin became Prime Minister, the case was being compared in sections of the Cape and Australian press to the Dreyfus affair. Despatches took on a more insistent tone; but they brought success. After serving a little more than three years of his sentence, Witton was released in August 1904. Immediately Deakin requested compensation for him in a despatch clearly suggesting that the original sentences were improper and unjust. This the War Office steadfastly refused. 22
Ministerial interest in the case was further prolonged by the claims of Major Lenehan who sought to be reinstated in the permanent forces of the Commonwealth, and insistently claimed deferred pay from the Imperial government and compensation. On both counts he had the support of the New South Wales government and successive federal ministries. The first count involved Major-General Hutton - General Officer Commanding the Commonwealth forces from 1902 to 1904 - in acrimonious disagreement with his Ministers for Defence. Hutton felt that a dishonoured and discredited Lenehan had no place in the army he was striving to mould. Finally Lenehan was reinstated in September 1904, not long after the release of Witton. However, his claims against the War Office came to nought, despite constant ministerial representation. At the Imperial Conference Deakin personally took the case to Haldane. It was not until 1911 that the Fisher government ruled that all possible efforts had been made.23

Thus cabinets and ministers, as they took office, were confronted by various aspects of the Morant and Handcock affair. Doubtless the case was remembered when from 1901 debate raged over the form of military discipline deemed best for Australians, when objections were made to service under the Army Act in peace and war, and when, finally, the Commonwealth decided after 1914 to refuse the imposition of the death penalty in the field against offenders in the Australian Imperial Forces. It helped create public and political support for those Australian officers who felt their units must never again be scattered and lost in the British Army. It added to the national myths making separate identity in the British world seem the clearer.

There is one further aspect of both these affairs. The fate of the Victorians should have posed legitimate doubts about the cult of the citizen-soldier. The death of Morant should have been a warning of the dangers that accompany guerrilla warfare: lawlessness, vengeance and reprisal. In neither instance did the politicians pause from indignation. They clung to an ill-articulated conviction that irregular troops could protect Australia from invasion.
It was fully consistent with the manner in which Barton approached these and other issues relating to South Africa that he should not contemplate direct military involvement until December 1901 — and then only on his own terms.

He was willing to allow the states to send drafts to keep up the strength of their units in South Africa and to allow the despatch of contingents raised or planned before the Commonwealth took control of all defence departments on the 1st of March 1901. And publicly he maintained that responsibility for existing contingents lay with the states. But as soon as the Queensland government appeared to usurp the powers of the Commonwealth and offered a further contingent, Barton rebuked the premier and reminded the Colonial Office that the Commonwealth was supreme in the sphere of defence. Out of this came the assurance from Kitchener that he was "fully satisfied with the mounted troops at his disposal".24

Sir John Forrest, the Minister for Defence, faced the same problem in a different form. In at least three states there were many men eager to return to war and to enlist at Capetown; there were also roving agents ready to recruit them for various irregular Imperial units. In July, Forrest suggested that the solution lay in raising and offering a Commonwealth contingent of some 2,000 men. Barton disagreed. His reasons became clearer as the year proceeded: there was no emergency in South Africa such as that after Black Week in December of 1899; British forces were now strong enough to complete the war, for the colonial mounted units had filled the gap while British forces were being recruited. Above all, if the British government wanted Commonwealth troops, insisted Barton, they must request them; any federal government would have to consider a measure setting a precedent for military cooperation in Imperial wars very carefully. Though Seddon of New Zealand and Laurier of Canada offered troops later in the year, Barton and his colleagues maintained their stand.25

What could be justly construed as a policy based on national dignity was caused in part by the hostility of ministerial supporters
like Crouch and Higgins - and the possible opposition of Labour - to
direct military participation. But the main reason was fiscal. Not
only did Cabinet wish to spend far less of the revenue due to it under
the Braddon Clause, the tariff issue had not been decided. Politically
it would have been dangerous to finance new policies until it was
settled. To prevent being overthrown the Cabinet therefore thought it
essential to spend no more on defence than the states had spent. 26

Thus Barton's conditions for national participation in South
Africa were clear. The measure had to be publicly justifiable. It must
result from a request from the British government. It must involve no
expenditure by the Commonwealth.

Early in December of 1901, Henniker Heaton, the English Member
of Parliament and Imperialist of penny postage fame, was in Australia.
He was distressed at Barton's inaction especially since loyal support for
the British cause was evident in all capitals. He discussed the matter
with state politicians in Melbourne who offered a Victorian contingent.
Supposing that Forrest would support him, Heaton then informed Chamberlain
of the offer on the 9th of December 1901. On the same day Chamberlain
made overtures to Hopetoun in a secret telegram. Questioned in the
House two days later, Barton stated that the government had definitely not
decided to proffer troops and promised to consult parliament before it
did so. In fact he had already decided to intervene in the South
African War.

Federal parliament rose for the Christmas recess on the 13th of
December. In public Barton said that Chamberlain had requested military
assistance "on or about December 13" but that Cabinet, feeling there was
need neither to be hysterical nor to forget obligations to the Empire,
had decided to await more authentic information. Later in the House, he
hinted that Cabinet had decided to respond to any request from Chamberlain
on or after the 17th of December - that is during the recess when there
was no parliament to consult - and explained that the official request
did not arrive until the 21st of December. What were the facts?

On the 9th of December Chamberlain asked whether the Commonwealth, if appealed to officially, would follow the example of New Zealand and Canada and despatch a contingent at the expense of the Imperial government. The following day Hopetoun informed Barton of the secret telegram. Immediately the Prime Minister committed his government - very possibly after prior discussion with his colleagues. Of this decision Chamberlain was informed on the 11th of December - the day Barton told parliament that he had made no decision. He did have two reservations. The first concerned the timing of an official announcement; the second involved public justification for supporting Chamberlain. It seems likely that Cabinet wanted to receive the official request early in January, just before parliament was to reassemble - and here it is possible to see the restraining hand of Alfred Deakin. However, after Hopetoun had pressed Chamberlain's case for urgency, Barton, on the 17th of December, proved willing publicly to respond to the British appeal whenever it was made.

The Prime Minister obviously anticipated trouble; for he had previously asked - on the 11th of December - whether the Colonial Office could confirm German reports, appearing in the Australian press, that the Commonwealth by its disinclination to send further troops had demonstrated "that England will find the Colonies to be a broken reed when she looks (to them) for support and that the Colonial military ardour has vanished since it became evident that war was not a nursery game". If this could be established, the telegram continued, our "hands will be much strengthened". Barton hoped to appeal to the sense of national honour which was evident in the furor over the Wilmansrust affair and was seen to be stimulated by the execution of Breaker Morant. On the 14th of December an item was in Australian hands from the Vossische Zeitung, reported in The Times, claiming that the Imperial idea was dead in the colonies. Thus with the decision made and the justification prepared, the official request was received on the 21st of December. It called for a force of 1,000 experienced mounted troops to be paid and equipped
by the Imperial government from the time of enlistment. The Commonwealth had only to provide clerical facilities for its organization and despatch. The Cabinet formally approved the measure on the next day. 30

It had not considered the military importance of its decision. As early as September 1899 the colonial commandants had recommended a fully representative Australian contingent of all arms under the control of an Australian officer and staff. They had warned their governments that smaller colonial units would be "scattered amongst other corps of the regular service or (be) tacked on to some other colonial unit, and thus have (their) identity destroyed." 31 This had indeed come to pass. In December 1901, the attempt was again made to realize their plan. Various officers again stressed the need for contingents composed of battalions with sufficient staff to be distinctively brigaded under an Australian commander. As eight battalions were despatched by the Commonwealth between February and June 1902, it appears that the scheme would have been practicable. But the Commonwealth brigade was not created. Barton imposed the first barrier. He, not Chamberlain, had set the limit on the contingent of 1,000 men. It is also clear from the tenor of despatches that Cabinet would satisfy Kitchener's requirements; he had no wish for a colonial brigade. Thus the contingents of the Australian Commonwealth Horse were sent to South Africa only at battalion strength and were, like their colonial predecessors, attached to other British units. We may safely assume that many Australian military officers had no wish to see a repetition of this in the future.

The decision to intervene in South Africa on even such favourable terms was for Barton political not military. So were his troubles before the House sat on the 14th of January 1902. Influential groups in the states had become frankly disgruntled over his inaction. Following Heaton's contribution to this dissatisfaction, the Victorian government and legislature formally exhorted the Commonwealth to offer, on its own initiative, sufficient troops to bring the war to an end, to demonstrate
Imperial loyalty, and to uphold the honour of the Empire. To put an end to this potential rebellion of the states against federal authority, Barton let all governments know of his decision soon after the 21st of December. He also allowed recruiting to proceed for the volunteers who had begun to appear from the beginning of the month. Significantly, those selected were called on to declare that they would fulfil all the requirements for service "under the Imperial Government" making no claim whatsoever for compensation against the Commonwealth.\(^32\) Apparently this action, cautious though it was, did not satisfy some liberals in Victoria. It is very probable that Alfred Deakin complained of the publicity and the speed of these arrangements when the measure was without parliamentary approval. Barton pleaded that it was impossible to do nothing and once measures were started he could not stop them. Public opinion, he said, was too obviously in favour of participation.\(^33\)

This was true. But it only added to his worries. On the one hand, he had to stress that to compel the Imperial government to request troops from Australia was no humiliation for either party. Many sections of the community showed little appreciation of his previous policy. On the other, he had to avoid being defeated in parliament for agreeing to Chamberlain's plea. Newspapers rumoured the alienation of the government's Labour allies and the possible opportunistic hostility of Reid.\(^34\)

Though it was most unlikely that Reid would court public disfavour, Barton thought it best to ensure his support. On the 13th of January he sent Reid a rough draft of the resolution he was to put to the House the following day. Parliament was invited to express its indignation at the foreign charges against the "honour, the humanity and the valour of the people of the Empire" on the occasion of the despatch of a Commonwealth contingent.\(^35\) As he explained, federal parliament could speak out against the "aspiration cast on the Empire — in which we proudly
assert our partnership" and vindicate "our readiness to act with that Empire in every call of duty".\(^{36}\) Reid was willing to second the government's resolution but on an important condition. Debate must include, he insisted, refutation of all offensive foreign imputations against individual soldiers and Kitchener's military administration. The government must express unshaken confidence in the chivalry and humanity of all Imperial forces. The resolution was altered to accommodate Reid. So, too, was the emphasis. Barton had stressed Australian honour, which German newspapers questioned. Now the House would be called upon to uphold the honour of Great Britain with which the dignity of Australia upon the world stage was bound. The broader terms of reference, as events proved, allowed the Imperial loyalists to whip themselves into a frenzy, and made opposition more difficult. For it would have been easier for the radicals to argue national interests against national honour than to argue against the need to maintain the honour of the British race.

On the 14th of January 1902, Barton introduced two resolutions in the House of Representatives. The first asked members to vindicate the valour, honour, and humanity of the people and troops of the British Empire; the second called upon them to promise Great Britain all possible assistance to end the war in South Africa. With the support of Reid's followers, the resolutions were passed with an overwhelming majority. Only six members rejected them. In the Senate they were passed without division. But opposition and misgivings about Barton's policy were more intense and widespread, particularly among the Labour members, than voting figures or even rhetoric indicated.\(^{37}\)

Nineteen of Reid's followers supported twenty-three of Barton's to vote for the resolutions. What of the possible dissidents among these men? J. Hume-Cook, R.A. Crouch, S. Mauger, J. Wilkinson, and A. McLean among the ministerialists had at one time or another opposed Australian involvement in the war, expressed misgivings about its conduct, or shown no readiness on other issues to follow Chamberlain's lead. Among the Free-trade opposition, A.H. Conroy, G.B. Edwards, and J.W. McCay had
shown similar predilections. Presumably they were encouraged to support Barton on this occasion not merely by the public fervour for the British cause in South Africa. It is likely that all their nationalist conditions had been met by the request for aid which Barton had extracted from the Imperial government. Five Labour politicians, W. Fowler, J.C. Watkins, J. Page, W.G. Spence, and W.M. Hughes, also supported the resolutions. Their attitude brings us to the problem of gauging the extent and significance of the opposition. It also brings us to the stand taken by Henry Bourne Higgins. 38

Higgins had opposed colonial involvement in war during 1899 and had remained a prominent critic of British policy in South Africa. He had lost his seat in Geelong in part because of such views, but had been elected to represent Northern Melbourne after publicly reaffirming them. He was a supporter of the "Peace, Humanity, and Arbitration Society" which was soon to present a petition to the Commonwealth demanding the withdrawal of all Australian troops and calling for a negotiated peace "consistent with the National traditions of a brave and gifted foe". 39 He was one of many liberal radical-nationalists in Australia; he was one of the very few pro-Boers. His personal convictions which often compelled him to differ from his fellow protectionists often coincided with views of Labour members. His election had been supported by the Labour Leagues Conference of 1901; he had spoken for Labour in criticising the first defence bill; he was to enter the first Labour ministry. On this occasion he claimed to represent the views of many politicians who had given way to public clamour in 1899 and who now privately opposed Barton's policy. Other indications proved him correct. 40

Higgins maintained that if the war was unnecessary, immoral, and unjust in 1899, then it was more so in 1902. The aim of Great Britain was the subjugation of a noble people. There had been several opportunities to negotiate peace but the sordid struggle was continued to satisfy the lust for wealth of the capitalists and for the military revenge of Majuba. There was no reason why Australians should kill Boers and burn their
... the war is unnecessary, immoral, and unjust ...
houses – the despatch of a contingent would set a precedent for the country to be involved in all Imperial conflicts without prior consultation or negotiation. Australia had no interest in such a conflict, except a responsibility to restrain the Imperial government.\textsuperscript{41}

If Higgins found his position just, he found its justification painful. His forthright points occurred in a long, anguished, and rambling speech. He deplored the conformity imposed upon the public and politicians by editorial opinion. There was, he suggested, every attempt to "terrorize members" who wished to criticize.\textsuperscript{42} Loyalty to the Crown, he protested, did not exclude loyalty to the ideals of truth and justice. Indeed, for the just man, he implied, criticism and opposition were obligatory, and would remain so until there was an extremely grave national emergency. Then his response could be different. If Great Britain were in "extreme need – if her existence were in danger and it were a matter of life and death", he admitted, "we should spend every man and every shilling in defending the Empire".\textsuperscript{43}

This admission was important. Many of the opponents in 1899 had argued thus, but had given way in the face of public clamour even before the disasters of Black Week. British reverses then seemed to justify a change in attitude that was dictated at root by the urge to political survival. Crudely, this was the stand taken by men who drew sustenance from the indigenous values of Australian nationalism which lacked the ideological equipment for criticism of British policy in times of crisis. Apart from moral bravery and an appreciation of Australia's destiny, Higgins was sustained by something more.

He agreed that the British Empire stood for civilization and liberty as no other had done in history. He came, he confessed, from Northern Irish stock more English than the English. Like them, he drew breath from the England that had welcomed the deeds of Kossuth, Garibaldi, and the Poles. He recalled the England of John Bright opposing the Crimean War, and of Gladstone seeking peace during the first Boer War.
Higgins, despite his belief in protection and radical reform, strongly felt that the English liberal tradition should guide him in the affairs of Australia. Unlike the Australian liberals who supported the British cause and the Labour men who could not openly oppose it, Higgins argued passionately about the conduct of Imperial affairs not as an Australian, nor a British-Australian, nor even an independent Australian-Briton, but, like Professor G.A. Wood of Sydney and C.H. Pearson of Melbourne, as an Englishman who called Australia his home. That he alone should play such a role indicates a dimension of Australian colonial nationalism which Richard Jebb did not discern.

In the division that followed Higgins was supported by five Labour politicians - Bamford, McDonald, Thomas, Ronald, and Mahon. Bamford and McDonald came from Queensland - as did Andrew Fisher, the future Prime Minister - where opposition to colonial participation in 1899 had initially been markedly vehement; we may assume that they - along with Thomas of New South Wales - preserved their suspicions that the war had been provoked by capitalist interests. Ronald was a Presbyterian minister with considerable sympathy for the Quaker movement. Mahon was an Irish nationalist who had been Parnell's private secretary and had served a gaol sentence with him. From such men came the fire of the anti-conscriptionists in 1917.44

Those Labour politicians who supported Barton's resolution had equally various motives. Spence had raised no objection to the despatch of contingents in 1899; Watkins had. In both cases - and that of Fowler - we may assume that in 1902 electoral pressure was at least as influential as personal views. Page, on the other hand, had served with British forces in South Africa during the eighties. Very probably he favoured participation. The case of Hughes is more interesting. He had opposed participation in October 1899, on the general ground that the war, unjust in purpose, had been provoked by British financial interests. Furthermore, he argued that an emergency did not exist; so long as Great Britain was in no danger - or did he mean in difficulty? - Australians were under no
obligation to assist. This second argument was probably the public justification for his change in attitude. It is difficult to be certain, for either by happy accident or transparent design, he was absent when the division was taken in the New South Wales legislature and voted in favour of Barton's resolutions by virtue of a pair. Later, however, after the matter had been decided and when the issue could still not be avoided, he was to assert that the Australian troops going to South Africa had the support of the great majority of the public. Doubtless setting his sails to catch the radical breezes Higgins had stirred, he admitted:

I have taken up an attitude in regard to this war different in some respects from that assumed by my colleagues. I did not believe in the war at the start, but since then I have been rather too enthusiastically in favour of the country to which I belong. 45

The ambiguity of the last phrase was a product of the confusion in national identity we have already examined. 46

In a speech rehearsing many of Higgins' arguments but resting ultimately upon Christian, pacifist, and humane objections to the war, Senator McGregor was to remark that each Labour politician followed his own conscience because the question had "no significance in labour politics. Our object in Parliament is of a different character altogether". 47 This was sufficient justification for a McDonald, on the one hand, or a Hughes, on the other. But it could not be so for men like the leader of the party, J.C. Watson, and those like Senator Pearce. They sought to examine the national and Imperial aspects of the issue without doing violence to the views of their colleagues and without drawing the dreaded public charge of pro-Boer as Higgins had done. Their concern seems to have been with the formulation of a Labour policy. 48

Their task was difficult. Direct criticism of Barton's measures was impolitic. Watson - like Andrew Fisher and King O'Malley - indicated his attitude and his misgivings to the House but went from the chamber before a vote was taken; Pearce did not have to face a division. Safer means had to be found for expressing doubts and reservations.
W.M. HUGHES

... too much in favour of the country to which he belonged ...

