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On 1 July a new era in the history of the Australian Army began with the fusion of Training Command and Land Command to create Forces Command. The raising of the new command represents a significant milestone in the implementation of the Adaptive Army initiative.

In his Order of the Day to mark this occasion the Chief of the Army Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie wrote:

Today I am happy to announce the raising of Forces Command. It is a key outcome of our work to ensure Army is postured to train and educate our people for the demands of contemporary and future conflict. It combines the strengths of the previous Land and Training Commands and, in turn, enables the implementation of the new Army Training Continuum. This provides for vastly improved unity of effort in our individual and collective training and will ensure our officers and soldiers remain at the forefront of the world’s best trained and prepared armies.

Throughout its history the Australian Army has undertaken reorganisations in order to respond to significant changes in the environment. Since the current era of persistent and complex operations began with the deployment of INTERFET in 1999 the system of Functional Commands established in 1973 has become obsolescent. The Adaptive Army initiative is designed to rectify the deficiencies in Army’s higher command and control arrangements and to enhance our capacity to absorb and disseminate lessons learned.

The raising of Forces Command is of fundamental importance to this process by removing arbitrary distinctions between individual and collective training and rationalising our force generation functions. But such organisational changes need to be complemented by the inculcation of an adaptive, innovative and agile culture within Army. To be able to capitalise on the revolutionary changes in new media and information technology the Army must commit to continuous modernisation and to fostering a culture of learning.

The Australian Army Journal and the Land Warfare Studies Centre aspires to assist in this process. In that spirit we are publishing a special edition devoted to the
theme of Adaptation and the Australian Army. This will be released as our summer 2009–10 edition.

We are also modernising our website to allow more exchange of ideas and feedback on our publications. This will be accompanied by wider dissemination of electronic links to articles of professional interest, especially those relevant to junior leaders preparing to deploy on operations. Members will receive notification of the availability of the new site in due course. Of course for all these mechanisms to be of benefit to the Adaptive Army it needs you to engage in the professional debate—to write your thoughts down and share them with the rest of the Army.

This edition features a number of articles that explore issues relevant to the Adaptive Army. In particular, Captain Benjamin Watson examines ways of enhancing mission command and devolution of control at the lower tactical level of operations, while Warrant Officer First Class Glynn Potter discusses the inculcation of a learning environment. We hope that other RSMs will emulate Warrant Officer Potter’s example and submit articles to the *Australian Army Journal*.

At the more strategic level Major General (Retd) Jim Molan and Lieutenant Colonel Brett Chaloner offer suggestions for the prosecution of the war in Afghanistan. The situation there is finely balanced as the United States ‘surges’ its ground force component. As this edition goes to print United States Marines have commenced a series of offensive operations in Helmand Province aimed at clearing and holding areas where the Taliban has been operating with a degree of impunity.

Continuing our focus on current operations, we also publish a review of the book *The Accidental Guerrilla*, written by the former Australian Army officer David Kilcullen. The review was written exclusively for the *Australian Army Journal* by the distinguished American soldier/scholar, Colonel Peter Mansoor. This book is essential reading for military and policy professionals seeking to understand the character of the current irregular wars in which we are engaged.

Indeed one of the tools that Kilcullen relied on in his analysis of modern insurgencies was anthropology. We commend to our readers the article by Colonel Roger Noble, which examines the potential benefits as well as pitfalls of applying the discipline of anthropology to military strategic planning.

We are pleased to commend the Winter 2009 edition of the *Australian Army Journal* to our readers and to invite your comments and contributions.

Finally, the *Australian Army Journal* wishes to pay tribute to the service to the nation of Edward Kenna, VC, who died on 8 July 2009 in Geelong. He was the last surviving Australian VC winner from the Second World War.

The *Australian Army Journal* also extends its sincere condolences to the family and loved ones of Private Benjamin Ranaudo, who died on active service on Saturday 18 July 2009.
THE ADAPTIVE OFFICER
THINK, COMMUNICATE AND INFLUENCE

COLONEL JOHN HUTCHESON

ABSTRACT
The majority of officers will be working in a multi dimensional and unpredictable operational environment on complex problems that require an integrated inter-agency and/or coalition solution. To assist in developing those solutions officers will need to be more cooperative, compromising and collaborative in order to shape the desired outcome. This desire requires the ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and influence others through persuasive argument. This article seeks to highlight how Army can develop officers who can think, communicate and influence other non Army people to implement the Adaptive Army initiative.

