

SUBMISSION TO DEFENCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

DATED 18th September 2009, Palmerston North

By Dr Dave Baldwin

**“The aim of my submission, is to reinstate an
air defence force as part of New Zealand’s
overall defence force”**



INTRODUCTION:

MY NAME IS:DAVE BALDWIN, FLTLT, Military Number: W93561

I SERVED AS BMO at RNZAF BASE OHAKEA 1989-91.

**I AM A FULLY REGISTERED NZ MEDICAL PRACTITIONER
VOCATIONALLY TRAINED IN GENERAL PRACTICE WITH THE
ADDITIONAL SUBSPECIALITY OF “AVIATION MEDICINE”.**

**I AM PRESENTLY WORKING AS A GP AT BULLS MEDICAL
CENTRE AND AS AN AVIATION MEDICAL SPECIALIST AT THE
BULLS FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE (www.flyingdoctor.co.nz) –
PROVIDING AN AVIATION MEDICAL SERVICE TO
APPROXIMATELY 25% OF NZ’s CIVIL PILOTS.**

MY SUBMISSION IS DIVIDED INTO TWO PARTS:

PART 1: A UNIQUE VIEW OF NEW ZEALANDS AIR DEFENCE FORCE BY A BASE MEDICAL OFFICER:

As the sole Base Medical Officer at the RNZAF Base Ohakea from 1989 to 1991 I was in a unique position to observe what an asset the Air Defence Force was to our country.

I list my firsthand observations for you:

1. I observed, both on the ground and in the air, how 75 Squadron Sky Hawk Squadron had a world class strike capability in the following roles: air to air combat, maritime strike and ground attack under the direction of SAS Forward Air Controllers. This world class reputation was also clearly demonstrated to me during my personal observations at a number of exercises with the RAAF and ASEAN countries including the 1991 Operation Vanguard held at Kuantan Air Base, Malaysia.



2. The engineering support was world class and an enormous sense of achievement was created for all base personnel. It was demonstrated in the fact that they could maintain an ageing strike aircraft like the A-4 to a very high level of serviceability. Likewise I was present during Operation Kahu which involved converting the ageing A-4 Skyhawks avionics to that of upgraded F16 avionics – an amazing feat of Kiwi engineering ingenuity. The base engineering staff were very excited about the pending F16 arrivals and what the new technology meant to not only the RNZAF but also the New Zealand Aerospace Industry and its support networks.



3. The standard of pilot and engineering applicants in the RNZAF was considerable and those who achieved their required qualifications were very proud of them. Because of this, morale and “esprit de corps” was very high.



4. **75 Squadron, the actual operational A-4 squadron, has one of the most distinguished lists of battle honours of any Kiwi fighting force since it was formed in 1916. All of the base personnel cherished this history.**



5. The vast majority of the civilian Kiwi population held the air defence force in very high regard. This pride was well demonstrated by the huge crowds that turned out to any event involving the RNZAF fast jets – especially the Kiwi Red Sky hawk Aerobatic Teams tour of our country in 1990. To the average Kiwi the Sky Hawks were a symbol of our national pride that projected New Zealand's power as a sovereign nation and a deterrent to any would be threat.



6. I saw first hand how the air defence exercises with the Sky Hawks provided relationship building and the opening of diplomatic doors with our allied countries such as Australia, UK, Malaysia and Singapore. It didn't take long for me to realise that the bridge building done by our defence forces interacting with these countries was very important in developing long term diplomatic relationships as many of the Defence chiefs in Asia go on to become captains of industry and political leaders.



**Then Labour Government decided,
despite over 75% of Kiwis
disagreeing, to disband the Air
Combat Force – in my opinion it
was a very black day in the history
of our armed forces!**

Subsequently, I believe that I have been in a very unique position to observe the after effects of the Air Combat Force disbandment. This is because on one hand, as having served as the previous base medical officer at Ohakea, I can understand the effects of this decision on the troops. But on the other hand, being a civilian doctor operating the Bulls Medical Centre next door to Ohakea, I now can see the consequences of the decision on the civilian population.