J.C. WATSON

... no jingoistic cries for vengeance ...
Accordingly, Watson later introduced a motion calling on the government to prevent the appearance of troops at a public meeting celebrating the despatch of the first contingent. Reid, hoping to take advantage of this mood to woo Labour support for the approaching tariff debates, followed soon after with a motion respectfully censuring the Governor-General for justifying in public Cabinet's attitude to the war during 1901. Both involved issues of importance as well as the opportunity to express views on South Africa without risk. Speakers on the first stressed the necessity for preventing military coercion and influence in public affairs, and for preserving the right of free and open criticism of the government's policy and the conduct of war in South Africa. Amid the earnest concern about the spread of "militarism" in Australia came support for Higgins. The second motion involved the exclusion of the Governor-General from politics. It was also an opportunity for attacking Barton on the grounds that he had committed the nation to assist Britain without first consulting parliament. In all debates twelve of the sixteen Labour members had taken a stand. Of these, only two were unequivocally in favour of participation. Five were opposed. Five - Watson, O'Malley, Hughes, Batchelor, and Fisher - felt some reservation.49

Thus in a situation fraught with divergent, changing, and cloaked views, Watson gained some measure of support for the middle course he had pursued. This is best seen in the speeches of both Watson and Pearce; for Pearce, in the less tense atmosphere of the Senate, was able to elaborate themes Watson had introduced in other debates.50

Briefly the middle course was this. Though it was necessary for the Commonwealth to appear united before the outside world, discussion of the issue - and open criticism - must be allowed to continue. For the South African War had not, as the government assumed, ceased to be a political question. Various objections could be made against Barton's first motion. There was no need for Australians to be distressed at foreign news reports; they should ignore them with quiet dignity, not respond with jingoistic cries for vengeance. For it was undoubted that
the nation was loyal and valorous and that the war was being fought with
the greatest possible humanity. But the best interests of Australia would
be served by keeping man-power in the country for internal development.
Parliament's first loyalty must always be to Australia. Even so, Great
Britain had requested troops. They must therefore be raised for service
in South Africa. Political considerations could not, however, stop there.
The second resolution—calling on aid from Australia to end the war—was
dangerous. Apart from the precedent set, it invited the British government
to press for the subjugation of the Boers without mercy. Chamberlain had
already indicated that colonial opinion was urging the drastic prosecution
of the war. By its very participation at the request of the Imperial
government, the Commonwealth bore a responsibility for the nature of the
peace. War must not be carried to the extreme. Every effort must be made
to keep the possibility of negotiation open on the most lenient terms.
Above all, the basic condition of peace must be the certainty of full
citizenship rights for the Boers. 51

Both Watson and Barton expressed concern for the kind of peace
that would follow victory in South Africa. Yet while Watson desired
political discussion to keep the issue alive, Barton wanted parliamentary
support for military operations and dependence upon Great Britain for
mercy and magnanimity. Only Pearce saw the consequence of Watson's demand.
If Australia was ever to decide the issues of peace and war, it must have
a voice in the management of the Empire. Yet as Barton had elsewhere
explained, the first concern of the Commonwealth was the success of the
federal experiment; its role in Imperial affairs in the meantime had to be
slight. His view prevailed: parliamentary discussion ceased and the
peace was signed without intervention by the Commonwealth. 52

Even while Watson was finding prudent means for his followers
to express their views, arrangements were being made to organize two more
batteries from the great surplus of recruits. The formation of a second
contingent was announced on the 21st of January; there was no comment from the lower House. The last contingent — the eighth — left Australia in June. Once committed on such favourable terms, the only limit to the Commonwealth's military contribution appeared to be the lack of competent and experienced officers. It was a limitation of great importance to those who were to direct defence policy, and it was to recur as a serious problem in 1915. 53

In May 1902, Deakin was asked as acting Prime Minister whether Chamberlain had honoured his public promise to consult the colonies before peace was negotiated with the Boers. "The Government", he answered, "has not been consulted." This was misleading. There is no evidence that Cabinet sought to intervene; and the announcement of the cessation of hostilities indicated that the ministry was, by and large, content merely to restate its views in the House. In hasty declarations designed to prevent further discussion, government leaders expressed hopes for the peace, prosperity, and unity of South Africa. By these means and the common patriotism of Boer and Briton, South Africa would soon possess the same free institutions to be found in Australia. 54

Yet, despite this brief outburst of genuine goodwill, the Cabinet had not examined its aims in this imperial war. Barton displayed, then and later, an occasional grasp of realpolitik. Much later Deakin argued indignantly that the importation of Chinese labour to the Rand was a betrayal of the cause for which Australian lives and money had been spent. Later still Richard Jebb implored him to protest against responsible government for the Orange River Colony. This, he warned, prejudiced federation, betrayed Australia's Imperial allies, endangered the status of British settlers — in short Milner's administration sacrificed the aims for which the Commonwealth had fought. In vain Deakin responded. But no such aims had been made clear to the imperial government or discussed in the House. Only the uncomfortable Watson, and to a lesser extent Senator Pearce, seemed to appreciate in 1902 the necessary relationship between state policy and the organization of armed might. 55
In the parliamentary discussion - and the policy which preceded it - the issue had been considered with striking restraint and responsibility. Few politicians were as fervent as editorialists for the daily press. Fewer showed the unbridled emotional attachment to Great Britain that was to be experienced in town halls from Rockhampton to Adelaide, where resolutions were passed giving unequivocal support, not for the Commonwealth, not merely for the British government, but personally for Joseph Chamberlain in whatever course he thought best to pursue. Orators, the like of which Reid had described in 1897, dwelled upon the honour, the prestige, and the dignity of the British Empire and the British race. They did not attempt to see Australia's role clearly, to assess national interests and national responsibilities. That was left to men like Watson and Barton. Watson's task in this respect had been made easier by the stand of Higgins and by the opposition to the government by the Bulletin and the Worker. It was also made necessary by the divisive tendencies in his own party. The more credit, then, must go to Barton. It was he who pursued a policy of dignified restraint, borne of parsimony, throughout 1901.56

A further striking feature of the debate was that nearly all parliamentarians could claim to be imperialists. Both republicanism and imperial federation had been abandoned as solutions to problems of peace and war. Yet to recall the spirit of the speeches of Barton, Reid, Fowler, Salmon, Higgins, Watson, and Pearce is to remember what a variety there was in the forms of loyalty to King and country. Among the Free-traders there were Imperial loyalists who so closely identified British security and prestige with those of Australia that they would tend to accept active cooperation as the role for the Commonwealth in Imperial defence in both peace and war. Thence came the strongest support for the renewal of the Naval Agreement of 1887 and the conviction that the despatch of contingents to the Soudan and later to South Africa had set a firm precedent. Thence also came support for the formation of an Australian army capable of acting beyond territorial waters. Their views attracted men in other parliamentary groups. Many of the protectionists would have tended to agree but with important provisos. National interests
had to be served; national honour had to be satisfied; and, above all, national legislation of much higher priority had first to be passed. These could be achieved only if Australia's limited armed forces were controlled by the Commonwealth to mark its separate identity in the British world and organized to enhance its authority in the eyes of its citizens. Such convictions were strengthened by the party's radical adherents who in turn were often supported by members of the Labour Party. For they shared with most Labour politicians a belief in Australian self-reliance. Imperial crises could be accepted as exceptional occasions calling for ad hoc decisions on the nature of military assistance according to the justice of the cause and the gravity of the crisis. Labour politicians who held such views, along with radicals like McCoy in the Free-trade party, and radicals like Crouch and Higgins in the Protectionist party, were to exert a profound effect upon federalist military policy.

* * *

The success of military cooperation by the Commonwealth owed a great deal to Joseph Chamberlain and the War Office. The Imperial government not only undertook to pay, equip, arm, train the national contingents, to pay annuities and pensions, and to replace any Australian equipment used by the men. It paid promptly. By October 1903, some £415,000 had been advanced to the Commonwealth. Both sides kept strictly to the agreement of the 21st of December 1902. This aspect of the federal government's role in the South African War was to be overlooked by enthusiastic Imperialists; for if participation had set a precedent, one condition had been payment for service by the British taxpayer. 57

And what of the contribution of Henniker Heaton? Did he, as some politicians thought, force Barton's hand by stirring discontent in Victoria and then wiring Chamberlain? Did Barton fall or was he pushed? Chamberlain kept those questions alive by asking Hopetoun to thank Heaton publicly for his patriotic spirit. Indignantly Barton informed him that Heaton had interfered in the affairs of the Commonwealth; that neither
he nor Forrest gave him tacit support; that it stirred grave doubts to receive a secret request from the Secretary of State on the same day Heaton had sent McCulloch's unauthorized and unconstitutional offer to the Colonial Office. Some ministers believed Chamberlain's action a direct response to Heaton's agitation; a few seem to have wondered whether Chamberlain had manipulated the whole affair. Cabinet suspected that someone had attempted to push the Prime Minister. Chamberlain denied any such intrigue. 58

Barton's suspicions were reasonable. While he and Deakin were in London to watch over the passage of the Constitutional Bill, they had experience of Chamberlain's manipulation of Australian opinion to suit his own purposes. Furthermore, dissatisfaction with the management of the war, talk of a new ministry, a wavering in public support which Milner and Chamberlain feared so much, all marked the British response to the struggle in South Africa during the first months of the winter of 1901. Perhaps Chamberlain felt the need of support from the colonies. If he did so—and if he did commission Heaton's activities or take advantage of them—the Commonwealth government and public bodies in Australia certainly gave him a vote of confidence. But whatever Chamberlain's motives, the tenor of Barton's indignant despatch on the Heaton affair indicated that any future military cooperation would not be easily manipulated from Whitehall. That was another precedent. 59

What did contemporaries make of the military contribution from the colonies, and, later, the Commonwealth? L.S. Amery was to suggest that Imperialists everywhere had come to realize that race "instinct or patriotism are as much natural emotions as hunger or self-interest". He was also to declare that the colonies had sent contingents to prove they would not tolerate any secession from the Empire. Lieutenant Modern, an Imperial federationist in Britain who devoted himself later to attacking the concept of local colonial navies, was to declare:

The larger feeling of race patriotism swept away local patriotism ... and well it was for the Empire it was so. 60
Captain A.T. Mahan thought that the war had seen the stirrings of Imperialism and the quickening of national self-consciousness. Lord Brassey, of Naval Annual fame, was of the opinion that participation had finished talk of separation. Richard Jebb, who drew strongly upon the sentiments expressed in the Bulletin over the period to help formulate his ideas of national self-respect and of colonial nationalism, tended to dismiss elements of "racial sentiment or artificial 'loyalty'" in the Australian response. Yet he wrote:

(The) coincidence that almost the first official action of the Commonwealth Government was to direct the despatch of military contingents to South Africa signifies the fact that in Australia, as in Canada, there is not merely a compatibility but even a causal connection between nationalism and imperialism. 61

It is a pity that this shrewd observer could not carry his analysis further; if he had he may have found himself agreeing with Amery. A leading Australian spokesman of the Royal Colonial Institute, Senator Harney, was to state:

Australia has never been louder in her cry for an independent army and navy and never more clamorous in the assertion of her distinctive nationality than at the very period when patriotic fervour of the South African War was at its hottest. 62

Close examination of the politics of the period reveals that Amery was right but inadequate, Hodorn not completely wrong yet wilfully imperceptive, Mahan too general about a vital point, Brassey unduly surprised and gratified, Jebb convincing for reasons he dismisses, and Harney false to the facts if true to part of the spirit of the times. Each grasped something of importance. Of them all Jebb's analysis was found most fitting and, a just reward, his term "colonial nationalism" gained currency among contemporaries.
The truth of the matter was that in 1902 neither national policies nor the role of the Commonwealth in the Empire had been settled. Conflicting opinions - between a Higgins and a Fowler or a Reid and a Barton - reflected differences held by Australians at large. Each was necessary for the formulation of future defence policy. None was an absolute guide in itself. For the South African conflict was the occasion for a debate about the issues of peace and war which reached back to Gavan Duffy, Parkes, J.D. Lang, and beyond. The perpetuation of the debate was far more important than the war.
CHAPTER SIX

THE TRIAL OF AN IMPERIALIST: THE MILITARY REFORMS OF

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR EDWARD HUTTON (1901-1905)

It will be readily conceded by all observers of recent events in our history that a mutual, though unwritten, understanding exists between all portions of the Queen's dominions. The ties of sentiment and of self-interest alike render the maintenance of the Empire necessary for the commercial and political development of each and all .... (This) can be best effected by an "offensive-defensive" system of defence.

COLONEL E.T.H. HUTTON, 1898.

If we let him alone he will land us in a queer mess. He will put the collar and chain around the kangaroo all right.

LABOUR PARLIAMENTARIAN,
September 1902.

If (Sir John Forrest) should now fail to guard the rights of the citizen soldier against the claims of professionalism, the Federal Parliament may just as well repeal all existing Defence Acts and Regulations, and proclaim a military dictatorship under Major-General Hutton.

The DAILY HERALD, 18 March 1903.

(The) soldier has been set aside. The civilians have triumphed. The needs of defence have been subordinated to political considerations.

MAJOR-GENERAL HUTTON, November 1903.

I have impressed upon successive Governments the primary importance of having a mobile field force ... capable of the Defence of Australia as well as Australian interests elsewhere if hereafter considered advisable .... Never have I recommended, or implied, any proposal to give the control of Australian troops to other than the Commonwealth.

MAJOR-GENERAL HUTTON, November 1904.
On the 1st of March 1901 the Commonwealth assumed control of the state defence departments. It was, however, in no great haste to appoint a military adviser to command the federal forces.

From the outset Barton acknowledged the need for an Imperial officer: a soldier on the active list of the British Army, enthusiastic enough to undertake arduous duties and travel extensively, and sufficiently experienced to create an army from the disparate colonial units and, with the Minister, to mould military policy; a qualified expert who was at once discreet and tactful, sympathetic to the citizen-soldiery, and fully acquainted with the war in South Africa. For one such man Cabinet was prepared to pay £2,000 a year - so long as he was unconditionally recommended by Lord Roberts.

None of the officers selected by Roberts for Australian approval would accept the post. Some wanted at least double the salary. All required, in accordance with the advice of Imperial authorities, a large staff including four other British officers. In particular, Chamberlain wanted to see the Assistant Quarter-Master-General, responsible for strategic assessments and plans for "offensive and defensive operations", drawn from the British Army. Negotiations were protracted. Indeed the first Defence Bill, naval policy, and intervention in South Africa were discussed before the matter was settled. Finally, Cabinet raised its offer to £2,500 and of its own accord mentioned a candidate whom, after repeated enquiries, Lord Roberts eventually felt "disposed to recommend ...".

On the 29th of January 1902 Major-General Sir Edward Thomas Henry Hutton, K.C.M.G., C.B., arrived in Melbourne and assumed command of the Commonwealth forces. He was well known and well spoken for in New South Wales where he had served as commandant. Not only was he familiar with the Bevan Edwards report of 1889 but had been president of the second Federal Military Conference. Reid was therefore delighted at
the appointment. Hutton was prepared to accept the salary. More important, he assured Chamberlain that he would not require the services of any other Imperial officer. Under him Head-Quarters Staff could be composed of Australians. Barton declared that Australia was indeed fortunate to receive the services of such an experienced officer for so low a sum. The radicals were not so sure.

Before leaving England, Hutton had requested that his term of office be reduced from five to three years. This was granted. He also sought the local rank of Lieutenant-General, in part to place his authority over the state commandants beyond question. The War Office refused. Roberts promised to reconsider promotion if "the military affairs of the Federation have succeeded ...". Close to the age of retirement he had, then, three years in which to weld the forces of the Commonwealth and lay the foundation of military policy. Cabinet, federal parliament, and the War Office would be watching him.

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Hutton was singularly qualified to expound his fixed opinions about the future Australian army. Born in 1848 he had, at the age of nineteen, joined the King's Royal Rifle Corps as an ensign. In fifteen years he had graduated from Staff College, fought in the first Boer War, and campaigned against the Zulus. During the Egyptian and Soudan expeditions he again saw action, was mentioned in despatches, and had his horse shot from under him. Experience in the field was matched by responsibility at command level. He returned to England to take a position on the staff at Aldershot.

These formative years must have been exciting ones for Hutton. Apart from the experience of campaigning he lived through a period of reform which saw the abolition of the purchase of commissions against intense parliamentary opposition and the beginning of the struggle against promotion by seniority alone. Rather than living a comparatively indolent regimental life, he became an enthusiastic professional. Under the aegis
of Wolseley he became, as he later explained, "the humble instrument for establishing the Mounted Infantry" against the scornful opposition of cavalry officers. Service at home had convinced him of the unused potential of citizen-soldiers; service abroad convinced him of the strategic and tactical value of the mounted infantry, not as an ancillary, but as an arm of the service in its own right.

In his own terms, Hutton expounded on the nationalization of the rifle mentioned by the Age and even the principles of mateship described by Breaker Morant. The range of modern weapons, he insisted, and the deadly effects of concentrated rifle fire called for rapid mobility. On horseback, the infantryman had great potential offensive power; dismounted, he possessed all the qualities of the marksman and skirmisher plus the facility for fluid manoeuvre. Dispersion under attack, concentration of fire power in defence, rapid flank marches on the offensive, the use of natural cover for advance or retreat, and, in the last resort, the charge, were all possible with mounted infantry. Fluid warfare called for special qualities in officers and men. The pipe-clay and pedantry of the peacetime parade ground had to go. Drill for the troops would have to be simplified; initiative set at a premium; individualism encouraged; efficiency with automatic weapons a necessity. The men would be bound together by common background if enlisted on a territorial system but more so by experience and comradeship. Non-commissioned officers had to be selected with care. Discipline had to be firm but not stifling. The spirit of cooperation between officers and between commanders and the men would be perpetuated, Hutton believed, if the officers, unlike those in France, were drawn from the one class. For efficiency and cohesion in war, to win the respect and obedience of the men, it was essential that all officers be non-political and professionally competent.

While Hutton failed to persuade in England, he sought and found vindication in the outer Empire. He also displayed remarkable versatility. As commandant in New South Wales from 1893 to 1896 he did much to revitalize the militia system, enthuse officers of the permanent artillery, institute
... an enthusiastic professional in search of vindication ...
reserves and service units, hasten the formation of volunteer infantry regiments, reorganize administration, draw up plans for mobilization, and establish the nucleus of a field force, the predominant feature of which was the mounted rifles. More than any other he raised the status of the forces. As a federalist, he emphasized the importance of the field force and played an important role in drawing up the Federal Defence Scheme and the Draft Federal Agreement. Justifiably impressed with his reforms, he returned to England to praise colonial troops, often to sceptical audiences. After observing the German and French manoeuvres of 1897 he was more convinced that colonial experience had confirmed his teachings: citizen-soldiers needed only effective organization and expert officers to form a complete and powerful army of all three arms—infantry, mounted rifles, and artillery—capable of augmenting the regular forces. The alternative, conscription or compulsory military training, he found impressively suitable to Teutonic calculation but antipathetic to Celtic impetuosity. When later confronted directly by the proposal he found it abhorrent, "contrary to the principles of military service among Anglo-Saxon races", an unwarranted danger to free political institutions, and an intrusion on personal liberty. It was natural for him to declare that soldiers bore the heavy responsibility of cultivating military spirit in Australia—and elsewhere—and of inculcating in the young national character, healthy bodies, patriotism, self-abnegation, devotion to duty, and realization of the sacrifices that sprang from citizenship. But compulsory training was too high a price to pay for those advantages. These remained his views until well after 1908.

From England Hutton set out for Canada where as General Officer Commanding at the turn of the century he had a more difficult time. Relations with the Cabinet were often tense and sometimes acrimonious. Nevertheless, his insistence upon the training of militia officers at the Kingston Military College and the method of inducting reserves and recruits into undermanned units to bring them to wartime establishment brought success during the South African War. He led the Second Battalion of the Royal Canadian Artillery with skill and credit. In mid-1900 he was given permission to form the First Mounted Infantry Division of some 6,000 men
from units of the British Regular Army, the Imperial Yeomanry, and
Canadian, New Zealand, and Australian contingents. On his staff were the
Victorian, Colonel J.C. Road, and the New South Welshman, Colonel W.T.
Bridges. Tasmanians, South Australians, and Queenslanders also served
under him.