INTRODUCTION
In 2008, I read Jim Hammett’s interesting and thought provoking article in this journal on the decline of the Infantry Corps. It is fantastic that an officer is willing to argue in a logical and passionate way about things that really matter to him. However, for someone who has commanded both regular and reserve infantrymen and two operational task forces, it concerns me that the
argument is based on the apparent premise of ‘us and them’. Last time I attended a Corps Conference the Special Forces fraternity were part of the Infantry Corps. In Afghanistan, the Special Forces are involved in executing Deep Battle operations in order to shape the Close Battle, where combined arms teams protect the reconstruction and training effects of our task force. That has been the role of Special Forces since their inception. Regardless of this observation, it is great that this journal is creating a forum for debate by providing an opportunity for senior officers to be influenced by well written articles based on a subordinate’s critical analysis of an issue.

In hierarchical organisations such as the military, the ability for original thought can often be stifled by the many layers of bureaucracy and there are sometimes many hurdles a young officer needs to cross in order to get the ear of a senior officer. The recent Adaptive Army initiative seeks to overcome these layers to allow ideas to be debated, and potentially change organisational structures, processes and procedures. To be effective the initiative requires a culture of openness and candour that invites and fosters counter points of view. For the Chief of Army, the ongoing excellence of Army will require ‘constant re-evaluation of how the Army as a whole thinks and operates’. The limitation to achieving his intent will be the inability of some officers to mount persuasive arguments.

Today, the majority of officers will most likely be required to work in an environment that is multi-dimensional and unpredictable, requiring integrated inter-agency and coalition solutions to complex problems. This complexity requires the Adaptive Army Officer to be able to think, communicate and influence others through persuasive argument. Conversely the majority of interaction I have witnessed has been dominated by Army officers who seek to impose a pure military response to a complex problem. The result, not surprisingly, is a lack of commitment by other agencies to unify effort to support a holistic and resource effective solution. Quite simply, officers have alienated others by trying to control the agenda and have failed to provide balanced arguments in simple persuasive language. To counter the implicit failing suggested by my observation (based on experience as a Task Force Commander), officers need to be encouraged to be more cooperative, compromising, and convincing in order to influence the desired outcome. This desire is enabled by an ability to think critically, communicate, and work with non-Army people. The aim of this article is to highlight these three fundamental qualities that an Adaptive Army Officer will need to possess to achieve the Chief of Army’s intent.
THINK CRITICALLY

An officer’s ability to analyse complex operational and organisational problems critically in uncertain and constrained environments is essential to the successful implementation of a commander’s intent. Mission success is dependent on the staff being continuously involved in developing comprehensive solutions to support the execution of operational or campaign plans. The key part to this process is the initial framing of the problem to prevent restricting options. From my experience, the majority of people find it easy to frame a problem by focusing on what they know about the issue, based on past experiences. This action tends to limit exploration of peripheral considerations and restricts options from the outset. In most cases, these peripheral considerations are disregarded early in the process due to a lack of understanding of competing views of the same or similar event. This lack of appreciation is often shaped by hidden assumptions and innate bias and perceptions. It can often result in an inability to see competing and alternative views, and can arguably prevent the full assessment of the second and third level implications of a particular event.