They include:

1. The average kiwi still doesn't understand why the decision of disbanding the air combat force actually occurred in the first place. Many of them now referred to the **"Air Farce"**, rather than **"Air Force"** due to its lack of punch and its newly perceived role as merely the transport arm of the NZ Army. This denigration is very upsetting for any one who has been involved with the fine record of our RNZAF. Additionally, the situation is political dynamite because the previous government realised it couldn't sell the A-4's but, breaking them up would stir up huge backlash within the population that would be reflected in the political polls – so they have left mother nature do their dirty work by letting them mould away in the rain at Woodbourne Airbase.
2. I believe the pool of recruits wanting to join the RNZAF has been reduced since the F16 deal has fallen through. Prior to the disbandment I perceived a great excitement among young, up and coming engineers and aviators at the chance of getting their hands on an F16 and really stretching their technical minds. Since then I have questioned many young aviators and many now believe that the RNZAF is seen as a less attractive option for a career.
3. The NZ aerospace industry and local support services were set to benefit by hundreds of millions of dollars if the F16 deal had gone ahead. Maintenance requirement and engineering challenges of the F16 deal could have seen the NZ Aerospace Industry flourish. Instead the Australian Aerospace Industry has risen to prominence because of

the its involvement in projects like the JSF Fighter Project. Highly trained Kiwis have left NZ to be part of this exciting industry.

4. Since the disbandment of the our Air Defence Force New Zealand has no significant ability to defend the country from outside attack. Don't believe what the political spin doctors tell you that "everything is okay",because most average kiwis know that New Zealand has become a source of humour and sarcasm from our Allies for having let ourselves get into this vulnerable position – the Aussies are even making TV adverts on the subject! Of even more concern New Zealand is unable to provide a rapid reaction force from the air to acts of piracy in our waters or high jacking incidents in our skies.

This is a national disgrace as one of the most basic necessities of good government is to be able to rapidly defend the country from perceived or real threat!

Quote from a famous historian: "History has taught us time and time again that in times of national crisis each country will always take care of its own first".



The British surrender at Singapore in WW2.

PART 2: NATIONALS PROMISE TO THE PEOPLE OF NEW ZEALAND.

I became involved with protest activities to retain the air defence force at the time the disgraceful decision to disband the air defence force was made. We received wonderful support from the National Opposition.

PUBLIC MEETING

BULLS TOWN HALL


High St, Bulls

WEDNESDAY


3 OCTOBER

7.30 pm


DO WE NEED AN AIRFORCE?



Hon Max Bradford MP
National Opposition Spokesperson
for Defence and Foreign Affairs




Simon Power
MP for Rangitikei



Owen Jennings MP
ACT Spokesperson for Defence

Within a few weeks the combat air wing is due to be disbanded which means the end of the A4 Skyhawks and Air Macchis. Many New Zealanders have expressed concern at this move and these concerns have been heightened by the recent terrorist attacks in America. The vast majority of New Zealanders want an air combat wing kept.

Therefore, Enterprise Bulls invite the public to come and share your views with leading Parliamentarians at the Bulls Town Hall next Wednesday, 3 October at 7.30pm



www.unforgetabull.co.nz

All inquiries to:

Carol Lewis Chairperson

ENTERPRISE BULLS

TEL 025 288 5531

At the time I wrote to all of the Opposition MPs for their views. I enclose what letters of support for retaining an Air Defence Force that I can still find – (unfortunately a number have been mislaid but I am sure they can be located in the files of previous national MPs).

All of the National MPs, including Mr Mapp the present Minister of Defence, agreed that disbanding the Air Defence Force was a very bad decision and that an Air Defence Force was very important part of the overall defence plan for New Zealand.

Based on this, I demand, that these National MP's who now hold the reins of power don't make excuses, stick to

**their word and reinstate an Air Defence Force as part of
the overall Defence Strategy of our country!**

Kind Regards

Dr Dave Baldwin

