
DONALD RUMSFELD,

US defence secretary, was born on July 9, 1932. He died of multiple myeloma on June 29, 2021, aged 88

As US defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld was known for his bons mots. “Stuff happens,” he quipped. Or, most famously: “There are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns — that is to say, we know there are some things we know we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns — the ones we don’t know we don’t know.”

On Rumsfeld’s watch stuff most definitely did happen, including the bloody, unwinnable wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. And he suffered such intense criticism after being tripped by “unknown unknowns” in Iraq that after six tumultuous years at the Pentagon, President George W Bush was finally compelled to dismiss him. By then Rumsfeld had become a deeply unpopular and largely discredited figure.

In the Times today (30th December 2021), reflecting on the obits published in 2021 was the memorable and so necessary reminder in that comment from Donald Rumsfeld: **“But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don’t know we don’t know.”**