To negate the impact of this lack of depth in analysis, the development of critical thinking is necessary to ensure officers have the skills to scope, identify and adequately evaluate alternatives. In most cases, their bias is shaped by preconceived ideas and a lack of awareness of the operating environment, culture, human behaviour, politics and other agencies. The result is a predisposition to argue along lines that confirm their belief systems to defend a preferred outcome, or try to relate to something similar that has occurred in their past; in effect what I would call the ‘template’ solution to likely activity. For example, in the Solomon Islands a number of my junior staff informed me that a ten-man section was required to protect two police on patrol. As young platoon commanders they had employed this method of protection when working with the United Nations in Timor Leste. I said, ‘but we are not in Timor Leste and this is not a UN operation’. The result was an increased effort to understand how the Participating Police Force (PPF) conducted operations, and what they required from the task force to support them. These discussions led to the establishment of a combined operations room that was managed by the PPF, with my staff officers providing advice as required. Being exposed to other agencies exposes those officers to alternatives and different ways to think critically about an issue.
The tendency for staff to over-simplify very complex issues related to human behaviour is symptomatic of a gap in preparing our people to perform operational staff functions. The interesting thing about human behaviour is that it is far from rational and therefore will always keep you guessing. To counter the influence that value judgments, bias and previous experiences have on a solution requires the inclusion of critical thinking tools in the officer training continuum, such as mind mapping. I have found that most officers can identify the problem and evaluate the implications, but find it difficult to determine what the connections are with other factors. By exposing them to thinking tools that assist in framing the problem those connections will be evident from the start, and should allow them to develop comprehensive and holistic solutions. The only caution I have is that staff need to remember that they are ‘tools’, whose function is to assist in understanding all the issues related to a complex operational and/or organisational problem, not the plan. Equally some complex problems cannot be solved, they can only be improved on, and therefore require constant redefinition to keep the plan on track.

COMMUNICATE

Once the problem has been defined, connections understood and implications determined, the key is how to communicate this outcome to others. This effort requires officers to be competent in expressing their thoughts verbally and in the written word. I have found that the majority of officers can verbalise their ideas, but have great difficulty in expressing those same ideas on paper. My concern with the standard of written work within Army is based on my experiences in Army Headquarters, operational commands, and my time as a member of the directing staff at the Australian Command and Staff College. I believe that this deficiency is due to insufficient time to practice the art of writing, lack of mentoring by senior officers, and little desire to improve by some officers. The impact of these three observations is that Army does not have an environment that encourages people to compose good prose or to improve this important skill. In most cases, the result is prose that often requires further translation and is susceptible to misinterpretation. In Timor Leste, I often received poorly drafted minutes and operational orders due to a belief that brevity and the use of ‘big’ words made the headquarters appear smarter than the task groups. The consequence was that my New Zealand Deputy Commander had to make a considerable effort to ensure there was no ambiguity in the staff work.
The use of simple and concise language is the only way to overcome this difficulty. I have always believed that if someone can express their ideas in simple language, then they actually understand what they are writing about. Army can do much more in this area by returning to a system that constantly tests peoples’ skills, and supports this action with parallel writing programs. I remain convinced that the poor written work presented by officers is a direct result of a lack of focus on the ‘3Rs’ in Australia’s secondary school system. This inadequate preparation in foundation skills needs to be acknowledged and addressed in Army’s basic skills development program to ensure the Adaptive Army initiative is successful.

Conversely, the ability of officers to verbally communicate their thoughts is very good. The basic principles of listening to people, remembering people’s names, focusing messages on target audiences, and confidence in public speaking have always been evident in my staff. These actions seek to build trust and limit ambiguity by developing a relationship with others that will be important if they are seeking to influence those same people. The one area, however, that does need work is how to rate the success of that communication. I believe that this objective can only be achieved if you know your own and others’ feelings and emotions. This knowledge allows you to determine acceptance or disagreement by observing people’s body language and subsequent actions. In simple terms, are these people willing participants, or do they remain unconvinced that your ideas are going to work?

Comprehending human nature is not intuitive, and as the concept of emotional intelligence identifies, the skills of understanding yourself and others (also called social intelligence) will be a key factor to successful social interactions. Therefore, more work needs to be done on the human dimension of the Adaptive Army initiative to develop those personal skills that allow officers to influence others as part of a coalition or inter-agency task force in a foreign country.

INFLUENCE

The ability to apply critical thinking competencies and to build on officers’ communication skills is one aspect of being able to influence other people’s actions. The other essential skill is the ability to build trust and maintain harmony when working with other Services, agencies, international organisations and indigenous people in the theatre of operations. One of the major hurdles to developing and implementing solutions to individual or multiple events is the inability for some officers to compromise and collaborate with non-Army people. There seems to be a motivation in most Army officers to want to (or at least be seen to) take charge. This assessment is based on my observation of the actions of my staff in Timor Leste and the Solomon Islands. In some cases it seemed that Army officers found it difficult to confront their own biases about the other Services, public service, agencies and
the United Nations. Since these officers did not take time to understand these
groups and therefore appreciate how to shape their audience, they were never able
to influence them. I believe that the key to countering resistance is to get others to
support your ideas through compromise, persuasion and collaboration.