This was almost the vindication he sought. Using railways and
road he demonstrated the strategic mobility of his forces - but so did many
other commanders. He did command Imperial troops from Great and Greater
Britain - but the force so painstakingly collected from many theatres was
soon scattered. It may have been as well because intercolonial rivalry
and resentment at being subordinated in a larger organization were already
causing friction among the Australians. The demonstration had lasted too
short a time in a war on too vast a scale to impress official opinion.
Nevertheless, Hutton felt he had successfully applied the principles he had
long advocated, drawn the correct lessons from the conflict, and knew for
certain how correct was his prescription for training mounted infantrymen.9

The first General Officer Commanding was thus a conservative who
believed in individuality, a British officer who had sought service under
colonial governments, a professional who was as zealous as he could be
arrogant, a man of varied but not outstanding experience who was possessed
by a vision requiring fulfilment. A sometimes formidable presence on the
parade ground, he could be warm and affable to his intimates. He could
grasp the essentials of a military problem yet have difficulty in expressing
them with clarity and subtlety. He could practice guile - indeed Alfred
Deakin was to describe him as "absolutely slim"10 and yet speak tactlessly.
He would extend the arm of patronage to protect officers from public fury
and yet call it upon himself by chastising prominent citizen-soldiers. He
expected loyalty and was deeply distressed by apparent betrayal or angered
by military criticism. He surrounded himself with proteges but was
unwilling to delegate responsibility. Despite a truculent manner and a
disdain of politicians, he craved private understanding and public
recognition. Later he smarted under the attack which, he bitterly
complained, came from "ill-informed members of Parliament who have had neither the training nor possess the military instincts to qualify them as critics" who "credit me with all the prejudices and ideas of a machine-made officer" and remained ignorant "of my character, of my training, and of the almost unique experience which Providence has given me in commanding Colonial troops in all parts of the Empire and under the varied conditions of peace and war". For not only was Hutton seen as the archetypal British officer and military expert whom nationalists and amateurs felt duty bound to criticize, he was also an Imperialist who appeared to give them cause.

His attitude to Empire was set in the eighties and expounded during the following decade. "The more trade, the more war; and the more war, the more trade", he once declared, invoking Seeley's The Expansion of England. The fruits and beneficence of Empire followed the sword; trade followed the flag; expeditionary forces protected honour and interests. Without expansion, the stern ordeal of war, and national difficulty, no state could become rich and powerful. The evolving state within the British nation, Australia, was no exception. Aspirations in the Pacific and increasing trade augured greatness in Eastern seas; friction with other commercial powers was inevitable and conflict likely. These were beliefs to chill the blood of Gladstonians, radicals, and Labour members in the New South Wales legislature. Moreover, as a strategist and a soldier Hutton saw the Empire as a unit and the forces of the Crown as one. Though loyal to the colonial governments he served, his allegiance would not be in doubt if the Crown were at war and his superiors hesitated to cooperate. He owed first loyalty to the Queen.

His interest in Imperial military cooperation was sustained by his absorption with the citizen-soldiers in the colonies. With the advent of federation, Hutton was sure, Australian forces could be organized for active Imperial cooperation.* He therefore envisaged the formation of a

* For succinct account of forms which military cooperation could take — and the distinction between a formal and informal Imperial reserve — see Appendix B.
vast militia army under the Crown drawn from the field forces of all the self-governing colonies. Basing his plan on the recommendations of the Federal Military Conferences and projecting the proposed Australian organization on the Empire, he suggested in 1897 that each colony maintain forces under legislation like the British Militia Act. Field forces of each colony could then be used for home - or passive - defence; they could also combine with other colonial forces for expeditionary operations. This was the true offensive-defensive potential of the militia. It had to be organized and trained to fulfil both functions. On the one hand, there was no reason to have Australian forces controlled and paid by the British government; on the other, there were substantial objections to improvising an expeditionary force from hastily trained volunteers. For only by rapid mobilization and concentration was security at home and success in distant spheres of operation assured. The Australian mounted rifles could create chaos by penetrating deep beyond Kandahar in the event of Russian attack upon India. War was ever best fought on foreign soil.\(^{13}\)

The use of colonial troops as some kind of Imperial reserve had been discussed since the days of Dalley's gallant offer. The idea evoked increasing interest after Hutton's departure from New South Wales. The War Office had been prepared to countenance active military cooperation primarily because it demonstrated the solidarity of Greater Britain, not because there was military potential to be tapped. Small colonial units might serve as they did in the Soudan; or they might serve abroad to relieve British regulars of garrison duties on distant Royal Naval stations. Despite marginal and fitful interest in the offensive capacities of colonial troops, official assessment of their prowess in London was low.\(^{14}\)

The popularity of the mounted rifle contingents attending the Diamond Jubilee foreshadowed a change. Commenting on "Major-General Hutton's pets" the London *Daily Mail* stated that the officers and men of the parading units were "of course loyalists from plume to spur". The men, it observed, were "peculiarly characteristic" of Australia:
As a type they are the swarthy, lean and lithe warrior, with bone and muscle so hard that you couldn't drive a nail into any part of them. They ride like centaurs, for their saddle has been their cradle, and the horse that could throw one of them has not yet been foaled ...

Drawn from pastoral pursuits in the outback, these examples of sturdy manhood put the Imperial yeomanry to shame. Britain stood in no danger as long as the "dependencies" could produce such soldiers. This eulogy was proudly written into the records of the unit to become the Second Australian Light Horse Regiment. 15

Plans from Australia involving far more centralized control than Hutton was willing to contemplate were not long in following. During 1897 Lord Brassey, of Naval Annual fame and Governor of Victoria, advocated the formation of a special corps of 5,000 mounted rifles drawn from the Australian colonial forces. In return for an annual retainer of twenty pounds paid by the British government, each citizen-soldier in especially designated units would be liable for service in Imperial wars. This scheme — and its many modifications — contemplated the creation of Australian units as part of a formal Imperial reserve which would automatically fall under British control on the declaration of an emergency. The Colonial Defence Committee was not, however, impressed. Small colonial forces attached to British regiments during expeditionary operations were one thing; to burden the Imperial treasury was another. The return would not warrant the cost. Australians were inexperienced, unevenly trained, variously organized, and hostile to rigid discipline. All experience pointed to the value of regular troops. Moreover, Imperial federationists, the Committee implied, overlooked the gravity of political objections, indeed ignored the workings of representative and autonomous government in the colonies. 16

The South African War and its aftermath slowly changed official opinion. Mounted troops proved indispensable; militia forces were essential to augment the regular units; and colonials had demonstrated
their prowess. By 1902 there seemed widespread approval for the scheme which Hutton, among many others, had advocated. Yet the War Office remained cautious. It was not until 1904 — the final year of Hutton's term of office under the Commonwealth — that the Elgin Commission into the conduct of the war in South Africa unreservedly declared the use of the military potential of Greater Britain to be a matter of necessity, not permissive condescension. The report stated:

If the war teaches anything it is this, that throughout the Empire, the United Kingdom, its colonies and dependencies, there is a reserve of military strength which for many reasons, we cannot and do not wish to convert into a large standing army, but to which we may be glad to turn again in an hour of need as we did in 1899 .... We regret to say that we are not satisfied that enough is being done to place matters on a better footing in the event of another emergency. 17

Again events validated Hutton's earlier assertions and schemes; again he was denied personal credit. For just as it was difficult for Australian radicals to dissociate Hutton, the soldier, from the stereotype of the British officer, so they distrusted Hutton, the strategist, because he seemed too much the British Imperialist. In fact his devotion to Empire was restrained by his sensitivity to nationalist aspirations and by his commitment to the federal experiment. The organization of a national army owing allegiance to the Commonwealth while drawing sustenance from territorial affiliations was his aim. Whatever the virtues of Imperial control, military cooperation within the Empire, he knew, could be based only upon the will of the various autonomous governments to form an "offensive-defensive alliance" — upon an unwritten agreement to offer mutual assistance as loyalty to Crown and country dictated. Moreover, the glorification of war — after the experience of South Africa — was no longer fashionable or tenable. An even stronger restraint was Hutton's professional ethic. He was trained to advise and obey his civilian superiors. Without betraying his responsibilities to the Crown, sacrificing his concept of Empire, or ignoring his duties to the War Office, he earnestly attempted to serve the Commonwealth as if it already possessed many characteristics of a nation-state. 18
There was one other dimension to Hutton's character which Australian politicians failed to perceive and utilize. As a professional soldier, he not only desired the sympathetic direction of his civilian superiors but demanded a clear defence policy — or at least a cogent list of instructions — approved by Cabinet. This he considered essential to serve the Commonwealth, especially if his organization of colonial forces was to rest on something more substantial than shifting parliamentary opinion. As a professional, he also had a fixed concept of what constituted a defence policy. It rested upon the responsibilities to be assumed by the civil arm of government.

What is state policy in external affairs? What specific interests within or outside the nation does the state consider worthy of protection? Who are the probable enemies? What are the probable dangers? How much armed might is therefore necessary to underwrite policy? What resources are available? What organization of men and equipment will best meet these conditions? How can the forces be most effectively used? Taken together and in order the answers to these questions form a defence policy and provide the essential context for more technical consideration. Soldiers may advise or provide answers to some of them. Cabinet must approve the answers to all, including the most tentative. For the professional soldier there is an essential symmetry in defence policy which begins with grand strategy and ends with plans for mobilization. This demand for civil direction assumes that statesmen may quite properly refuse to commit their government irrevocably to certain courses of action in peacetime; yet where they cannot be certain they must deal in probabilities. Room for manipulation, manoeuvre, and diplomacy is essential to political life; fixed plans, down to the formidable problems of logistics and railway timetables, is an unavoidable aspect of military thinking. But defence policy must never be so vague that probable courses of action cannot be postulated for military planning; military planning must never be so rigid that no latitude is left for diplomatic manoeuvre. Even in peacetime when questions are difficult to answer the responsibility of the soldier is clear; so, too, is the obligation of the statesmen. Military planning
in an Imperial situation may involve further complexities. Yet the closer a self-governing community is — or aspires — to dominion status the more relevant the mode of formulating defence policy. Colonial nationalism, as Richard Jebb saw, was often accompanied by a repudiation of the comforts in the Gladstonian doctrine and involved an assessment of national interests and local policy within the Empire. At the very least, if ministers argued that the basic considerations of policy were long the responsibility of the British government, their military advisers could demand that they decide how far it was appropriate to accept guidance from London.

For Hutton and his protégé, Colonel W.T. Bridges, who was to be Chief of Intelligence after 1904, this was no academic argument. Whether Australian ministries found such views foreign or irrelevant is not clear. It is certain that no minister and no Cabinet attempted to fulfil its responsibilities until well after 1907, and in a sense failed until the outbreak of the Great War. In the earlier period, under weak, confused, or inexperienced ministers, initiative often fell to parliament where a confusion existed between defence legislation enabling the organization of forces and defence policy dealing with their function. The will of parliament amounted to a jumble of caveats and negative injunctions directed at the schemes Hutton propounded. No military policy was defined by Cabinet; none approved. Colonel Bridges was still trying to extract answers to the questions in 1908.20

At first Major-General Hutton prospered in his new command precisely because civil direction was lacking and he had ample opportunity to display both his talents and his convictions. For soon after his arrival in Melbourne Sir John Forrest and Edmund Barton requested that he draft a general scheme of defence. The resulting Minute upon the Defence of Australia of April 1902 drew upon his previous knowledge of Australia and contained the distillation of his varied experience. It was to be the basis of all his reforms. In accepted fashion he began with a strategical appreciation and ended with a table of establishments. Hutton, the soldier and the Imperialist, could not but intrude upon policy.
... an Imperialist with a prescription for national defence ...
He filled the gap left by the indecision or indifference of Cabinet. It was a position he was to refuse to vacate.  

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The basic considerations of Hutton's policy bore two faces. The first was familiar and serene. Traditional threats from traditional enemies would be adequately met by traditional solutions. As a dependency of the Crown protected by a Royal Navy it should help to maintain, the Commonwealth could face with equanimity the prospect of raids. Commerce protection could be left to Imperial forces. The cities would be safe. For garrison troops would man the fixed defences whose strength would be supplemented by the colonial naval forces under military authority. Once contemplation passed from probabilities to the various possibilities arising "from any warlike complication" the role of the field forces became more important. On mobilization they could "deny access to all cities, towns, and harbours of commercial importance". Capable of strategic concentration and mobility they would constitute a grave deterrent to an enemy commander who would realize that even with an expeditionary force of 50,000 men — and all the attendant problems of communications and supply — he could not hope to occupy and permanently hold any sector of the vast continent. Landing would be relatively easy; military success very uncertain. The field forces would thus be Australia's assurance against invasion in the most desperate of circumstances and against collapse of confidence in the City of London. This was conventional wisdom.  

The second face was at once more apprehensive and martial. Consciously intruding upon policy, Hutton insisted that the Commonwealth possess the sword of state to wage war — to meet Imperial commitments; to benefit from the rivalry between major powers; and to defend specific external interests. As a bastion of Empire in the Pacific the Commonwealth might well choose to use her expeditionary forces in an Imperial war. it might also be compelled to do so. The Commonwealth was in the arena of Old World strife. Its territories now joined those of Germany and Holland
and were close to those of France and Germany in the South-Western Pacific. Russian designs in Northern China no less than those in India and Persia menaced the peace of the Pacific. America had recently established herself as an overseas power. The rise of Japan as a first class power was unprecedented in history "and must prove in the near future of the utmost consequence to the political and commercial prospects of the Commonwealth". The centre of interest might for the moment lie in China where both political and economic rivalry proceeded apace; but the whole area - virtually all interests within a 4,000 mile area from Port Darwin - could be affected. It was not as if Australia had contracted out of this struggle. The development of "national instinct and the increase of commercial prosperity tend to show that Australia in the near future is destined to play a leading part in the Pacific". Legislation, policy, and parliamentary discussion had already anticipated the declaration of paramount interests in the South-West Pacific. The first essential was, therefore, the maintenance of British sea supremacy. The second was the organization of field forces under the control of the Commonwealth. It must possess "a Field Force capable of undertaking military operations in whatever part of the world it may be desired by Australia to employ them".

The military organization Hutton proposed was designed to meet all these contingencies. It rested upon five general principles. First was the priority given to the field forces in general and the mounted infantry in particular. Second was the cadre principle. Nearly all units of the field force would be raised at roughly half-establishment in peace-time but with nearly the full number of officers. Commanders would thus be trained and organization preserved for rapid expansion by the induction of men from the loosely-organized reserve. This was thought at once to suit the fighting temperament of Australians and to be sufficiently cheap. Third was the related necessity of establishing a firm organization with trained staffs and officers capable of absorbing the expansion of units while preserving coherence and clarity in the chain of command. Essential to this was the quality and predominance of Head-Quarters Staff. Firm
organization Hutton considered more important than training. The fourth principle was more often implied than explicit in Hutton's reforms, but nonetheless of importance. Any militia system ultimately depended for its success upon the acceptance and popularity of soldiers in society. It followed that staff officers, permanent troops, and citizen-soldiers should be certain of their status. Pay, allowances, parades, equipment, and social appointments were all in part directed to this end. The fifth principle was to cause the most trouble and eventually to undermine the foundations of the scheme. Military defence was to remain inexpensive.

On his arrival Hutton declared that he could effect his reforms within the limits of the federal budget. At the time the Military Estimates of 1901-2 stood at £831,212; shortly after they were reduced to £750,131. The General Officer Commanding accepted this limitation explaining that a further and separate sum of approximately £500,000 would be necessary to equip and arm the Australian forces. Yet within a short time the estimates were reduced to £600,000.27

The hub of a military organization involving the scattered forces in six states and the flexibility for rapid expansion in war, indeed the "essential and paramount condition" for successful reform, was a professionally competent and powerful Head-Quarters Staff whose direction and authority would be felt throughout the army, in permanent and citizen units alike.28 Within a month of his arrival Hutton had made arrangements for a staff of twelve officers. In deference to Cabinet, he chose only eight, each of whom had served under him before and knew well his aims. A Chief of Staff was not appointed because Hutton believed that no Australian had the knowledge and capacity to be able "in all respects to act as the alter ego of the General Officer Commanding".29 Much detailed work and responsibility would therefore be borne personally by Hutton. Initially this may have suited his temperament but the burden became crushing once Cabinet ruled that the two key positions on the staff, when they later became vacant, were not to be filled.30
Head-Quarters was primarily a central directorate over which the General Officer Commanding ruled supreme, his influence via staff officers reaching into the district staffs and the militia units. It was also a professional club bearing the stamp of its first member and capable of dispensing rewards and favours. Yet it was a club with a function. Towards the end of his tour of duty, Hutton became increasingly aware of how much his disciples would have to complete the reforms he had initiated. Indeed the officers on his staff, some attached to the district staffs, and a few from the well-established militia regiments, were later to be known in government circles as "Hutton's men". Two were to rise to high positions in the Commonwealth. They could not have been more diverse in character and ability.  

Colonel J.C. Hoad was distinguished by a gift for seeking political preferment rather than any marked ability as a soldier. Australian born and a citizen-soldier, he had joined the Victorian permanent forces in 1886 and showed considerable interest in the mounted rifles. He was groomed almost from the outset to command as a native-born colonial and had first gained Alfred Deakin's attention as an aspirant in the Australian Natives Association. Under Deakin administrations he later rose to the position of first Chief of Imperial General Staff, Commonwealth Section. In the nineties he came to Hutton's notice, served under him in South Africa, and prospered by his patronage. Valued primarily for his industry and loyalty, Hutton appointed him Chief Staff Officer and Deputy Adjutant-General responsible for enlistment, training, and discipline. More informally he served as a buffer between Head-Quarters and the politicians. His selection by Cabinet as an observer in the Russo-Japanese War instead of the two recommended officers, Hutton took as an insult to his judgement and an injury to his scheme. Only Hoad's disloyalty was worse. Having "signally failed as Chief Staff Officer", wrote Hutton in 1904, Colonel Hoad "has neither claim nor qualification to represent Australian troops with the Japanese Army". As we explore manoeuvres in the corridors of power, it will become clear that Hoad had some value to Australian ministries as a grateful and pliable instrument and as an agent for those who wished to preserve the status of the citizen-soldier. He had neither
the temperament nor the training to be a professional. His rise to fame epitomized the period between 1905 and 1911 when, as Dr. C.E. Bean discreetly and regretfully explains, servility and intrigue were as common "in the Australian military staff as ... in those of the older armies". 33

The Assistant Quarter-Master-General, Lieutenant-Colonel William Throsby Bridges, held a lesser but more vital position under Hutton. The duties which the Colonial Defence Committee claimed could be fulfilled only by an Imperial officer fell increasingly to him: military intelligence, tables of organization, peace and war establishments, and later, the drafting of complete schemes of defence for the Commonwealth. As a member of the Federal Military Conferences and an officer under Hutton in the nineties, Bridges was in the position to grasp his superior's design in all its complexity. He was in this sense Hutton's man. Though English born and initially trained in the Canadian Military College, Bridges had joined the permanent forces of New South Wales in 1885. He had lived long enough in Australia to be sharply aware of national aspirations. Yet, unlike Hoad, he was neither garrulous nor given to intrigue. Unlike Hutton, he was neither forceful nor politically tactless. Dour, brusque, gauche, and sometimes painfully rude in manner, Bridges possessed an essentially shy nature. Dignified self-effacement hid great strength and wide intelligence. The theory and practice of war fascinated him. At the School of Gunnery in New South Wales before the close of the century, and later as the Commonwealth representative on the Imperial General Staff in 1909 he grasped the opportunity to acquaint himself thoroughly with the many demands of his profession. After Hutton left Australia, Bridges was appointed Chief of Intelligence and was to appear before the Committee of Imperial Defence while it was drawing up a general scheme for Australian defence. Yet the steps from Hutton's staff to higher positions were slow. His very virtue, professional restraint, and the demand for clear civil direction in implementing what remained of Hutton's military policy, annoyed his civilian superiors. Later, he was willing to be shuffled into the position of first Commandant of the Australian Military College whose establishment Hutton had pressed upon successive ministries. On the outbreak of war,
Bridges was appointed to lead the first Australian Imperial Force. This was his just reward, a reward he characteristically thought might best be offered to Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Hutton. 34