These three qualities are essential if officers are to overcome the inherent tension
created when there is an overlap in agency responsibilities in a theatre. In most
cases these agencies appear, on the surface, to be supportive of the plan but will still
protect their interests. Therefore, officers must be able to understand the rationale
and motivation of those agencies before trying to implement any coordinated
action. In Timor Leste there was a significant overlap in the responsibility for
security between my forces, UN police, and
the indigenous security forces. I found that
while my staff were action driven, the other
two players were process driven (in particular
the United Nations), therefore there was a
tendency for staff to often disagree over the
real issue and required response. The way to
overcome these tensions in my view is not to
seek to control, but rather to cooperate and
synchronise the various plans to achieve unity
of effort. The tension was evident when the
three organisations had to respond to riots after the announcement of the Gusmao
Government in August 2007. The initial plan involved a significant amount of
duplication of effort, and lacked a common understanding of what was happening.
In the end, staff had to compromise in certain areas in order to convince the other
players about what was important to my mission. The outcome was a strong
commitment to the creation of a joint operations and information centre to coor-
dinate future responses.

The issue, of course, is that not everyone can compromise or collaborate with
other people. Either way, I think the power of a good liaison officer is not to be
underestimated in facilitating inter-agency and coalition operations. Liaison officers
are the glue to connecting the different agencies and providing timely information
to decision-makers. This fact means that there is a need to ensure that high calibre
officers are placed in liaison positions. The officers who can really influence take the
time to comprehend other agencies and thrive on personal interaction. In Timor
Leste I had two outstanding liaison officers who helped to solve the many problems
the task force faced in working with the United Nations. These officers appreci-
ated that success was founded on the collective will of individuals to belong to the
security team, and a desire to see the team succeed. Typically, they were willing to
listen to others’ point of view, kept any disagreements behind closed doors, and
displayed great patience when dealing with arrogant people and misinterpreted direction. In some instances these officers implemented team decisions even if they disagreed with them. Their ability to influence was founded on their personal qualities of compromise, collaboration and persuasion.

CONCLUSION

The operational experience of many Army officers is growing and they are continually challenging how things are done, but to develop officers who can think critically and communicate with and influence others requires an environment that encourages candour and conflicting views. This environment should seek to encourage writing, the appreciation of human nature, and a passion for learning. One way to achieve this desire is to introduce critical thinking methods and philosophy into the training continuum, and encourage senior officers to assess the written work of their subordinates regularly. Another technique may be to include assessment criteria into annual reporting on a person’s ability to influence (separate from their leadership qualities). I doubt, however, that these ideas will really be effective unless officers want to improve their ability to think, communicate and influence; while senior officers must display a willingness to encourage and foster these abilities. This change translates into a desire to constantly search for excellence, like a music agent constantly in search of the next ‘hit’. The officer who wakes each morning wanting to add value to Army in everything it does will make it a truly Adaptive Army.

This article has sought to contribute to the debate on what abilities are required of an Adaptive Army officer by highlighting three key qualities that I believe are essential to support effective collaboration in an inter-agency context. These observations, in most cases, reinforce some of the qualities espoused by many leadership publications, and how the Army used to train its officer corps. The question is: how can these qualities be developed in young officers? This question is an issue for future consideration; however, I proffer some preliminary thoughts. First, a review of the officer training continuum seems important to ensure that from day one these qualities are developed, or more importantly that those officers who lack them are identified for remedial training. Second, establish a virtual development program that is easy to use and seeks to encourage, not force, officers to develop these skills. Third, senior officers must become less tolerant of what they accept in

Liaison officers are the glue to connecting the different agencies and providing timely information to decision-makers.
staff work, while providing their subordinates time and opportunity to develop the required skills. This action includes encouraging them to develop their ideas and write those thoughts for submission to journals in order to enhance the quality of the debate.

In summary, the power to influence is the key to success in the challenges Army officers are likely to face in the future. This capacity is enabled by the ability to think critically, build trust and communicate. The bumper sticker for the Adaptive Army officer in the contemporary operational environment must therefore be ‘think, communicate, influence’. Jim Hammett’s article influenced the debate on the employment of Infantry and Special Forces in Afghanistan by making officers think about what he wrote, and take a position. That is what the Adaptive Army officer does in the current debate.