Hutton struggled vainly with Cabinet to ensure high status and suitable salary for his staff and other young men. Few officers had private means; there was no system of retirement pensions. It was his aim "to place the professional experience, knowledge, and physical capacity which are demanded from Officers in high and responsible positions, to some extent at least on the same level, as the other professions such as the Bar, the Church, or Commerce" 35 so that the "best educated and most desirable gentlemen" 36 of the highest qualifications would embark upon military careers whose pinnacle would be appointment to Head-Quarters. For Cabinet this was a vexing problem. Not only was the pay of officers in the states disparate; it was variously augmented by allowances for horses, servants, and housing. Pledged to economize, the government had no desire to see substantial or differential salaries. Neither did the radicals in parliament. They would tolerate no favours bestowed on military men. They would find the preference given to staff officers repugnant. So although Sir John Forrest slowly grasped the principles of Hutton's recommendations and belatedly gave them grudging support, Cabinet reduced the proposed scale of salaries. This was to be the first of a series of effective attacks upon Head-Quarters in which economy and egalitarian ideals appeared to march side by side. 37

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In 1901 there were some 29,600 troops of all arms throughout Australia. Their primary function was to protect the fortifications guarding harbours of refuge and thus defend the main coastal cities. Australia under attack could therefore be visualized as a series of isolated garrisons with the sea on one side and a vast land mass on the other. This legacy of the colonial era when fortifications were the core of defence needed only certain modifications to meet the dictates of federalist policy. 38
Hutton's scheme foreshadowed a profound change. Because field forces were to be the primary instrument of national defence the capitals ceased to be semi-isolated garrisons. In strategic terms, they became the bases of extended military operations. They were links in a chain of railway communications which allowed strategic mobility. Fixed artillery defences, "sedentary" garrison troops, and the local naval forces would hold them secure. When not wanted to meet more serious threats, the field forces, Hutton argued, could augment their strength. Fixed defences, except for those at the naval base at Port Jackson, were of minor importance. 39

This would have been far more distressing to parliament if the consequences had been felt. But because Hutton had no wish to see the funds that would finance his scheme used for renewing port defences, he did not recommend the alteration of existing arrangements. It was in his best interests not to stir a hornets' nest and to avoid controversy about the relative merits of each garrison. He therefore accepted that Adelaide, Hobart, Melbourne, Sydney, Newcastle, Brisbane, and Townsville could continue to be protected ports and that Albany and Thursday Island would remain of value as harbours of refuge and potential coaling depots for the Royal Navy. The defences at Port Kembla were allowed to languish. To Sir John Forrest's satisfaction fixed defences were recommended for Fremantle to protect the coaling and docking facilities under construction there. 40

For the same reason, Hutton was cautious in suggesting rearmament. Most of the existing works were designed after 1877 and the alteration in types of guns had not been matched by changes in disposition of the forts. Moreover, the ports were defended by an amazing array of weapons which colonial governments had purchased in haste, often from private armament firms, during the eighties when coastal ordnance in Britain was in a confused state. Hutton was content to shuffle existing armaments from one port to another and tentatively order only a few new guns from Britain. Except for Fremantle and changes in the armament to Fort Glanville in South Australia, little was done. The purchase of quick-firing guns of
new design could await the immediate future. In view of his own aims this advice was prudent. It was also sound. Most of the defended ports, despite the proliferation and age of weapons, were in fact over-defended.41

The defence of Thursday Island in Torres Straits through which so much of the trade between Queensland and the East passed was a more difficult problem. Indeed it was to cause complex technical discussion until 1914 and protracted uncertainty. The fundamental issues were clear in Hutton's day. For with the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, Chambers of Commerce in various towns along the Queensland coast urged the Watson government to provide adequate protection against Russian commerce raiders entering the Barrier Route from the North and devastating the coastal trade. The importance, and the limitations, of the fixed defences on Thursday Island became apparent. Successive Australian ministries seem to have believed that the battery on the island would prevent the passage of enemy cruisers through the straits. This simply was not so. The guns did not cover even the commonly used channels through the reefs. Denying the enemy access to the straits was the role of the Imperial Squadron on the Australian Station. Accordingly, Hutton and his staff recommended strengthening the permanent garrison and the eventual purchase of quick-firing guns. Little was done even at the height of fears of Russian intent in the Far East. The problem of Thursday Island was passed to other governments.42

Not that this disturbed Hutton unduly. Faced with the alternative of strengthening the fixed defences on Thursday Island or maintaining the strength of the Royal Australian Artillery, organized from the permanent artillery of the colonial forces, he would unhesitatingly choose the latter. Again his preference can eventually be traced to the needs of the field force. Just as Head-Quarters Staff was the pinnacle of the military profession, so this unit was the model for the army he hoped to mould. The future efficiency of all forces - and even the competence of leadership - rested on these permanent soldiers who were encouraged to view themselves as a corps d'elite. They had to man the fixed defences
and train militia artillerymen and engineers to meet the demands of port defence. 43

In this, the garrison forces were to fulfil traditional and orthodox functions. Drawn from most of the volunteer regiments and some militia units, they were the sedentary troops, without mobility. Because the resisting of flash raids was their business, the cadre principle was not applied to them. Hutton had hoped to see their strength in excess of 15,500 and 30 field guns; but eventually his organization allowed for only 11,752 garrison troops and 26 guns. With existing fixed armaments, the elite Royal Australian Artillery and such garrison forces, the capitals would be safe. 44

Yet the duties of the permanent soldiery went beyond this. Men of the Royal Australian Artillery were to form instructional cadres for the training of the field forces. The future efficiency of Australian defence was said to rest with them.

The eighteen regiments of the field force were to have a peace establishment of 13,831 troops and 60 field guns and a war establishment of 27,553 men and 84 field guns. They were to be organized into six Light Horse Brigades - in war some 10,500 mounted rifles - and three Infantry Brigades - in war some 12,000 infantrymen. Each brigade would be equipped with staffs, field artillery, field engineers, transport columns of the Army Service Corps, units of the Army Medical Corps, and other ancillary services so that it could act independently or in combination. In certain circumstances this might prove difficult. New South Wales could muster enough men to complete three brigades; but to mobilize the third infantry brigade troops would be called together from Tasmania, Queensland, South Australia, and Western Australia. Facilities for transport by rail and coastal shipping were therefore essential. So, too, was the maintenance of regimental organizations in the states ready to undertake local operations and able to combine at brigade strength. The "elastic" and "carefully constructed framework into which the fighting
material of the nation can be fitted when the emergency arises" was therefore to be effected at all levels. Even the smaller tactical units - the squadron of the Light Horse Regiment and the company of the Infantry Regiment - were to be maintained in peace at half strength, though with a nearly full complement of officers. Into these would be inducted men who volunteered for service once danger was imminent, preference being given to those who had military experience.45

Whence were the experienced volunteers to come? European planning of the day usually included machinery for calling to colours reservists who had trained with a particular regiment. Such schemes, apart from often being the product of conscription, called for a stability of the male population and a degree of governmental control unknown in Australia. A surprisingly large, if uncounted, number of men had served but not completed training in militia units. In addition there were most of the 16,000 Australians who fought in South Africa but had neither been drawn from nor returned to existing regiments. It had long been found fruitless and expensive to keep in contact with these men. They were rarely willing, even if they had completed service in militia units, to undertake the yearly musters a reserve system might involve; to organize and pay them would stretch already slender resources. For Hutton the solution lay in making the best of Australian conditions. The few reserves which had been organized were allotted to garrison forces; retired officers were put on the reserve list. Beyond that, he looked to the rifle clubs and their 29,000 members. Members were to be encouraged to look upon shooting as a skill and not a pastime. In New South Wales some clubs had been affiliated with militia units in order to introduce a loose reserve system. It was hoped to impose this system on all states. It was also hoped that many veterans and time-expired militiamen would join rifle associations. From the cadet forces maintained by some schools in Victoria and New South Wales, but soon to come under the control of the Defence Department, Hutton hoped that young men could be inducted into the field force. From the many Australians with military experience - in and outside the system - Hutton believed he could easily find the 14,000 volunteers
needed in time of emergency.

Moreover, there existed the principle of levy en masse discussed at the Federal Military Conferences and soon to be embodied in Commonwealth legislation. Though all men between the ages of eighteen and sixty could be compelled to take arms, a process of selective conscription was envisaged to make good, if necessary, deficiencies in the militia units. The experience of 1899, when men of no military background were hastily organized into units and trained in South Africa initially for garrison duties and guarding lines of communication, indicated that such powers need be exercised only in the most dire emergency. Even the most cautious assessments were not to embrace such contingencies.46

The Colonial Defence Committee remained sceptical. Friction, confusion, and inability for immediate service were the inherent defects of the cadre system without organized and fully trained reserves. The expansion of existing units in war, it argued, was to be deprecated in any army. It would be crippling where militia units, themselves so poorly trained, would be flooded by untrained or slightly trained recruits. The rifle clubs were not worth the subsidies the Commonwealth paid. Moreover, a plan of organization which allowed three of the six brigades to be drawn from two or more military districts "can only be regarded as formations on paper".47 Training and manoeuvres at brigade strength would be difficult, command uncertain, confusion of responsibility likely.48

Against such advice from Whitehall Hutton turned a deaf ear. He doubtless believed that given the working of his scheme in its entirety for five years, the cadres would remain firm and organization coherent. The old hands would help impose the kind of discipline on newcomers drawn from the same locality in the manner he had earlier described. He could have dwelt upon the military potential of mateship; he did not because he well understood the phenomenon in different terms. Moreover, the experience of raising battalions of Australian mounted rifles on a crude territorial system as Commonwealth contingents for South Africa - battalions that would have been capable of combination - served to support his hopes.
He knew that the war had clearly established the fighting qualities of the Australians. Precisely because they had shown their prowess when "attached to larger bodies of troops which were led by carefully selected and experienced officers of the Imperial army" responsible for staff duties "of a larger and more important kind" it was essential not only to preserve organization and purchase the best equipment, but to train "strong and experienced Australian leaders possessing the requisite force of character, military knowledge, and professional experience".  

Therein lay an ambiguity which was to disturb radicals in parliament. Hutton declared that "those who lead must be those who instruct". Militia officers were often responsible for the training of units in their regiments. But it was also the duty of permanent soldiers to instruct. Apart from Instructional Staff attached to militia units, the men of the Royal Australian Artillery were to form a number of cadres to instruct the corresponding sections of the field force. Cadres for other arms were to be similarly organized to raise the standard of militia units by instruction and example. Hutton was drawing directly from his Canadian experience. For the further role of the instructional cadres was to provide a "stiffening" in war. Without them Hutton believed that a mobile field army would be "a make believe force which could not be relied on in war". Did this mean that permanent rather than militia officers would be given command positions? The answer was not clear. The cadres of mounted rifles and infantry, on expansion, could have been commanded by permanent officers; but their primary function was to provide instruction and a number of experienced non-commissioned officers to train the flood of relatively inexperienced volunteers. This was not so of the most technical arm, the cadres of field artillery drawn from the Royal Australian Artillery. They were to form the "nucleus of the Field (Force) Artillery".

Nor was the answer clear from the arrangements for the selection and promotion of officers. In parliament the view had been expressed that citizen officers should lead, should possess roughly the same status
of permanent officers, and should, wherever possible, be drawn from the ranks. It was a stand to be more clearly articulated as the years passed. In Hutton's scheme nearly every regiment of the field force drew upon units in the country districts. As a consequence, the officers were often men of substance. Fragmentary evidence indicates that Hutton continued to believe that cohesion and efficiency depended upon engaging officers of similar social background. Promotion from the ranks, on the other hand, he wrote, "conferred no special qualification" that would not normally be taken into account. Transfer and promotion from the citizen to the permanent forces should be restricted to young men. In all cases, competitive military examination of a high standard was indispensable. Notice might well be taken of background, experience and decorations; but the prime criterion was competence. Although militia officers were not to be excluded from staff duties "of a larger and more important kind"—that is at brigade and perhaps some regimental levels—the way was left open for permanent officers to command the citizen forces. This is what Hutton implied when he declared that "brigades of this new Field Force would be given to Militia officers provided they knew their work, as commanders, and were otherwise suitable." All rankers in the field force were to be members of the militia. Contrary to the spirit of the radicals in parliament but in accord with repeated advice from the Colonial Defence Committee, Hutton hoped to see the conversion of all Australian units to the partially-paid system. In the meantime volunteers were assigned to the garrison forces where their probable failure to assemble numbers and gain efficiency would not upset his scheme. The problem of pay had been carefully considered by the Federal Military Conference of 1896. Invoking its findings, Hutton recommended each private of the militia be paid six shillings a day in return for the equivalent of sixteen days training a year. Whenever possible eight of those days were to be spent in camps of continuous training. In order to encourage troops to pass efficiency tests pay should be given annually with deduction for failure to attend parades. This plan had obvious virtues. Pay throughout the states varied greatly, and his proposals, once implemented, would be a boon to units in Tasmania,
South Australia, and Western Australia. However, the pay for the militia units in the other states was eight shillings a day. It was clear from this that Hutton had other motives. The rate of six shillings a day had been paid to colonial troops in South Africa. He argued that any increase would make the cost of mobilizing the field force exorbitant for the Commonwealth. It would also hinder the ready use of field forces abroad to campaign with the British Army. Each militiaman, trained under Australian conditions but ready to serve under the Army Act, would, Hutton was certain, be ready to go wherever the Commonwealth thought fit. It was, in any case, a matter of small consequence to him whether he was sent somewhere on the Australian continent remote from his home or to "some overseas locality". 56

Only a field force roughly the size Major-General Bevan Edwards had long before suggested, and double that planned by the Federal Military Conferences, would be sufficient to meet the Commonwealth's new responsibilities to nation and Empire. Only a force trained, paid, led, organized and administered in the recommended fashion could defend Australia and its interests. It was no good depending upon the volunteer movement, as J.C. Watson had urged. It would be disastrous to rely upon the guerrilla army King O'Malley envisaged. It would be foolish to depend upon individual volunteers and improvised units for overseas service such as H.B. Higgins was prepared to tolerate. Only the full implementation of the scheme would give the Commonwealth an efficient, national, Imperial, and democratic army. Such was the sum of Hutton's military policy. 57

Its implementation depended to varying degrees upon the stature of the General Officer Commanding, his powers of elucidation, the perception of all the six Ministers for Defence under whom he served, the decisions of five Cabinets and, above all, upon the temper of parliament. For the initiation of reform Hutton depended most upon Sir John Forrest, the Barton ministry, and the first parliament whose attitudes we have already examined. His success was limited. 58
Until the Commonwealth Defence Act became law on the 22nd of October 1903 the forces were administered under six separate acts. Hutton's scheme of organization was not given formal approval until the 24th of July 1903 — and then with serious reservations. Although recommendations had long been presented, published, and elaborated, the affairs of the Defence Department during the first parliament seemed chaotic and directionless. "A responsible Government should have notified the General Officer Commanding of their opinion", declared one radical attempting to reach to the heart of confused debate, and if they had no opinion of their own "they should be prepared to accept the views of Parliament". 59

Parliament had views aplenty. One radical member, commenting on the use of the field forces for the protection of external interests, protested: "If that view is adopted, I say that the Minister ... instead of being called the Minister of Defence, should be designated the Minister of War." 60 Recalling Hutton's speeches of the nineties about the offensive-defensive use of colonial field forces, another declared: "If we let him alone he will land us in a queer mess. He will put the collar and chain around the kangaroo all right." 61 Another critic, while calling on parliament to continue to direct Cabinet, summarized the radical case thus: "(Whatever) is done we shall not settle the question from the point of view of military experts." 62

Parliament, not Cabinet, made policy. None of the first five Ministers for Defence under whom Hutton served bothered to grasp the fundamentals of his scheme. Between the General Officer Commanding and the radicals there were few buffers and no expositors. Insofar as Cabinet members were concerned at all with military policy, they were content with absorbing the views expressed during debate on the first Defence Bill — completed well before Hutton's arrival — and reducing the estimates by £130,000 in accord with their promise to the House. Soon after giving this undertaking to parliament in 1902, Sir John Forrest left for England to attend the Colonial Conference. Sir William Lyne and Sir George Turner
struggled with the problem in his absence. By July 1903 Forrest could proudly point to a reduction of £259,633 on the 1901-1902 estimates; excluding payments under the Naval Agreement the combined naval and military vote stood at £571,579. In short, Hutton had to accept about £100,000 less than the minimum sum needed to finance his scheme. Forrest was generally congratulated. 63

Given this kind of ministerial response, the radicals had merely to keep reminding him of their views. This they did in debates on the Supply Bills. Yet in such a context discussion of military affairs became confused with the case for economy. It was J.W. McCay, seeing the possible excesses his fellow radicals might impose, who gradually became the unappointed Minister for Defence in the lower House. McCay held a commission in the Victorian militia and was later to command the Australian Intelligence Corps; he would claim Monash as a protege and the first Chief of the General Staff as an instrument; and he would serve abroad with the Australian Imperial Forces in 1915. A member of the Australian Natives Association and initially opposed to colonial participation in South Africa, he possessed the experience, intelligence, and standing to criticize in detail the measures the radicals opposed in principle. As H.B. Higgins saw him, McCay appeared to owe "two allegiances, one to Mars and one to Minerva". 64 It was he who grasped the significance of Hutton's proposals for the Australian citizen-soldier and successfully expounded them. In the process, he was grooming himself to take the position of Minister for Defence under the Reid ministry in August 1904.

McCay began with the assumption that Australian defence depended upon British sea power and, in particular, upon renewal of the Naval Agreement whatever slight to national pride this involved. For military defence the Minute Upon the Defence of Australia was an excellent basic document showing considerable grasp of Australian needs and perception of the Australian militiaman. Even so, McCay made it clear, his support for Hutton's scheme was limited. Like H.B. Higgins, he believed that neither permanent nor militia units should be organized or used for overseas service.
... unappointed Minister for Defence ...
Those who wished to serve the Empire could, after examination of their conscience, volunteer individually. The Field Force would be only for home defence; self-reliance was the doctrine to be followed. Like J.C. Watson, he believed that too much money was spent on staff officers. District commandants and militia officers should have greater freedom. So while he disagreed with the blind faith many Labour members had put in rifle clubs and volunteer units, he supported their demand for economy so long as the total estimates were not reduced beyond that set by the federal conventions, namely £750,000. He was also to support their demand for greater civilian control over the armed forces. Almost inevitably this meant an end to the position of General Officer Commanding and the institution of councils and boards. Like R.A. Crouch, he desired the maximum reliance on citizen-soldiers. He was suspicious of the threat posed by Hutton's instructional cadres. The permanent forces he wished to limit to garrison artillery, engineers, and instructional staff. His support for the cadet system and his opposition to training and wartime service under the Army Act were well known. In short, McCoy accepted Hutton's scheme, omitting those parts which the House would consider militarist, Imperialist, unnecessarily expensive, and provocative. They were also those parts that Hutton thought essential. 65

The result was, in the terms of the parliamentarians, a defence policy. For with McCoy in the van, the arguments introduced to modify the first Defence Bill were sharpened and used to cut Hutton's scheme to size. When Forrest laboriously but more confidently prepared drafts of the Defence Bill in 1903 the General Officer Commanding found that he was struggling against the legacy of the earlier debate which had been scrupulously guarded in parliament. On this occasion Cabinet anticipated objections by modifying the bill before presentation. Critics, despite poor attendance in the chamber, had two acute leaders in McCoy and Higgins whose recommendations were well known. Their views prevailed. The Defence Act of 1903 was, in substance, the bill Forrest had been compelled to amend in 1901. The final phrasing of Clause 49 was at once indicative and crucial: "(Members) of the military forces shall not be required,
unless they voluntarily agree to do so, to serve beyond the limits of the Commonwealth and those of any Territory under the authority of the Commonwealth." As the spirit of the debate indicated, men would have to individually volunteer for overseas service in improvised units — after they had, perhaps, examined their consciences. The avenue for organized cooperation in Imperial military defence — discussed in the nineties and hotly debated during the South African War — was effectively sealed. Thus it was that parliament examined a military policy, the strategic and political basis of which it considered repugnant or irrelevant. Hutton's Minute Upon the Defence of Australia never did receive parliamentary approval. His successors were building on shifting sand.

It is possible that Hutton never fully understood why parliament rejected his military policy. It is probable that he later sought to perpetuate his scheme and its intent by guile and intrigue. It is clear that he first attempted to convince his civilian superiors in the correct professional manner.

* * *

Edmund Barton left for the Colonial Conference of 1902 with all the material necessary to appreciate the grand design. Minutes and pamphlets were hastily assembled and scored for clarity. If ever a politician had the opportunity to understand, it was Barton. It is unlikely that he did more than peruse the Minute Upon the Defence of Australia.

For Joseph Chamberlain the aim of the conference was to fulfil the promise of 1897. To ensure the self-sufficiency of the Empire the self-governing colonies might, it was hoped, seek closer political relations, allow preferential tariffs on British goods, and assist Great Britain in the defence of the Empire. Imperial federation was again in the air. The general theme of English spokesmen was reciprocity: in return for the benefits of continued British predominance the colonies were to bestow
favours, share responsibilities, and eventually possess some voice in the making of policy. In this spirit R.J. Seddon, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, called for the inauguration of a formal Imperial military reserve. According to a War Office memorandum prepared for the conference the Commonwealth could contribute to this scheme one infantry brigade and two mounted brigades— in all some 9,000 troops. The units would be combined into an "Imperial Australian Force".

The Secretary of State for War in traversing familiar arguments took up the theme of reciprocity: in return for protection received from the Royal Navy and the obligation of Great Britain to défend its outlying dominions the Commonwealth could provide troops for service in India (against the prime military threat, Russia) or in China (to help maintain the military provisions of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty). If all colonies gave their troops the training they so clearly needed, he continued, then each could contribute in one of two ways. The Imperial reserves could be maintained at colonial expense and used at colonial discretion. But they were to be organized on the explicit understanding that they were part of the army reserve of the Imperial force and so likely to serve overseas under Imperial control once the colonies had decided to cooperate. Alternatively, the less preferable course was for the British government to pay each man in the selected units. In this case control would stem from Whitehall and there would be no colonial discretion. 69

To this very one-sided version of reciprocity, Barton replied, in effect, that the Commonwealth would neither ear-mark special units nor institute a formal reserve. Australian forces were for Australian defence. But since the need for military cooperation was bound to recur, each dominion had better build its own armament factories and equip its forces with weapons of Imperial patterns. "I could wish to have gone further," he declared, "but ... we can go no further than public opinion will take us." 70

All this was poor consolation for Hutton. Twice during 1902
he sought official acceptance of the scheme. Twice he had been merely told to proceed with re-organization within the narrowing limits of the budget. Now Chamberlain's forays into Imperial federation harmed his cause. Harassed by the press and critics in the House Sir William Lyne, the Acting Minister for Defence, declared that no approval had been given for a scheme involving offensive operations. In a minute he wrote: "I do not agree with any proposal to give control, or implied control, over Australian troops to any but the Commonwealth authority." Funds could not "at present" be found for any plan for "such external operations".\textsuperscript{71} Hutton was indignant. His minute had not even been read. He had contemplated neither the selection of special units for Imperial service nor the organization of a formal reserve. No suggestion, he angrily retorted, had been made to surrender in any way the authority of the Commonwealth.\textsuperscript{72}

By June 1903 Hutton was desperate. Half his term of office had slipped away; the provisions in the drafts of the Defence Bill he had examined promised to undermine his project; recruiting had long before ceased; the morale of existing units was low; yet another reduction in the estimates was imminent; and still the formation of the field force was no nearer. Then Sir John Forrest applied himself diligently to the problem. Apparently for the first time he closely examined Hutton's recommendations by comparing them with the reports of the Colonial Defence Committee. He gave provisional approval for the complete reorganization of the forces — and then posed a question. Was Hutton's proposed field force not excessive in numbers and strength "for carrying out a policy limited to local defence"?\textsuperscript{73}

For the first time Hutton was challenged. How did he meet Forrest's objections? A few months earlier Hutton realized that the funds needed to implement his scheme would be further curtailed by the Estimates of 1903–1904. It was then that he first sounded the notes which later military innovators were to orchestrate. It would be the height of
folly, he wrote, "to disregard the possibility of the supremacy of the sea being temporarily or permanently lost. It is impossible to foresee the result of naval warfare in the future, or to anticipate the effect of fleets acting on the part of a combination of great powers hostile to British Imperial interests". The argument continued: Should sea supremacy be lost the "invasion of Australia for the purposes of territorial aggression is ... a military undertaking of no serious difficulty" for the enemy. To meet such a threat the field force was indispensable.

This change in justification came well before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War and was apparently formulated while Hutton was examining the drafts of the Defence Bill. It is probable that the argument was used with telling effect against Forrest's enquiry. It is also probable that Hutton introduced a phantom to save his military policy. Henceforward, the bogey he introduced was to become more and more credible until the military structure he had struggled to build would be swept away to make room for the compulsorily trained mass army created to exorcize it.

In any event his scheme of reorganization was approved by Cabinet. The minute on which it was based was not formally accepted. Hutton was allowed to proceed under three conditions which were to bedevil his successors and ultimately evoke the criticism that his plan existed only on paper. He was not to convert any existing unit into the militia unless the estimates allowed. He was not to expand the estimates Forrest had so carefully reduced. But most important, he was to ensure that the total number of troops would not exceed the strength existing on the 31st of May 1903.

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The most important single obstacle faced by Hutton in his struggle to vindicate his teachings and realize his dream was the preparation, the reduction, and the review—often at quarterly periods—of the military estimates. The paper work was endless and the work involved
enormous. The time spent with the Minister on the estimates was far
greater than on any other issue. Sir John Forrest's reductions have
left to posterity bundles of disordered files. Orderlies on Thursday
Island, instructors in South Australia, Head-Quarters Staff in Melbourne,
the few Schools of Instruction in Melbourne, militia units throughout the
continent — all were affected by this crude form of civil control. 77

In the eighteen months Hutton had been in Australia the numbers
in the military forces had dropped by some 4,700. With the remaining
24,800 Hutton's staff busied itself implementing the reorganization scheme.
Complaints from volunteers who had previously been given some allowances
and had no wish to go unpaid, from proud volunteer regiments who were
disturbed at seeing various companies allotted to the militia field force
or who were indignant at conversion to the militia resulting in the loss
of their volunteer status, from infantry units who did not wish to convert
to the Light Horse, from various small and inefficient units who refused
to disband, soon found their way to Head-Quarters and to parliament. The
degree of friction was exaggerated by publicity. Finally Cabinet warned
the General Officer Commanding to leave the volunteer regiments well alone,
to disband no existing unit, and to accommodate complaints. In ministerial
circles the feeling grew that Hutton was too ruthless and too insensitive
to the troubles of colonial units. Federalist politics demanded restraint. 78

A new source of friction arose between Hutton and civilian
superiors during 1904. His relations with ministers was never easy, but
no minister was to be more hostile to Hutton than Senator Dawson, Minister
for Defence under the Watson Labour government in 1904. Dawson had
stoutly resisted Queensland's participation in the South African War. His
hostility to soldiers and his suspicions of militarists enriched a natural
antipathy between the two men which Hutton's indiscretions inflamed.

The major cause of friction was the proposed control of the
defence forces by a Council of Defence and Boards of Administration.
Whereas Dawson, among many others including J.W. McCay, saw this as a
means of ensuring civilian control over the troops and removing forever
the position of General Officer Commanding, Hutton viewed it as a major threat to his scheme. Dawson thought the council the only means of removing the British and Imperial factors from military defence, diminishing the influence of permanent officers, and ensuring that the top positions would be held in the future by Australians. Hutton earnestly believed that without central control the military system would fly apart; that to have a situation where the most senior officer could be questioned by a subordinate would be to subvert discipline; that to introduce citizen officers in the high councils of state would be to invite ill-informed opinion and friction; and that above all, to institute boards and councils was to open the door for military and party politics which would wreck the direction of the armed services. Both sides accumulated evidence. Despite his obvious prejudices, Hutton rightly predicted the unhappy future of the Board and Council system. Dawson was doubtless correct in his insistence that parliament — if not the army — would not tolerate another British General Officer Commanding. It was an impasse to be suffered, but not by Hutton. For the reforms were not introduced by J.W. McCoy until after his departure from Australia. Hutton left in November 1904; McCoy introduced the new system in January 1905.  

Nationalist politics would not tolerate an overbearing, tactless, secretive, Imperial officer who owed an uncertain amount of loyalty to the Army Council in London. During the final eighteen months Hutton was involved in a series of affairs which appeared to lend substance to the suspicions which had obscured his ability and the worth of his recommendations. Press and parliament maintained a furore. Cabinet had to intervene and in each case chastise the General Officer Commanding.

By far the most important of these controversies, the Secret Cypher Affair, must remain in part a mystery. In substance the case was this. Hutton possessed a secret cypher with which he could communicate with the War Office. During Senator Dawson's term of office he discovered that Hutton had sent a secret telegram to London. On being questioned Hutton refused to reveal its contents. In an indignant minute he indicated that he considered himself an Imperial officer; for he had refused "on the
grounds that it would be a lapse of duty for a General serving one
government to communicate official secrets with another". He added
injury to insult by demanding that the Commonwealth government pay for the
secret message. What was in the secret communication? Probably its
contents were harmless. Nevertheless, the ramifications were great.
Hutton was appearing to serve the Commonwealth while owing allegiance to
the Army Council.

Speculation about Hutton's intrigues were not completely without
some foundation. He did change his strategic appreciations primarily to
save his scheme. He did juggle the estimates. Did he do more? From the
information J.W. McCay solicited from a contact in London during 1905, it
seemed not only that the War Office was furious with Hutton over the
Secret Cypher Affair and some important officials scornful of his ideas,
but that Hutton by using what influence he could muster in the War Office
attempted to stop the Colonial Defence Committee from criticising his work.
He may even have attempted to suppress the Committee's report on its release
by requesting, confidentially, the support of the Governor-General.

It is therefore quite possible that Hutton indulged rather
ineptly in intrigue. The field force lay at the core of his ambition.
It was natural for him to fight tooth and nail to inaugurate and preserve
it. Even so, all these affairs - and the speculation they evoked - did
Hutton, and his scheme, immeasurable damage in the eyes of the very men
from whom he sought support.

In retrospect Forrest acknowledged Hutton's difficulties in
successfully placing the defence forces on a uniform basis. As a minister
he was ruthless in depriving him of the funds to implement his scheme.
One example will suffice.

In Hutton's estimation equipment and armaments for the field
force were not only essential militarily but excellent for morale, status,
and recruiting. At the outset he had forewarned parliament that £500,000
above the normal military vote would be necessary for armament and equipment. In April 1903 he prepared a table whereby the gross amount could be expended over four years. Fixed defences could wait; the field forces could not. In all £125,000 was to be spent in the year 1903–1904 if the field force was to be fully equipped for action by 1907. Forrest decided £50,000 would be sufficient. Moreover, he felt that parliament would not accept an estimate of £50,000 unless five thousand rifles were also ordered "as there is a strong feeling that we are not adequately provided with rifles". Hutton argued — and wisely — that the War Office was about to refit the British Army with a new S.M.L.E. automatic rifle and that it was best for the Commonwealth to wait. Without arms and equipment the field force would be but an army on paper. To no avail. Rifles instead of field guns, samples instead of equipment, were the items provided for. Duly Colonel Bridges had a new list of annual amounts prepared whereby parliament would pay £61,000 a year. Thus the Commonwealth would have a fully equipped field force by 1910. Until then, Hutton's scheme, even if successfully implemented, would involve potential rather than real strength. This action by Forrest, to the military mind capricious, ill-informed, and irresponsible, is easily understood within the broader political context. It also indicates the limitation of Hutton's success on his departure in November 1904.

The basis of the general scheme for the defence of the Commonwealth — that is the strategic assessment and the summary of military policy — was never considered or approved by Cabinet. Sections of the Defence Act ran counter to it. In the professional soldier's sense, there was yet no policy. The hub of the new army — Head-Quarters Staff — had been criticised, ridiculed, reduced in numbers from eight to five officers, and was to be replaced by a Council of Defence and Boards of Administration. Garrison forces had been organized but fixed defences remained substantially as Hutton found them; the government had not yet decided which cities on the coast it wished to defend. Members of the Royal Australian Artillery — the corps d'élite — were reduced to two-thirds of their strength in 1902. The scheme of reorganization for the field force had been
implemented - but only in part. Rifle clubs were no closer to being used as reserves. The instructional cadres had been restricted in use by the Defence Act. The cadre of Field Force Artillery had not been provided for in the estimates. Militia and not permanent officers were soon to command citizen-soldiers even at brigade level. Camps of training for the militia varied from three to eight days a year in different parts of the Commonwealth. Equipment for the field force would not be complete until 1910. The pay approved by Cabinet for the militiaman was not six shillings a day as Hutton insisted but eight shillings a day. Schools of Instruction and Staff Rides had been too few. There was no provision for a military college. No arrangements had been made to provide for self-sufficiency. The institution of government armament, ammunition, and clothing factories remained an aspiration. Military estimates had been reduced during Hutton's term from £812,000 to little more than £500,000. As a result of retrenchment and controversy some units could claim only sixty per cent of their peacetime establishment. Morale and status were low.\footnote{85}

Nevertheless, Hutton left behind him the structure of the field force he had envisaged. By November 1904 the scheme of reorganization was complete on paper. Though never partially mobilized for exercises, the garrison force, the field force, and its ancillaries were allotted sufficient units. The government's proviso that the establishment should remain at the level of May 1903 pointed to the key weakness - lack of men. In order to complete all units of the Australian army to full peacetime establishments it was necessary for future governments to finance, the Defence Department to recruit, and the officers to train a total of 344 officers and 2,782 men. The gulf between establishments and actual strength was to increase - and be misinterpreted by those who wished to sweep away federalist schemes.\footnote{86}

So Hutton bestowed upon the Commonwealth an army which it could command if it had the will to breathe life into his reforms. From his point of view much was to depend upon future ministries grasping the substance of his grand design. As much was to depend upon the attitude and the authority of his proteges from Head-Quarters Staff - men like
Hoad and Bridges.

A month before his departure an exhausted General Officer Commanding outlined the role he expected his proteges to perform in the future. He knew that they too must struggle with his scheme for the defence of the Commonwealth which must, from the point of view of a professional soldier, begin with a statement of policy and strategy and end with a table for mobilization. He felt certain he had settled their problem, for he believed that parliament, by inverting the priorities demanded by the professional had unconsciously accepted his grand design in its entirety. If Cabinet accepted the scheme of reorganization, he explained, logically it must also have accepted the policy. Inferentially the offensive-defensive use of the field force was still possible. His actual words were:

It will be sufficiently obvious that although the (Minute Upon the Defence of Australia)... has never been officially endorsed by Parliament, its principles have been officially accepted by inference since the recommendations involved by those principles have been carried into effect almost in their entirety. 87

If this argument rested upon future Cabinets' grasp of professional thought, it was ill-founded. If it rested upon guile, the ruse was futile. If it rested upon the hope that his proteges would implement all that he had planned and succeed where he had failed, the expectation was never realized. No amount of sophistry could dismiss the limitations imposed by the federal parliament.

* * *

Some years later in a letter to Alfred Deakin at once proclaiming anew his providential grasp of Australian problems and pathetically begging that the government breathe life into his reforms, Hutton explained that his scheme "was so involved in political, social and military issues that I could not discuss my difficulties with anyone outside a narrow official circle". With a brevity that suggested he still had not grasped all that
had happened, he added: "There were many points in which I was misunderstood in Australia, and especially by Australian politicians." 88

On his return to England Hutton did not receive the reward he may have anticipated. True, he was promoted to Lieutenant-General. But he spent two more years in the British Army, and then retired, to recall often his pride in Australian troops and to restate as often his faith in his scheme. In 1911 Colonel Bridges, then Commandant of Dunroon Military College, suggested that Hutton's portrait be painted and hung in the halls of an establishment his Commanding Officer had recommended. Hutton was delighted and in reply wrote:

A great and brilliant future is before the soldiers of Australia, and I shall always feel proud indeed if I have contributed in however small a degree to their success as a great National asset to the Australian people. 89

That contribution to the Australian army of 1914 was less than he thought and far less than he deserved. He had a prescription for national defence; he was underrated because he was an imperialist. Tom Roberts painted his portrait, but Hutton had to pay for it himself.

*
(It) is hard to silence the clamour for a simple local security, which is apparent but not real, because it is founded on a subdivision and dissemination of force essentially contrary to sound military principle .... (Local) safety is not always best found in local precaution. There is a military sense, in which it is true that he who loses his life shall save it.

CAPTAIN A.T. MAHAN, 1902.

(Most authorities) consider that the Empire must have one fleet in the sense it must be administered, controlled, and directed by one central authority, that the formation of local navies is opposed to all sound naval strategy, that the expenditure involved is more than the colonies can afford ... It is, however, more practicable to devise a scheme by which ships locally manned and locally controlled can be associated into some larger scheme of Imperial Maritime Defence than to devise a scheme by which the colonies can pay increasing money contributions to the Imperial Exchequer and have an effective voice in the administration of the fund.

CAPTAIN ROBERT COLLINS, November 1899.
Australian statesmen had long tended to separate five aspects of national security and deem each to be "a line of defence": British supremacy upon the high seas; the unrestricted flow of overseas trade; the protection of coastal shipping; the defence of ports and coastal cities; and the safety of hearths and homes. Traditionally the Royal Navy guaranteed all "lines of defence" primarily by maintaining the first. And in accord with the doctrine of self-reliance, colonial governments had raised military forces and established fixed defences. Some had ventured into local naval defence for the better protection of urban hearth and harbour. Yet, in the course of Australian–Imperial relations, the Admiralty had departed from its traditional role.* For by the maintenance of both the Imperial Squadron and the Australian Auxiliary Squadron, the Royal Navy had clearly been maintaining the first two "lines of defence" and buttressing the others.¹

Thus it was that on the 1st of March 1901, when responsibility for defence passed to the Commonwealth, there were in Australian waters three naval forces each deserving Sir John Forrest's attention.²

Based at Sydney was the Imperial Squadron under the command of Rear-Admiral Sir Lewis Beaumont. Under Admiralty direction it was to protect shipping in Australian waters and on the overseas trade routes, to uphold British prestige in the South-West Pacific, and to reinforce in an emergency the squadron on the China Station. Its capacities were limited. Only the flagship, the Royal Arthur, was of any effective assistance in the Far East. The other light and ageing third-class cruisers and gunboats were used primarily to patrol the Pacific islands and then only in the less stormy seasons. The decision to strengthen the Imperial Squadron rested with Whitehall. There Forrest could act only as supplicant.³

* See above Chapter One.
Also under Beaumont's control was the Australian Auxiliary Squadron provided under the Naval Agreement of 1887. Five third-class cruisers of the Katoomba Class constituted a local squadron organized for coastal defence against commerce raiders and bound to Australian waters in peace and war in return for the annual subsidy of £106,000. These vessels could not be sent to distant waters unless the Commonwealth gave its consent. Here Forrest was confronted by two problems. The specially designed cruisers were suitable for coastal defence in 1891. Ten years later they were found to be not only obsolescent but too light for sustained duties in the heavy seas around Australia. More important, the Naval Agreement had run its course. Future naval policy had to be decided.4

Under Commonwealth control were the local naval forces of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia. Since the sixties vessels had been purchased, small permanent naval forces enlisted, and naval militia units raised under the Colonial Naval Defence Act of 1865. Of these perhaps the naval militia - the citizen-sailors - were most highly prized by colonial governments. In 1901 some 2,300 men, while continuing to operate under the State Defence Acts, came under Forrest's ministerial control. So, too, did the vessels of greatly varying capabilities. Some had been originally designed for protection of harbours; others were built for port defence. By 1901 all were obsolete. They lacked fighting efficiency and facilities for training Australians at sea. Forrest had to decide their fate.5

His decisions and those of his contemporaries depended on how they faced the three interconnected issues which provide the main themes for this work: the desired relationship between nation and Empire; the quest for security within available resources; and the formation of effective and distinctive Australian forces. Though obscured in the detail of military organization, they leapt to prominence in naval policy.