ENDNOTES

1 Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, Speech to Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 27 August 2007.

THE AUTHOR

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CURRENT OPERATIONS

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH IN AFGHANISTAN?*

MAJOR GENERAL JIM MOLAN

ABSTRACT

The fight against the Taliban in Afghanistan has lasted for almost eight years now—longer than even the Second World War. The author argues that in this time, progress has been made, but that it has been made against a tide that now threatens to wash away the modest gains so bitterly made. Australian forces have been making gains in their sector, but with the Dutch contingent expected to leave sooner rather than later, the author insists that only a significantly increased Australian presence will help maintain the momentum towards success now slowly building. A surge now will give local Afghan forces the necessary breathing space within which they can be trained. If this training is conducted intelligently and thoroughly, Afghan forces may reach a standard during this time such that Australian leaders could then seriously consider handing over responsibility for security. Ultimately, this could mean success, and a real chance to ‘bring the diggers back home’.

* This article has been adapted from an address to the United Services Institute of the ACT on 20 May 2009
The Iraq experience will have a significant impact on the future campaign in Afghanistan. The hard-won knowledge and experience gained in Iraq will be a critical factor in Afghanistan and there are several lessons that could be—and should be—successfully transferred from one campaign to the other.

The first lesson from Iraq centres on unity of effort—an essential element for success in any counterinsurgency operation. Unity of effort often results from a major partner in a coalition simply taking control. The United States dominated the Iraq campaign because it had its own strategy, had by far the most troops, provided most of the financing, did most of the fighting and commanded the war through its own generals.¹ In Afghanistan, unity of effort has yet to be established, although the United States now dictates the strategy, populates the highest command positions, is paying most of the bills and will soon dominate the fighting as its troop numbers increase. Numbers of troops will only become decisive when there is unity of effort, and this is yet to occur in Afghanistan.

The second campaign lesson from Iraq is that success will never come through military means alone. The presence of an appropriately sized security force is necessary, however, before other counterinsurgency tools—such as governance, economic reconstruction, and rule of law—can be applied effectively.

The third lesson concerns the focus of military force. Military force creates the necessary security for the full range of counterinsurgency tools to be utilised. Yet, in applying this military force, the focus must remain firmly on protection of the population rather than on the enemy. This is not a static or defensive attitude and it involves aggressive operations, particularly against leadership targets. This focus was key to the success of the Iraq ‘surge’; when more US troops were inserted, the Iraqi forces increased in effectiveness, and US Special Forces had a decisive impact on al-Qaeda.²

The fourth lesson from Iraq is the US demonstration that it can sustain military operations for a long period despite casualties. No insurgent or terrorist can ever assume that the United States is a ‘pushover’, and this remains an enormous strategic advantage in the campaign in Afghanistan. As a result, coalition forces entered the Afghanistan campaign in a far better condition than when they embarked on counterinsurgency in Iraq.³

In many ways, Afghanistan presents a far more challenging scenario than Iraq. These challenges include the presence of Pakistan, which provides the Taliban with external sanctuaries and support; the complexities of the local tribal networks; a very weak and corrupt federal system; a weaker conventional military culture to nurture than in Iraq; and the lack of an easily exploited resource such as oil. In Afghanistan there is a complete absence of a middle class that understands and seeks the advantages of peace and stability—a key factor in the success of the surge in Iraq. Afghanistan harbours a different enemy with different motivations and tactics and
How much is enough in Afghanistan

a different relationship with the local population. The campaign is waged by a truly disparate coalition force that is hamstrung by national agendas—a far cry from the unity of the essentially US-dominated coalition in Iraq.

For years there has been a consistent call from various commanders and commentators for the commitment of more troops to Afghanistan. In 2008, the ISAF/NATO commander (a US Army officer) stated that he needed another 34,000 troops. President Bush gave him an additional 6000 troops prior to the end of 2008 and President Obama is in the process of providing another 21,000 by the end of 2009.

The ability to accurately determine the level of security forces sufficient to deal with the type of counterinsurgencies occurring in many parts of the world, including Iraq and Afghanistan, is critical. This applies equally whether assessing the overall contribution across a particular theatre such as Afghanistan, or the contribution of a minor coalition member in an area of responsibility such as a province. Such an assessment is often predicated on the consideration of ‘troop density ratios’.

The importance of accurately quantifying the required number of security forces is linked to both the political sensitivity and the cost of providing security forces initially, and predominantly army troops. Initial deployments are often later proven to be grossly inadequate, and this inadequacy usually takes some time to be acknowledged by the contributing nation(s). This initial period is crucial as a war can be lost or the suffering of all parties significantly extended because of the time it takes to recover from a poor start.

Troop density is expressed as a ratio of security forces (including the host nation’s military and police forces as well as foreign counterinsurgents) to inhabitants. This reflects the hard learned and frequently relearned principle that a counterinsurgency strategy, of which security forces are a key part, must be focused on the population of a country rather than narrowly on defeating the insurgents themselves.

As recently as April 2009, the issue of troop density ratios was raised again at a hearing of the US Congress House Armed Services Committee by General David Petraeus, the highly experienced US commander who controls both the Iraq and the Afghanistan wars. Petraeus told the committee that he still supported the research-derived troop density ratio he had insisted on including in US counterinsurgency doctrine in 2007. According to this doctrine, most troop density ratios in successful counterinsurgencies fall within a range of 20 to 25 counterinsurgents for every 1000 residents. Twenty counterinsurgents per 1000 residents is often considered the minimum troop density required for effective counterinsurgency operations.
While any such ratio is always surrounded by a phalanx of assumptions, Petraeus obviously believes that some lessons in numbers from Iraq are relevant to Afghanistan. He told the committee that, at the start of the counterinsurgency in Iraq in 2003, the troop density ratio was 6:1000 and it moved very little until the Iraqi Security Forces became effective during the surge in 2007. According to Petraeus, the current troop density ratio in Iraq is an astounding 28:1000, with the implication that this is among the reasons for recent signs of success in that campaign. The current ratio in Iraq seems to have been derived from a total of 618,000 members of the Iraqi Security Forces plus about 140,000 foreign troops operating in Iraq today—a number considered impossible in the first few years of the war.

General Petraeus raised the issue of the troop density ratio in the context of an inquiry into President Obama’s increase of 21,000 US troops in the Afghanistan theatre, supported by the President’s new strategy. By way of comparison, the committee was then told that the troop density ratio in Afghanistan in early 2009 was only 7:1000 and that, by the end of 2009, when most of the US reinforcements will be in Afghanistan, the ratio will rise to a mere 9:1000. This means that, across Afghanistan, on the basis of these ratios, there is less than one half the number of effective troops assessed in the past as the minimum number necessary for success in counterinsurgency.

While calls for more troops in Afghanistan are not new, the question remains as always: how many is enough? NATO was unable to address this issue as it was never sufficiently unified in its desire to achieve a practical result in Afghanistan to seriously consider how many troops were necessary for victory. The war in Afghanistan is currently in the process of becoming a US war, and President Obama’s strategy is based on defeating al-Qaeda and its extremist allies—one element of which requires an adequate number of security forces.

At the end of 2009, when the current round of reinforcements is complete, there will be approximately 90,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan, with requested increases of another 10,000 US troops in 2010. The Afghan National Army is currently 80,000 strong with a target strength of 134,000 by the end of 2011, recently brought forward from 2013. Currently, only half of the Afghan army’s battalions have been assigned foreign mentors or trainers who actually fight with the Afghans. However, for those battalions that lack mentors and currently operate poorly as a result, the future is positive: almost all battalions should be mentored by the end of 2009.

most troop density ratios in successful counterinsurgencies fall within a range of 20 to 25 counterinsurgents for every 1000 residents.
The Afghan National Police is also 80,000 strong, with a target strength of 82,000. The police are generally considered to be far less effective than the army, and the number of foreign police attached as trainers is being increased, although not to the same extent as the army.

It is difficult to assess the level of effectiveness of the Afghan security forces. One guide to effectiveness is the time it has taken to produce effective local counter-insurgents in Iraq. After seven years of enormous effort and frequent failure, and more resources than Afghanistan is ever likely to see, only 10 per cent of Iraqi army combat battalions and only 6 per cent of police battalions are capable of independent counterinsurgent operations. Because, to some extent, Afghanistan presents more challenges than Iraq, the unavoidable conclusion is that it may take many years to form Afghan units that can take over from ISAF/NATO units. If the coalition does not learn from the Iraq experience, it may take even longer than it did in Iraq. Even if the lesson is learned perfectly, the time must be in the order of three to five years.