For there were two general alternatives: naval policy could continue to involve close cooperation with the Admiralty to serve
Australian interests; naval aspirations could be fulfilled primarily by assuming some of the duties performed by the Royal Navy. Each opened a labyrinth. What degree of naval protection did the Commonwealth require? Should the Imperial Squadron be strengthened? Should the Naval Agreement be renewed and, if so, on what terms? Should Australia depend solely upon the Royal Navy? Should not steps be taken to create an Australian navy? Should that navy assume the duties of the Imperial Squadron, the Australian Auxiliary Squadron, or the local naval forces? Should that Australian navy help defend British interests on the high seas, protect Australian coastal commerce, or aid the military in harbour defence?*

To such questions Forrest addressed himself and entered a debate which was to continue until 1911 when the Royal Australian Navy was established. It was a debate well under way.

* "An Australian navy is not a mere sentiment", proclaimed the Melbourne _Age_ in 1901, "It is a policy and a wise policy." With federation accomplished, Australia could not "avoid her destiny as a sea power" in the Southern Pacific. 6 Renew or even revise the Naval Agreement? Never! Tribute, subsidy, cash nexus, insurance policy, call it what you will, the Naval Agreement must go! The bonds of Empire were as light as gossamer and as strong as steel only because unfettered self-government allowed complete self-defence. To secure the nation from the King's European enemies was the fundamental duty of each part of the Empire to the whole. Yet each part was at once different from, and as important as, the core. Just as the Crown Colonies were not part of the self-governing portion of the Empire, so the Commonwealth was splendidly different from

* Though the distinction between the creation of Australian naval forces capable of (a) decisive engagements on the high seas in quasi-alliance with British battle fleets; (b) cruiser warfare and commerce protection on the high seas; (c) coastal defence; and (d) radial port defence will emerge from the narrative, these, and other distinctions, are set out in Appendix B "Australian Naval Defence : The Possibilities".
Argus: Australian naval policy had to be integrated with Imperial policy. 10

Though keenly aware of the need for editorial support from at least some of the navalist press, members of the Barton ministry remained cautious or sceptical. The federalist era was no time for daring and expensive innovation. Only Alfred Deakin seems to have glanced ahead. He was quick to perceive what two world wars had tended to obscure: that weapons of war could inspire a sense of awe, pride, beauty, and patriotism. Australians took joy in the smartly-painted vessels of the late nineties and felt prideful awe at the later and more sinister grey vessels. To watch a naval parade was the Greater Briton's equivalent of the pomp and panoply of a Jubilee celebration. For as every schoolboy knew, just as every missionary and Australian colonist in the New Hebrides awaiting the showing of the flag from far more diminutive vessels could testify, the Royal Navy epitomized British justice, civilization, and power. When all the political and strategic arguments had been heard this fact remained: Australian warships could be symbols of nationhood within the British world.

Yet on these and other issues Deakin remained publicly silent, a potential navalist. The future was the time to work out the context, the programme, and the campaign to persuade, cajole, and educate British and Australians alike. Federalist politics involved expedients. Sir John Forrest, aided by the Prime Minister, was left to find one. 11

Labour was the first political party to espouse the navalist cause. When in September 1902 it had become clear Forrest would seek a revision of the Agreement, a committee of federal caucus passed a resolution demanding the creation of an Australian navy. Most members knew that this was indeed a matter for the future however anxious they were to see "a self-reliant nation, free from interference by, or dependence on, Britain". 12 Nevertheless, they desired to record their objections to any form of naval subsidy. By July 1903 their position had strengthened
ROYAL ARTHUR

... smartly painted vessels of the nineties ...

DREADNOUGHT

... to inspire awe and patriotism ...
and Labour members expressed in the House the sentiments long proclaimed by the *Age*. The appeal for an independent force — no less than the mood which equated federation with national defence, nationhood with manhood, and maturity with opposition to Whitehall — suited Labour parliamentarians well. But Labour had no programme. Amidst heated debate, W.M. Hughes — often presented as a defence specialist — declared that he did not know for certain whether an Australian naval force was strictly necessary, nor how it should be formed, nor what it would do, nor how much it would cost. He was certain that the Commonwealth should possess one. The rest he left to the experts.  

This role was played by the officers of colonial naval forces. None was Australian-born. Most had served in colonial navies since the eighties. Like many other sailor settlers, they had either served in the Royal Navy or had other reasons to respect all it stood for. Like Colonel Bridges, they had so placed their roots in the colonies that nationalist aspirations were readily championed. They were British-Australians, not merely émigrés. None could hope for a career in the Royal Navy. Their professional future and the fruits of success lay in the creation of a new Australian naval force. They therefore had vested interests in giving direction to navalist aspirations. Yet despite imposing local ranks, few were sufficiently qualified to change policy and anti-navalist opinion. Of the nine officers whose submissions reached ministerial level, three had been commissioned in the Royal Navy and then only to the rank of Lieutenant. The remainder had been drawn from the mercantile marine. They were easily overshadowed by the Admiralty or the Commander-in-Chief on the Australian Station. It was a comment upon the nature of the navalist movement that Forrest deferred to British opinion partly because there was no alternative authority.

It was not until after 1904 that the navalist officers were formed into a more coherent body with official voice — and by then the voice of only one man was heard. For most of the federalist era they were appointed to separate commands under the different State Defence Acts.
Ever sensitive to criticism and in the interests of discipline, Forrest forbade them to make public statement. But Captain William Rooke Creswell proved irrepressible. Perceiving that spearheads for the campaign had to be forged, he campaigned in the press between 1901 and 1903 under the cloak of anonymity, and sometimes burst openly into print so that he could be quoted in parliament. His star was to continue to rise until he became the Australian authority.  

*  

Born on Gibraltar in 1852, Creswell was educated at Eastman's Naval Academy and, later on his entry into the Royal Navy during 1865, aboard the training vessel, the H.M.S. Britannica. As midshipman he served on the North American Station and later joined Admiral Hornsby's famous Flying Squadron which visited Australia in 1869. After a short time with the Channel Fleet he was promoted to junior sub-lieutenant on the China Station. There he first saw action.

In patrols off the Malayan coasts skirmishes with pirates were frequent. During one encounter near Penang, Creswell was severely wounded. For his conduct he was selected for promotion and as a lieutenant returned to England. Opportunity to develop his professional training at the Royal Naval College was, however, short-lived. For three years he was destined to serve on the East Indies Station, operating mainly from a depot ship at Zanzibar in individual forays against East African slave traders.

But fever took its toll and he was invalided to England in 1878. There naval retrenchment was in full swing and prospects for junior officers were grim indeed. At the age of twenty-seven he retired from the Royal Navy; he had been a lieutenant for six years. With his brother he then emigrated to Australia to try his hand at "pastoral pursuits".

As a pastoralist in Australia he made little progress. He tried journalism, sugarcane farming in Queensland, and droving. Then, during
a stay in Adelaide in 1885, he was offered an appointment as first lieutenant on the newly-arrived special service cruiser, the Protector. He accepted. In South Australia he ceased to be an emigre. He was later given command of the Protector, promoted to captain in the colonial service during 1895, and married the daughter of Mr. Justice Stow of Adelaide. To supplement his meagre income he turned again to journalism and established many contacts with the staffs of the Register, the Bulletin, and later, the Courier. He enjoyed cordial relations with C.C. Kingston and sought and found some degree of intimacy with other federationists, including Edmund Barton.

In April 1900 he became Naval Commandant in Queensland. In August he was selected to command the Protector and ordered to take her to the Gulf of Pe-chi-li in China. This was the main colonial contribution to British forces during the Boxer Rebellion. Manned in part by reservists - by citizen-sailors - the Protector arrived too late to join issue. But Creswell was given the task of surveying unknown coastal waters. To have sailed 16,000 miles in four months, to have aided the Royal Navy abroad, and to have received the usual decorous accolades from the British Commander-in-Chief influenced Creswell deeply. He returned in December 1900 to Queensland on the eve of the federation he supported and just before Sir John Forrest applied himself to the problems of defence legislation.

Creswell's formative years were spent in a navy that was soon to be transformed. The facts of his early life could have provided plots for many a story in Boys' Own Paper. The Royal Navy in which he served did provide the situations. During the slow transition from sail to steam it was steeped in the lore of Trafalgar. Sea battle was envisaged as a glorious melee. Each ship was expected to engage, close, and destroy a single adversary. Young officers each could hope to re-enact the romantic stories of the Napoleonic Wars: close-quarters confusion; cutting out of harbours hapless merchantmen; spiking the guns in protecting fortifications; lying in wait for unsuspecting privateers. It was in expeditions such as these, wherein pluck was valued beyond expertise, that Creswell
fought against slavers and pirates.

He had spent his youth on foreign stations established in the era of sail when voyages were long and communications poor. Within each zone the primary duty in war was to ensure the flow of trade. The importance of commerce protection Creswell was never to forget.

On each foreign station and in each British port there were gunboats and torpedo boats for radial port defence. In Lieutenant Creswell's day localized naval defence — by station, coast, or port — was thought to be one means of deterring marauders which had evaded the fleet. For Captain Creswell of South Australia it was the new orthodoxy, justified by the findings of Sir William Jervois and the initial recommendations of Admiral Tryon. Creswell noted the effect of war scares upon the residents of the coastal cities in the eighties. He had examined the virtues of the torpedo, the reserve-crew system, and the naval militia for localized defence. But the context of his thought was the localized port and coastal defence of Australia.

Changes in British naval policy and practice from 1897 to 1906 — outlined in Chapter Four above — made Creswell's assumptions unorthodox and anachronistic. He had neither the professional training nor experience to comprehend battleships and cruisers as they developed at the turn of the century. Nor did he admit that the doctrine of fleet concentration, involving swift, homogeneous, and huge vessels tightly organized under the one commander to decide the issue on the high seas, had rendered local defence and small vessels obsolete and useless. Nor was he willing to conceive operations only on the basis of the actions taken by a prudent enemy responsible for concentrating equally expensive fleets. Rather he understood resource, initiative, daring and the confusion of close conflict in localized naval defence against a correspondingly resourceful and dashing enemy commander.
... in forging the navalist campaign, irrepressible ...
Such was the man who stood on the periphery of Empire challenging openly each assumption of the Colonial Defence Committee.* Fundamentally his brief was quite simple. 16

It began with a doubt: could the Admiralty fulfil its promise to limit attacks upon the Australian littoral to raids? Surely, he insinuated, the Royal Navy could not be supreme in all theatres against all possible political combinations for all the time it took to conduct a successful sea war. The number of raiders and their conduct could not be foretold with certainty. Blockade was ineffective. It was impossible to mask every port, hostile and neutral. No amount of firm centralized control by the Admiralty could severely limit, let alone hermetically seal, the avenue open to raiders. Merchant auxiliaries could arm at sea; raiders could sally forth before the declaration of war; both could use the ports of sympathetic neutrals.

And what if the hostile combination also had the resources, vessels, and the will, not merely to dabble in raiding activity but to wage a guerre de course? Certainly the safety of the Realm might ultimately depend upon victorious naval battles in the Mediterranean or Atlantic. But was the security of Australian ports and shipping thereby completely assured? Of course, the destruction of commerce marauders might theoretically be seen as a secondary consideration. Perhaps the City of London might watch with equanimity the calculated loss of two to four percent of the mercantile marine while the Royal Navy established superiority and swept the seas for the marauders. But would not a loss of one percent in Australian waters paralyse trade and devastate morale? Naturally, the concentration of armoured strength compelled the enemy to concentrate. But the concentration of battle strength in one theatre involved possible temporary loss of local sea superiority in another. To concentrate fleets and squadrons in home waters was to expose the geo-political rim of the Empire.

* See above Chapter Four.
Now the ground was cleared to deny point by point the case repeatedly presented in Whitehall concerning the intrinsic difficulties of raiding operations.

Hazardous raids might be, countered Creswell, but the prizes were worth the risk. To capture merchantmen, to spread fear, to arrest trade, to undermine morale were undertakings of no mere secondary importance. The Empire depended upon the free flow of commerce; its spirit of Imperial solidarity rested in part upon a sense of invulnerability. Knowing this, both the enemy commander and his naval directors would court the fortunes of war. He would refuel from captured colliers, ports held momentarily at hostage, or auxiliaries awaiting his arrival at pre-selected points. Speed in space offered him immunity. He could anchor at one of many islands in the Pacific — even in sheltered waters along the expansive Australian coasts. There improvised bases could be established to make running repairs or replenish ammunition supplies from caches. Sweeping cruiser squadrons could search for months in vain. Once seen off the coast or near some port he could hinder trade by the suggestion of his continued presence. Even to capture and sink one coaster and to disappear would shake confidence. Or he could bombard cities from beyond the range of shore batteries, particularly at night when that range was severely limited to 2,000 or so yards by the power of searchlights. Cutting-out expeditions at night might not be beyond his means. To provoke panic might be barbarous but it was greatly rewarding. Supported by other raiders his exploits could wreak irreparable harm. In short, to the resourceful and daring went the fortunes of war.

These were the very fears that other navalists played upon. Creswell had presented a formidable case from the Australian stand-point which British official opinion did not appear to be able to demolish. Now he could forcefully contribute to the indignation voiced in the Age. 17

Should the Commonwealth suffer monthly such threats just because it lay on the extremities of the Empire? Surely this was against all
Australian national self-respect and, worse, founded upon British egoism rather than Imperial policy. The bombardment of Melbourne might appear a mere harassment in London. It would be a tragedy in Australia. The requirements for the defence of Australia were clearly unique. No other part of the Empire was so dependent on naval protection. Coal and wheat were among essential interstate exports. Were these to be stopped? Northern Queensland was not connected to areas south by rail. Was this territory to be held hostage to the raiders? Cargoes bound for Great Britain could be destroyed within sight of the principal ports while the splendidly equipped military watched powerless from behind their fixed defences. Could commonsense accept such events?

Subsidies to the British Treasury were no answer. Complete naval dependence upon Great Britain would not only strain the resources of the Royal Navy. It perpetuated an unmanly and unBritish naval impotence. It invited attack but allowed the development of no means to meet it. The defence of harbours, roadsteads, naval bases, coastal towns, capital cities, and coastal commerce was plainly a naval task. It was an Australian responsibility and an Imperial obligation. Local naval forces to replace the old colonial navies and the Australian Auxiliary Squadron were therefore indispensable. The creation of a coastal defence force under Commonwealth control for the security of Australia—this should be national policy. So ended many a Creswellian brief.

Many people found Creswell a compelling advocate. Some also found him a striking man. Erect in stature, jaunty yet correct in manner, suave and charming at social gatherings, he could evoke enthusiasm from younger men, and delight them with his wit. A devotee of physical fitness believing in the development of individual and national character, a man who never forgot the traditions of the Royal Navy, he could frolic with his sons yet be stern and withdrawn in fulfilling his official duties. He had the capacity to be more agreeable than Colonel Bridges and had greater experience of striving to manipulate colonial ministers. Yet he was curiously far less astute. He grasped general ideas quickly but often too quickly to have examined their implications. Facility with pen and
tongue were deceptive. He could perform his role as naval advocate
effortlessly, but as a political officer he appeared too proud, too
certain, too forceful yet too clearly not the authority or the expert
to challenge the Admiralty. In argument with the acute and politically
sophisticated he could too easily be out-maneouvrèd. Much of his official
life became lonely and frustrating.

If Hutton failed because he underestimated the vigour of
nationalism within the intricacies of dual loyalty, Creswell's successes
were severely limited because he could not see that Australian statesmen
wanted special accommodation within the Empire.

Initially Creswell's arguments were not as clear as they appear
here. Indeed his first foray into policy contributed to the revision —
not the abrogation — of the 1887 Naval Agreement.

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At the Colonial Conference of 1897 the Australasian premiers
formally asked for a continuance of the Agreement. The one dissentient
was C.C. Kingston who, flourishing a memorandum prepared by Creswell,
proposed an end to cash contributions.* Instead, the colonies would raise
and pay a Royal Naval Reserve for service in Australian waters and sur-
rounding seas. All squadrons East of Suez and West of the Horn would be
rapidly and safely reinforced from Australia. Men instead of money in
return for naval protection was the solution.18

Lord Brassey, then Governor of Victoria, elaborated this scheme
at the request of the Australian premiers in February 1899. Already
Brassey had suggested the creation of a formal Imperial military reserve
in Greater Britain. Now surprised at the potential in Canada and Australia,
he wanted a naval reserve along the same lines. The colonies would raise

* See above Chapter Three.
and train the men while the British Treasury paid a retainer. It was he who unequivocally demanded that the Royal Naval vessels held in reserve at Sydney should be made available for sea-going training. In this manner, the navalists won a sympathetic voice in one of the most influential British journals. Until 1906 the Naval Annual warned its readers that the best route to Imperial cooperation lay in encouraging and channelling Australian naval aspirations, not in ignoring or stifling them.¹⁹

It was Captain Robert Collins, then Secretary of the Victorian Defence Department, who perceived where this talk — much approved in the press — of a reserve was leading. The Admiralty was far from delighted with the proposal. It would consider it only if a reserve was formed in addition to the cash subsidy. Moreover, it demanded that reservists train for twenty-eight days a year and serve six months in a man-of-war every five years. Citizen-sailors in Australia, Collins replied, would never be induced into the scheme. A Royal Naval rating received only £2-10-0 a month; prevailing wages in the colonies were £6-0-0 per month. Even if the colonies could afford to make up the difference, men would not leave their calling for six months for the dubious privilege of training on the lower decks. Quite apart from the difficulties of where these men should serve and which government should control them, the whole concept, argued Collins, was misdirected and would lead to frustration. It could well stand in the way of Australian naval defence.

In arriving at a viable alternative Collins drew heavily upon Victorian experience. He felt — as indeed did many of the innovators — that the much neglected Colonial Naval Defence Act of 1865 involved a clear Imperial policy. In passing it the Imperial government had obviously contemplated and approved the creation of colonial naval forces and a naval reserve. A colony could possess and control ships and train men for local operations; in war it could place both at the disposal of the Royal Navy. Therein lay the principles of self-reliance and loyalty, independence and mutual aid, home defence and Imperial cooperation, and localized naval defence within the Royal Naval shield. Moreover, the British government had lent Victoria the Cerberus which was now maintained for
harbour defence. Therein lay the precedent. There was no reason, suggested Collins, why this practice "might not be extended to sea-going ships". 20

In fact the Act was less clear than Collins supposed. The implied policy had never been instrumented. Though the Cerberus was earlier thought to have some sea-going capabilities, it had been built and eventually used only for harbour defence like a mobile gun platform. No other colony had followed the lead of Victoria until the eighties, and then under quite different circumstances. The British government had granted £100,000 towards the construction of the Cerberus; the Admiralty had not lent a vessel to the colonies. No precedent had been set. Nevertheless, this opened a possibility. 21

In August 1899 Collins convened a conference of naval commandants to counter Brassey's proposals. Success was largely his. The conference admitted and elaborated the Admiralty's misgivings about a formal reserve but only to stress that the existing naval officers, amalgamated into the one force, could better train Australians on ships under Commonwealth control. Like the military they would have permanent staffs, nucleus crews, and a reserve system of citizen-sailors. But what of the most expensive item, ships capable of sea-going training? Conference decided that the Naval Agreement should be terminated and the existing vessels of the colonial navies be scrapped. This would free some £190,000 a year for naval expenditure. With this sum the federal government could arrange for the loan of five second-class cruisers from the Admiralty, stationed in peacetime at each of the capital cities as training ships. Towards the cost of these vessels held in reserve the Commonwealth would pay only for their maintenance.* Men instead of money, the loan of second-class cruisers instead of the Australian Auxiliary Squadron, was now the solution. 22

* Second-Class Cruiser (like the Challenger): 5,800 tons; 11 x 6-inch + 9 x 12 pdr.; 21 knots. Approximate initial cost was £6450,000. Annual maintenance cost for one such cruiser in commission was £60,000, and in reserve £20,000.
The naval press was delighted. Even their opponents who recognized the value of Brassey's proposals found virtue in Collins' recommendations. Both acknowledged the need for sea-going training in Australia. The keenest criticism of this, the first plan for an Australian naval force, came from London.23

The Admiralty was silent but its attitude is easy to divine. To dissipate naval strength was always against official policy. Any effort by Australians to perpetuate with Royal Naval matériel five separate "lines of defence" in the era of fleet concentration was anathema. Another aspect was forcefully put by Admiral Sir John Fisher when Deakin asked again for a loan of cruisers:

The Colonies, one and all, grab all they possibly can out of us and give nothing in return. They are all alike ... 24

With grand disdain, The Times expounded the official brief:

The British Empire requires only one Navy, homogeneous, obeying a common law, maintaining the one standard of efficiency, available for service wherever the need is most urgent.

To form a "nondescript force" of "inadequately trained volunteers" aboard five cruisers and hope that they could successfully deter an efficient enemy was the height of folly. "Thus to describe such a scheme is to condemn it." The answer lay in a new naval agreement by which subsidies were paid towards the cost of the Imperial Navy to be used by the Admiralty without condition or restriction.25

The Australian navalists and their seconds accepted the challenge. Editorial fire was hot. The Age and the Register condemned The Times for its return to barbaric indifference to colonial affairs at a time when all were concerned with the "Imperial spirit". Creswell demanded an "Admiralty of the Empire, not merely the Admiralty of the United Kingdom". Collins argued soberly that it was
more practicable to devise a scheme by which ships locally manned and locally maintained can be associated in some larger scheme of imperial Maritime Defence than to devise a scheme by which colonies can pay increasing money contributions to an Imperial Exchequer and have an effective voice in the administration of the fund. 26

In short, a cash nexus would never weld the Empire. Facilities for autonomous and regional defence would.

The indignant words of the navalists hit home. Yet nothing was to add quite so much respect for their cause as colonial participation in the Boer War. Gradually it was admitted that neither Collins nor Creswell nor any responsible Australian contemplated a division in the spirit, strength, or policy of the Empire. While The Times set about educating the colonials in naval strategy, the Australians reviewed their position. To hope for the loan of vessels was futile. Naval and Imperial objections to localized forces could be countered only by demonstrating the fallacies in official strategy. Yet colonial troops on the veldt — no less than a colonial gunboat in Chinese waters — showed how the principles of self-defence and Imperial cooperation were by no means incompatible and indeed a source of great approval. The navalists had won the right to debate with their mentors. The way was still open to suggest new schemes. 27

This path Creswell took to fame and frustration. Recently returned from Chinese waters in the Protector, he knew he had a solution. National security, he protested to Forrest, lay not in military schemes, but in the creation of an "Australian Naval Defence Force". Ships should be purchased — not borrowed — by the Commonwealth and therefore unquestionably under its control. This new force could replace the Australian Auxiliary Squadron. It would have both local and Imperial functions: to defend "the coasts of Australia, and to cooperate in time of war with ships of the Royal Navy ...". 28

Current talk of battleships or heavy cruisers for Australian service he dismissed. The answer lay in the purchase of cruisers of
THESE TWO COMBINED: THE CRUISER DESTROYER?

The Protector of South Australia ... to China and back ...

The Wallaroo of the Auxiliary Squadron ... too light for sustained duties.
special design suitable for unique Australian coastal conditions yet capable of offering "our due quota" to Royal Naval strength in Australasian and even distant seas. On the specific nature of these vessels, which he called - echoing the terminology of Tryon's day - "cruiser-destroyers", he remained vague.* Even so, he insisted that the Naval Agreement and even the colonial naval forces should be abandoned. Of the estimated £350,000 annually to be spent on defence at least £350,000 could be used for naval purposes. By 1909 the Commonwealth would possess four cruiser-destroyers more capable of dealing with raiders than the Protector yet, like it, able to cooperate with the Royal Navy. Men instead of money, Australian ships instead of hired defence, was now the answer.  

The navalist press welcomed the scheme. Even the Sydney Morning Herald thought it worth consideration. It had been submitted to Cabinet before, but not made public until after November 1901. In the meantime, Forrest had decided future policy.  

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Having presented the first Defence Bill dealing primarily with military affairs to parliament, Sir John Forrest turned to naval defence, and did so, assisted by Edmund Barton, with a diligence acknowledged by neither contemporaries nor later historians.  

The debate on the Defence Bill had revealed that neither the spirit of federalist defence nor the political balance in the House  

* It is, however, clear that he envisaged modifications to cruisers of the Katoomba Class to incorporate all that was praiseworthy in the Protector. The resulting vessel was to be of heavy displacement because of the nature of Australian coastal waters; of short operational but longer cruising range since it would usually be acting near base; and of heavier armament than many commerce raiders. It was not to be built to serve anywhere in the world. In all probability, though perhaps unrealizable, the eventual demands were: 3,000 tons; 1 x 8-inch + 4 x 6-inch; 19-25 knots; initial cost £A300,000.
favoured navalist plans. There were, declared Barton, three alternatives: to acquire a proper navy which would be exorbitantly expensive; to abandon the Agreement and rely upon military defence; or to seek a new agreement which would provide modern ships on the Australian Station capable of giving training to Australians as Tryon had promised. The last was undoubtedly most favoured. 33

Uncertain of the correct course—a state of mind to which Creswell's scheme contributed—Forrest and Barton turned to Rear-Admiral Sir Lewis Beaumont. As a recent member of the Colonial Defence Committee, he was well qualified to speak. As a participant in the naval discussions during the 1897 Colonial Conference, he had learnt much about colonial attitudes. As Admiral Commanding on the Australian Station, he was an authority. In all probability he did not act on explicit instructions from the Admiralty, for its later recommendations differed from his. He certainly had no directions from the Colonial Office for he was chastized by Hopetoun. Doubtless he did wish to see the Australian Station changed from a dreary backwater in Imperial seas to a post of some importance. He was no Imperialist agent but an experienced officer giving advice with professional care. The substance of his arguments was to be repeated in different terms by Admiral Sir John Fisher eight years later. 34

Creswell's scheme he examined and dismissed. The "cruiser-destroyer" concept had been presented without postulating an enemy or its capabilities. Threats to commerce ranged from attack by Russian merchant auxiliaries to French corsair cruisers to formidable vessels like the Jeanne d'Arc.* Against the possible combinations and tactics of such vessels the Creswellian scheme had negligent deterrent value. The cost was underestimated; the vessels too light even to patrol Australian waters; the facilities available for modern training extremely limited. The voyage of the Protector had proven neither the efficacy of reserve-crew

* Jeanne d'Arc was in part designed for a guerre de commerce: 11,330 tons; 1 x 7.6-inch + 8 x 5.5-inch; 20+ knots; launched in the late nineties. Russian and French merchant auxiliaries ranged in speed from 12 to 22 knots and were armed with three to seven 5.5-inch guns.
system composed of naval militia nor a means of Imperial cooperation. It merely showed that the officers and crew could navigate the vessel to China and back at economical speed. As a naval programme for local defence it was dubious; for Imperial cooperation it would at best provide token and probably unwanted support. The "due quota" the Commonwealth could give to the Royal Navy inside or beyond Australian waters was extremely limited. This did not, Beaumont went on, deny the validity of the "wishes and aspirations of the Australian people." Indeed these must be met:

Local defence may in time be of use and may supply an outlet for the naval aspirations of the great ports of the several states, but the Commonwealth, I think, should aim at the protection on the high seas which is protection for all — floating trade, territory, and ports great and small. 36

The only satisfactory solution was an ocean-going navy capable of dealing with all but capital ships.

For the security of Australasia eight modern cruisers on the Australian Station were essential. Two first-class cruisers like the Royal Arthur and six second-class cruisers like the Challenger, advised Beaumont, would constitute an effective and homogeneous squadron.* The capital outlay for ships and depots would be about £3,600,000 involving in addition £1,000,000 annually for maintenance. Such a force was beyond Australian financial resources in the immediate future. It could only be acquired and maintained by arrangement with the Imperial government. In that case, the Commonwealth might profitably cooperate with Britain and New Zealand so that it maintained only four vessels of the new squadron. This would cost £190,000 annually.

* Examples of Vessels for a Cruiser Squadron:
(a) First-Class Cruiser in 1901-1903 (Like the Royal Arthur): 7,305 tons; 2 x 9.2-inch + 10 x 6-inch; 20.5 knots; completed 1890-1892; approximate initial cost £E510,000.
(b) Second-Class Cruiser in 1901-1903 (Like the Challenger): 5,880 tons; 11 x 6-inch + 9 x 12 pdr.; 21 knots; laid 1901-1904; approximate initial cost £E450,000.
The CHALLENGER

... for the protection of floating trade, territory, and ports ...
Clearly Beaumont was recommending an ocean-going cruiser squadron for Australian naval defence on the basis of strategical, rather than political, requirements. It followed from this that basically he was demanding the replacement of the vessels of the Imperial Squadron which, it had always been acknowledged, would leave the Australian littoral in times of danger. Therein lay the germ of later trouble. Of this Sir John Forrest saw some aspects clearly.

"To form, or even to form within a few years, a well-equipped and highly trained sea-going squadron would not be within our means. For the Commonwealth to successfully establish such a force, it must advance by gradual steps ...". 37 Thus did Forrest perceive that Australia needed a navy, not a local naval force, for the protection of her commerce and ports. But he also saw that even if the ships were constructed, the Commonwealth did not — and would not — possess the trained manpower to use them efficiently and effectively. A related problem was one Alfred Deakin later strove to solve: ships in an isolated naval force became obsolete and officers became "rusty". 38 How to ensure replacement of vessels and prevent the deterioration in staff?

Moreover, Forrest had to think of the naval militia, whose demise would cause public uproar. They were men without ships or without sea-going training. Facilities had to be made available to provide trained officers and men. Clearly Beaumont’s scheme was not enough. To follow his suggestions as they stood would be merely to subsidize the Royal Navy and Australians "in twenty years, would be no more self-reliant than we are today". 39 The Commonwealth would be without ships, without trained manpower, without local naval forces, and without a naval militia — all would be sacrificed to the new Imperial Squadron.

Confronted with these problems by Sir John Forrest, Beaumont suggested two possibilities. Forrest could request the Admiralty to present the Commonwealth with the obsolescent vessels of the Auxiliary Squadron as training ships in each of the major ports. If the Admiralty consented, the Commonwealth would have to find a further £94,000. A
complete naval scheme along these lines would cost about £300,000 annually. Alternatively, at greater cost the Commonwealth could develop, within the new arrangement, a system of radial port defences. Torpedo boats and destroyers could be used along with minefields and fixed defences to secure ports for Australian shipping and the Royal Navy. These the Commonwealth would have to purchase. But thereby Imperial and colonial interests would be served. In either case, Australians would be developing skills and perhaps acquiring ships for local port defence while and until the capacities for a national sea-going navy were developed. 

After due consideration Forrest accepted the first. Throughout the discussions it had been suggested that the local naval forces might best be scrapped to free enough from the estimates to pay annually between £200,000 and £300,000 to the British government. At that time, there was no latitude to consider destroyers, particularly with more attractive prospects open for investigation. At last the first step was clear: to seek a new agreement to last ten years for the vessels Beaumont suggested; to ensure that Australians could be given modern training aboard vessels of the Auxiliary Squadron on loan or aboard vessels, against Beaumont's advice, of the new Imperial Squadron. At the end of ten years, the Commonwealth would certainly have the men and officers and, in the meantime, wrote Forrest in October 1901, "we shall have satisfaction of knowing that we were working in the direction which would eventually enable us to provide for and establish an Australian navy". The next move was to approach Whitehall.

Substantially these recommendations would seem cautious, prudent, and realistic, well within the directions given by parliament, constituting a sound brief for naval discussions at the Colonial Conference of 1902. Yet, although Forrest emerged from the issues with enhanced status in some quarters as a statesman who saw the needs of the Empire, in others he was seen as an unpatriotic, Imperialistic, proud, foolish man courting British approval, frustrating all navalist hopes, insulting his colleagues and electors by presenting to the "Imperial authorities a cut and dried measure for naval defence on which he united
neither ministerial nor public opinion". While it is untrue that Forrest did not seek ministerial approval, the legend has tended to live on that he, and not Barton or Cabinet, was responsible for the iniquities of the new Naval Agreement of 1903.

The circumstances were partly of Forrest's creation. In what was essentially an appendage to his final submission he explicitly rejected the concept of independent colonial navies. For each part of Greater Britain to possess a few ships, he wrote in terms grand and eloquent, "would seem to be in accord with the actions and sentiments of a number of petty States rather than in accord with the necessities and aspirations of a great free united people". In matters of Imperial defence there were no different interests:

If the British nation is at war, so are we; if it gains victories or suffers defeats, so do we .... There is only one sea to be supreme over, and we want one fleet to be mistress over that sea.

Better, therefore, that each part of Greater Britain contribute to the maintenance of a supreme Royal Navy under undivided control! Better that Greater Britons should be able to serve, both permanently and as a reserve, in that navy! Better that the representation for the contributors should be allowed in the Admiralty until the British Navy became truly the Imperial Navy! Neither The Times nor the Imperial Federation (Defence) League could cavil at this.

Perhaps Forrest was led to his conclusion by the very logic of his submissions and the awful power of strategic thought. Having rejected local naval defence as unsound, and having accepted the need for a sea-going squadron which the Commonwealth could neither afford nor man, it naturally followed that Australia must depend upon the Royal Navy controlled by the Admiralty. Forrest may have been manoeuvred into this position partly because, in obeying parliamentary instructions to reduce defence expenditure, he had anticipated the extinction of the colonial naval forces - the remaining outlet for navalist aspirations. If so, the lessons for navalists - even those like Alfred Deakin who, with
Forrest, were interested in Imperial reorganization - was clear: local naval defence had to be espoused whether strategically justifiable or no. Perhaps Forrest was attempting to woo support from the Free-traders whose views he had carefully noted. If so, he was politically obtuse. Or perhaps Forrest, in summarizing sincerely his own attitude to Empire and defence, felt he had grasped a significant trend in public opinion. If so, there was ample justification. But whatever the reason, Forrest's grandiloquence was clearly directed at a final and distant goal. It did not invalidate his detailed recommendations.

Noble words may be the stuff of politics; rarely the substance of policy. Forrest knew that a new agreement must be a matter of careful haggling at the Conference even while rhetoric flowed on. It is true that he had proclaimed himself an anti-navalist. But he had merely reopened an alternative: renewal of the Agreement could lead to the reconstitution of the Imperial Navy or it could still precede the foundation of an Australian navy. More important, Forrest's venture into Imperial politics seems to have affected neither Barton nor the outcome one whit.

Barton went to the Colonial Conference of 1902 knowing in detail Forrest's brief. Beaumont had doubtless reported to Whitehall; New Zealand was formally requesting a revision of the existing Agreement to replace old ships with new cruisers. The first step would surely be taken by the Admiralty. 44

It was. Lord Selborne, the First Lord of the Admiralty, expounded lucidly and authoritatively the theory of fleet concentration. Defence was publicly struck from the naval vocabulary. The localization of forces was declared "altogether heretical". Selborne then applied the theory to the guerre de course. The French proposed, he warned, to
create two swift and powerful cruiser squadrons in Far Eastern waters.* British cruisers must be able to concentrate to compel this force to concentrate. Then would follow the hunt and the kill. The doctrine was inescapable.

In times of peace dispositions could be made for political and imperial purposes. In time of war the Admiralty needed complete control to utilize strength wherever the blow could best be struck. The primary object, read an Admiralty memorandum, "is not to defend anything, but to attack the fleets of the enemy, and by defeating them, to afford protection to British Dominions, shipping, and commerce".45

If Australia and New Zealand were prepared to accept the doctrine - which indeed Salborne was more concerned to expound than beg directly for contributions to aid the weary Titan - then the Admiralty had ready a proposal. It was prepared to place five modern second-class cruisers, like the Challenger, on the Australian Station, two of which might be manned by Australasians recruited into the Royal Navy on a permanent basis. For this force the Commonwealth would then have to find £304,515 annually.** There remained the problem of the naval militia. If these were to be trained to the point where they too could join the Squadron in times of emergency, and thus become an effective Royal Naval Reserve, the Commonwealth would have to maintain the five Katoomba Class cruisers of the old Auxiliary Squadron and allow their distribution to each of the major ports as drill vessels. This would increase the annual payment of the Commonwealth to £387,490.46

* The French were to form a force composed of two armoured cruisers, three swift corsair cruisers, and seven lesser protected cruisers to operate from Saigon and Noumea. The plan was never implemented. However, the Americans were to rely on cruiser squadrons in the Pacific and the Admiralty hoped to follow suit. The German government did so after 1910.

** About £50,000 annually might also have had to be found to make up the differences in pay for the colonials whose wages would be higher than the English.
This proposal allowed, where Beaumont did not, Australians to serve and train aboard modern cruisers and even to aspire to commissioned rank. The opening of the Royal Navy to colonials, permanent and militia, was a concession indeed. It did not provide, where Beaumont did, for first-class cruisers under a tripartite financial arrangement. But the Imperial Squadron could be strengthened in time of need to aid this new Australasian squadron. It offered, where Beaumont was uncertain, the use of the old Katoomba Class cruisers for training the citizen-sailors. All the Commonwealth had to do was to accept the fact that battles were fought in distant seas and pay the cost—a third more than Beaumont's highest estimate and more than three times the payment under the previous agreement.

Barton commended the scheme tentatively and soon after informed Alfred Deakin in one of his many telegraphic despatches of the proposal.

After much confusion which not only caused Barton dismay but revealed that neither Deakin nor other ministers had studied Forrest's submissions, federal Cabinet rejected the scheme since it would be far beyond the finances available. It wanted an "alteration in the basis of (the) contribution (to the) Royal Navy". Any increased expenditure in this field necessarily meant further reductions in the military estimates. Any subsidy, Deakin explained, would be unpopular. Both, it seems, Cabinet was prepared to face if the sum spent remained between £100,000 to £200,000 annually and sea-going training was offered. This left Barton a great deal of latitude and little to bargain with.  

His only asset was that Whitehall wanted a regular naval contribution from the Commonwealth comparable with that offered by the Cape, Natal, and Newfoundland, even if this meant satisfying certain Australian conditions. Given the circumstances, the Admiralty appeared to act quite generously in drafting a new tripartite agreement that was to continue for ten years. The conditions differed greatly from those in 1887.
In return for an annual payment of not less than £200,000 from the Commonwealth, the Admiralty undertook to maintain on the Australian Station a modern force of at least eight vessels whose prime ships of war were to be one armoured cruiser and two second-class cruisers.* In addition three older vessels were to be converted into drill ships to train twenty-five officers and seven hundred men for the Royal Naval Reserve. These, and one other, were also to recruit colonials on a more permanent basis. Eight cadetships, tenable in Great Britain, were to be offered annually. In response to Barton's insistent appeals on behalf of local interests, the Admiralty agreed to "recognize the advantages" of buying coal and supplies for all squadrons East of Suez from Australasia.

What had Australians gained for the payment of a little more than a shilling each for the next decade? A relatively modern force with an armoured cruiser as flag-ship and limited potential for specialist naval training:— these were assets. Yet in substance, the Admiralty had scrapped the Australian Auxiliary Squadron, primarily because the Commonwealth could not afford to maintain it, and contracted to reinforce, at a fixed strength in peacetime, the Imperial Squadron whose sphere of operations were never limited. The Australian Station became even more than before a convenient administrative division. Under the revised Agreement the new force was, under Admiralty direction, to act "against hostile vessels which threaten the trade or interests of Australia and New Zealand" in "the waters of the Australia, China, and East Indies Stations ...".48 The doctrine had been incorporated into the Agreement. On the other hand, the Admiralty had expressly guaranteed to protect Australian trade and interests. It was under a strong moral, even a contractual, obligation to secure the Commonwealth against all except flash raids. Protection from the Royal Naval shield was fundamentally different but perhaps no less effective than that provided for in 1887.

* 1903 Agreement: 1 First-Class Armoured Cruiser 2 Second-Class Cruisers 4 Third-Class Cruisers 4 Sloops.
As events proved, the Admiralty considered the force excessive and quietly chafed under the new arrangement. Why, then, did it promise so much for so little? The British government received an annual payment which, with some justification, it could look upon as a naval subsidy. So too could Australians. There was Imperial value in that—and a source of further friction. But, in substance, by refusing the first Admiralty offer of five second-class cruisers and five Katoomba Class cruisers as drill ships, Barton had, doubtless unknowingly, entangled the Commonwealth in international politics.⁴⁹

Under the terms of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, signed in January 1902, Great Britain promised to maintain in the Far East "available for concentration" a naval force which, allied with the Japanese, would be greater than that of any third power. Explicitly Selborne had included in this naval force the Imperial Squadron on the Australian Station. It is probable that he had this in mind when he expounded the doctrine before conference. The appearance of the armoured cruiser, the H.M.S. Euryalus, on the Australian Station during 1904-1905, therefore owed much to the Anglo-Japanese Treaty. So, too, did the arrival of more modern cruisers after January 1905. Australians were paying for protection in far more than a naval sense.

Moreover, in the midst of reorganizing the fleet, Admiral Sir John Fisher contemplated using three powerful cruiser squadrons in the Far East. Singapore was one of the five keys, in his estimation, with which the British could look up the world. To this end he had hoped to reinforce even further the Australian Station with two armoured cruisers and two first-class cruisers so that with the aid of the China and East Indies Squadrons the key could be turned in the event of war. Before him were two clear and insurmountable difficulties. The Admiralty did not have enough ships to implement his plan; the Royal Navy did not possess a cruiser suitable for the task of defending the Pacific.*

* See below Chapter Nine.
Australians were to resent the results of the first; ultimately they were to benefit from the second. For, though no one knew, Selborne had tilled the soil and Fisher planted the seed of the Royal Australian Navy.

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Great and increasing was the furore over the new Naval Agreement. Compared even with 1887, declared the navalists, it was needless, valueless, frustrating, enfeebling, and dishonourable. They carried the debate to the press, to British newspapers and journals, to meetings of Labour caucus, to the Australian Natives Association and the Royal Colonial Institute — and finally to parliament in July 1903 where Barton, unnecessarily exhorted by the Colonial Office and the Governor-General, sought its ratification.50

Of the forty-five men in the House who spoke on the issue, only eight favoured it without reservation. Six others were relatively non-committal about local naval forces. The remainder expressed grave misgivings and demanded some kind of Australian navy. The Labour Party, more clear about what it rejected than what it desired, steadfastly opposed immediate ratification, and was supported by seven radicals from among the ministerialists. Yet some of the most trenchant criticism came from neither Labour nor the radicals. At the van of the attack Sir John Quick was incredulous and outraged and Senator Matheson indignant and scornful. In support Watson was cautious, Crouch suspicious, Hughes alarmed, Higgins passionate, and Reid astute. Setting the pattern for many of the Free-traders, he repudiated Barton's claim, flirted with Labour, denounced Imperial federation, called for a future navy, and voted for the Agreement. Duly it was ratified.

The navalists in parliament performed well. The new Agreement, they had argued, is neither the business arrangement nor the insurance policy of 1887. What do we get for £200,000? We pay a subsidy to the
Eastern Fleet, to a squadron which the British in any case would maintain to uphold their Far Eastern interests. What is Australian about that? The naval reserve scheme satisfies neither our self-respect nor our demand for security. We are financing a squadron which will disappear from our coastline precisely when it is most needed. The British attempt to mollify us by suggesting that local defence is no longer effective. They can indulge in new theories; their ports are always protected. In times of danger ours will always be exposed. If ever local naval forces under our own control were needed, it is now! To accept the doctrine of fleet concentration in the form of the new Imperial Squadron is not only to obscure this imperative need, it is always to condone the offensive. It would be to entangle us in all Imperial wars resulting from policies we cannot restrain. Better the principles of 1865, or even 1887, than that! Our future lies not on the high seas. Calculated preparation for offensive operations in peace is neither our duty nor our tradition. In any scheme of Imperial defence we must protect ourselves, afford a safe base for British forces, and thus become an asset rather than a liability to British strength. There in times of peace our obligation ends.\(^5\)

For many earnest supporters of the Agreement the time seemed no less ripe for an examination of the nature of nation and Empire. Among them was T.T. Ewing. He was a New South Welshman, a staunch federationist, and a Free-trader. Later he was to hold the defence portfolio in Deakin’s fourth administration (1907-1908) and to be one of the very few to establish cordial and intimate relations with the Prime Minister. In that post his repeated predictions that war must come with Asia, that Australians might have to face the yellow hordes alone, and that British sea-power could not secure the Commonwealth from invasion, were to prove highly influential.

On this occasion, however, Ewing scrutinized his own people. He was worried by a strong conscious tendency among some navalists that began with an assertion of local patriotism, proceeded to the desire for separate nationality, but might well end in separation from an Empire.
The danger arose, he felt, because the navalists drew sustenance from four classes of Australian colonists, each of whom debunked or devalued the Imperial idea: those who nursed memories of political and religious grievances and carried these seeds of strife to their new land—these were, like as not, ignorant, swayed by flashes of violent prejudice and the victims of demagogues; those of the native born who sought in Australian life, literature, and art, something unique, something expressing a national attitude, something characteristic and distinct from the English—their ambition was explicable and pardonable but it generally carried with it a rejection of Old World traditions and standards which in turn produced a mind distinctly unfavourable to the Imperial connection; those politicians who professed a dread of British and foreign entanglements, assumed that Australia could live in splendid isolation, and were stirred by such phrases as refusing to be drawn "into the vortex of militarism"—these were not numerous but influential; and finally, those pessimists who felt that the Empire would inevitably disintegrate—a few of these were doctrinaire but most felt this must be the fate of any large and great political organization. No one of these groups constituted a threat; joined together in a single cause they might prove formidable. Already Australia was plagued internally with divisive loyalties which stood in the way of a national spirit; already at play were these centrifugal tendencies that had to be channelled or countered.

The alternative, declared Ewing, was to see Greater Britain as an evolving organism, as a complete Anglo-Saxon world developing freedoms with a sense of unity, as societies inspired with mutual trust and ready to offer mutual assistance. Within that exciting context plans for defence must be conceived. A sea-going navy formed by a more prosperous Australia as a cooperative unit of the Royal Navy would meet these demands admirably. Equally fitting was the new Imperial Squadron with its openings for colonials into the Royal Navy.52

This and other soundings of Imperialist thought in Australia reveal much in common: a disinterest in Imperial organization; a desire
for harmonious cooperation in Imperial defence to satisfy mutual interests; a protective and mild interest in the future of navalism against external criticism; belief in the spontaneity of Imperial sentiment in any crisis; the demand for inviolable right to make a free choice; and a profound faith in the supremacy of the Royal Navy and the efficacy of fleet concentration. Cooperation without coercion in an Anglo-Saxon world — thus Ewing summarized the case. All these strands were important, particularly to Alfred Deakin, and were to provoke men to action during the Dreadnought scare of 1909.53

Despite discussion, there was no doubt that the Naval Agreement was a fact. Many Australians welcomed it. The new Imperial Squadron was becoming part of Commonwealth defence. Indeed, the newly-elected second Deakin ministry was so "anxious" to see the new scheme for training Australians perfected that it appointed the arch-navalist, Captain Creswell, as Royal Naval Registrar.* He was asked to "render every possible assistance" to the commander of the Imperial Squadron in his effort to recruit Australians for service either as permanent members of the Royal Navy on the Australian Station or as members of the Royal Naval Reserve. Creswell indignantly replied that he would accept the post only at the express "order of the Commonwealth ...". He received it.54

Yet the navalists in parliament had not struggled in vain. In attacking Forrest and Barton, they had begun to clarify their aims — a naval force limited in operations to the Australian coast to replace the Australian Auxiliary Squadron in which they had recently found much virtue. Therein lay the opportunity for Creswell. The issue was far from dead. It was not only they who kept it alive.

In attempting to determine the fate of the existing naval forces after their return from the Colonial Conference, Sir John Forrest — with

* During 1904 Creswell held three positions concurrently: Naval Commandant in Queensland; Royal Naval Registrar; and Acting Naval Officer Commanding the Commonwealth Naval Forces.
... in war would hazard the lives of all on board ...
duty as drill ships. In war most would hazard the lives of all on board.56

To Sir John Forrest, the administrator pledged to drastic economies, the solution was self-evident — to accept the advice of the Colonial Defence Committee and disband this polygut navy. Yet, although the permanent naval forces were not held in high esteem, they remained the sole outlet left to the navalists cursing under the shadow of the Agreement. To choke off their funds was one thing, to let them die another. For with their extinction there would be no distinctively Australian force on the Station and no nucleus for a future navy. Not even the Sydney Morning Herald would brook that. For there was an even more grievous aspect of the problem which had been Forrest's constant concern — the future of the naval militia.57

Though previously neglected, retrenched, and discouraged, the citizen-sailors were highly valued. Politicians, Admirals, even the Colonial Defence Committee, commended their spirit. In them was found the sign that Australians still belonged to the British race steeped in the glories and traditions of the seas. Of the 2,000 men, half lived in the coastal towns of Queensland. The most coherently organized lived in New South Wales. They had no ships; they played no role in the naval forces; they drilled on land. But they were the Naval Brigades to the Free-traders and even the anti-navalists of Sydney. Prudently Reid, in July 1903, declared to the House:

If I thought (the 1903 Agreement) was to be made use of to interfere in any sense with the vigorous development of our naval brigades, I should vote against it. 58

Yet even before Reid's declaration, Forrest was considering a solution that anticipated it. To scrap the colonial forces, though an ideal administrative solution with ample justification, was impossible because the militia would go untrained. To see staffs and militia absorbed into the New Agreement was more appealing. Beaumont's successor, Vice-Admiral A.D. Fanshawe, was at first reluctant and then enthusiastic
about the proposal. Yet this would mean paying off or laying up vessels like the *Protector*, dismissing officers like Clare and Creswell, and disbanding those scattered militia units on the Queensland coast Fanshawe could not train. To maintain, under existing financial arrangements, both the forces and the units was a waste. Could, then, the Commonwealth replace the colonial naval forces even while the new Agreement came into operation? If so, with what vessels?

In April 1903 Forrest took these questions to Fanshawe. He had previously contemplated the use of submarines. Would Whitehall, he now asked - recalling but misinterpreting the previous advice of Beaumont, provide destroyers for Australian defence? Fanshawe pointed out that this would be contrary to the Naval Agreement and would involve great expense for the British Treasury. Destroyers, he said, were unable to operate beyond the local sphere to which they were distributed. Of all vessels, their functions were the most localized. Such a measure the Admiralty would never condone. But, continued Fanshawe, there was a way out.

The Commonwealth could purchase, or ask the Admiralty to help provide as it had done the *Cerberus* under the Colonial Naval Defence Act of 1865, destroyers to replace the old vessels of the local naval forces. These could be maintained and manned by the Commonwealth:

In that way they would be a local Naval Force belonging in Australia, unable to leave Australian waters, and would, moreover, be the recognized and proper weapons for defence of harbour and coasts in their vicinity.

Thus had Forrest, in pursuing an administrative problem to the edges of policy, reopened an avenue for the navalists - radial port defence.

Thus armed, Barton told the House from the outset of the debate on the Naval Agreement that future development might well lie in port defence. When opportunity arose and funds allowed, he said, it might be advisable to have "torpedo boats or torpedo destroyers at each of the principal ports, as a means of special harbour defence". Nothing in the
Agreement precluded this step; Australians would be upsetting neither the theory nor the practice of fleet concentration; the Commonwealth possessed the power and the precedent to act under the Colonial Naval Defence Act. The Commonwealth Naval Forces would become the nucleus for future growth. Within the Royal Naval shield, Barton predicted, the Commonwealth would tend to its own lines of defence as it grew more prosperous. 60

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Far from the centre of power as naval commandant in Queensland, Creswell examined closely each twist and turn in the public debate. He knew that Forrest's deliberations could well mean the extinction of his career and ambitions. No man more quickly grasped the opportunity afforded by Barton's statement. He was fast approaching the normal age of retirement. 61

A new coastal defence force with Creswell as senior officer was a dream worth fulfilling. Harbour defence might be menial, land-locked, liable to pressure from the military, and far less splendid. But the opportunity had to be quickly exploited. He clutched at a straw. In September 1903, with the hub-bub over the Agreement scarce ended, the Minister had the second of many submissions from Creswell: a torpedo boat service was essential to preserve that long smooth water canal, the Barrier Route, from attack by enterprising Russian commanders.

His suggestion was sent to the Colonial Defence Committee and fulsomely repudiated: the Barrier Route did not cover all the Queensland sea lanes; torpedo boat defence was localized and would involve greater cost against a highly improbable threat than the return was worth; better that the Commonwealth trust the Royal Navy and the Agreement; better that all fixed defences on the coast be modernized. With this advice Cabinet was content. 62
In February 1904 the Russo-Japanese War began. One month later the second Deakin ministry took the first step towards redeeming Barton's pledge. As senior officer, Creswell was appointed Acting Naval Officer Commanding the Commonwealth Naval Forces. Now he could be responsible for the inspection and efficiency of the force, their command in war, and the formulation of policy. Now he would have a voice in official circles, but little ready access. For he was expected - given an extra £250 a year - to hold his previous post in Queensland, recruit Australians for the Imperial Squadron at Sydney, and to travel to Melbourne for consultations.63

Within weeks after the appointment, another submission was before Cabinet. He urged a reorganization of the old colonial forces which he was to command in war along lines befitting "federated Australia". These could eventually be incorporated into a scheme of radial port defence. The first step was to make the existing forces effective. Later the Commonwealth could develop them on "a federal basis" for the "defence of ports, harbours, and open roadsteads (including) the waters in their vicinity".64

He sought a promise and nothing more concrete than a new administration and increased funds for the existing forces. Some money he got. No other decision was made. Again Cabinet wondered whether it could get training ships from the Admiralty under the Australian interpretation of the Colonial Naval Defence Act of 1865. Yet again it was thinking of modifying the existing Agreement. Neither Deakin nor his ministers seemed impressed by Creswell or his appeal.65

Nor he with them. Unlike Deakin, whose purposes he could not see and whose apparent confusion he could not tolerate, Creswell appeared disinterested in the Imperial ramifications of naval policy. This helped commend him to Labour.

On the formation of the Watson ministry Creswell was again asked to formulate policy. His relations with Senator Dawson, the Minister
for Defence, were cordial, direct, and wholly sympathetic. He was not the ogre Hutton had appeared. Hughes had demanded a national navy and quoted Creswell in the House; the new naval adviser had been presented as a patriot doing battle with Whitehall. The course of the Russo-Japanese War helped his cause by reviving nightmares about Russian raiders. Moreover, the Chambers of Commerce in the towns along the Queensland coast, inspired by notions Creswellian if not directly encouraged by the man, called on Andrew Fisher, then a member of Cabinet, and Senator Dawson to save them from daring enemy commanders. What, he was asked, could be done?  

Labour's initiative caught Creswell momentarily off balance. Yet as he discussed the efficacy of using three destroyers for the defence of Melbourne, new ideas came. Cabinet needed a scheme that was "Australian and national". Destroyer defence was the answer. These vessels, locally manned, maintained, and controlled, could be allotted to each capital for radial port defence. Moreover they could be used at sea. Along the coasts they could patrol and flee to safety and give the warning when the enemy was at hand. And should parliament so desire, they need not always be localized. For organized as a flotilla attached to the Imperial Squadron they would be excellent for scouting, despatch work, and even tactical offensives. All this could grow from small beginnings. Creswell was not, however, clear about whether the vessels were to be borrowed, allotted under the Agreement, or purchased.  

The beginning Dawson approved. The problem was cost. With Watson's approval, he requested assistance from Whitehall. His intention was to ask whether the Admiralty would "construct on loan to the Commonwealth, three or four Torpedo-Boat Destroyers, the Commonwealth to pay interest on the cost, including a percentage for sinking fund over a period of five years, over a period of years". Not only was the wording obscure but Dawson had confused the terms of the Colonial Naval Defence Act, and the old and new Agreements. It was even more difficult to interpret Labour's intent from his elliptical telegram to the Colonial Office. The reply from the Admiralty, strategical and political, was not
therefore surprising: any form of torpedo boat was useless for port defence unless used at night and in great numbers; the Naval Agreement, tripartite in nature, could not be easily amended unless two of the parties agreed to increase their contributions. Unless some modification was contemplated, the Admiralty would rather have the Agreement as it stood. 68

Dawson was furious. Not only was he scorned by the parliamentary opposition for so meagre a scheme but he had to justify himself to his colleagues. The Admiralty was blamed. Yet the misunderstanding was largely his fault. He had neither grasped all the issues nor clarified his stand. Nor, it seems, had he discussed the issue with Robert Collins, the Secretary of the Department of Defence.

Thus it was that although parliamentary navalists met naval expert, the union was unfruitful. Both were too confused. If Dawson and his colleagues had been in office longer, had more funds at their disposal, more experience in the administration of defence, and if Creswell had a lucid naval programme, had been the expert the navalists expected, the paternity of the Australian navy would not be debated by historians. But, then, it would not have been the Royal Australian Navy of 1914.

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