In Afghanistan, where the population is assessed as between 20 and 30 million, the troop density ratio may have relevance as a general guide to the number of counterinsurgents necessary to achieve some gains against the Taliban. Probably the only firm conclusion that can be drawn is that the number of effective troops in Afghanistan at present or in the foreseeable future is unlikely to be sufficient, and that decisive effects against the Taliban may not be possible across Afghanistan until the number of counterinsurgents is significantly increased.

While admittedly there are lies and statistics, these seem to be telling numbers. US commanders appear to recognise that, by the end of this year, when all the United States and a few European reinforcements are ready for operations in Afghanistan, the number of foreign troops that the West will have allocated to Afghanistan will be only one third to one half the minimum number required for success.

Much of this deficiency is driven by the fact that the United States remains short of troops given its commitment to Iraq, its other worldwide obligations, and the now growing demands of the Afghanistan campaign. Petraeus tacitly admitted this in the April 2009 committee hearings when he quoted the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mullens, as stating that, ‘in Iraq the US does what it must, but in Afghanistan it does what it can’. The logical conclusion is that, despite President Obama’s rhetoric of ‘disrupt, dismantle and defeat’, the coalition is still very much in a holding strategy in Afghanistan—a holding strategy relying on a relatively small number of troops.

... it may take many years to form Afghan units that can take over from ISAF/NATO units.
The crux of the problem is this: it is unlikely that significant numbers of foreign troops will be provided by anyone but the United States. It is also unlikely that the United States will be able to provide more than is currently forecast (another 10,000 in 2010) until some time in 2011 when the increase in the size of the US military begins to take effect and when US troops are withdrawn from Iraq.¹³

This underlines the crucial importance of raising the right number of Afghan troops and of training them to be effective. The Iraq experience indicates that the target of 134,000 is likely to be grossly inadequate, and will need to be at least doubled. To create effective Afghan security forces requires not only mentors within the Afghan units, but the partnering of new Afghan units with highly effective foreign units that can ease them into the battlefield and prevent them being easily defeated before they have gained experience and confidence. The number of foreign mentoring teams for Afghan battalions is currently being doubled, but the number of foreign units available as partners is not being increased proportionately.

For Australians, the pertinent question is: does the troop density ratio apply to the Australian commitment of troops in Oruzgan province? The Australian experience is of particular interest. The troop density ratio in Oruzgan is currently between 6 and 10:1000, depending on assessments of the competence of local Afghan troops. Yet the Australians appear to have some grounds for confidence—a confidence resulting from 18 months of operations—which appears to be having an effect on the Taliban, an effect described by some as ‘decisive’.

In Oruzgan, there are currently 1700 Dutch troops and there will soon be 1550 Australian troops. Thus, a total of 3250 highly effective troops will be available for counterinsurgency operations in this one province.¹⁴ Yet any examination of troop density would be wise to take a conservative view of the size of the population in Oruzgan and assume it to be 500,000 rather than the more common figure of 627,000.¹⁵ This former estimate produces a troop density ratio in Oruzgan of 7:1000. With the addition of the 1000-strong US aviation battalion moving into Tarin Kowt some time this year—which may or may not be dedicated entirely to Oruzgan province—the ratio improves from 7:1000 to 9:1000. Ostensibly, this is still one half of the bare minimum ideal troop density of 20:1000. With such an apparently deficient troop density, how successful can the counterinsurgents in Oruzgan be, given the problems that exist across Afghanistan?

It is difficult to say conclusively how well the counterinsurgents are performing currently in Oruzgan because official accounts are vague at best and tend to
Concentrate on success at the lowest tactical level (which has been undeniably impressive) and more public issues such as civilian deaths. The media is tightly controlled when visiting the province given the very real concerns for their physical security, and few journalists know what to look for or what questions to ask—even fewer still can interpret the answers.

A range of discussions with US, Dutch and Australian military personnel, diplomats and academics, all with recent experience in Afghanistan, suggests that the Dutch and Australian forces, along with their Afghan comrades, are doing well in Oruzgan. There is a very strong belief among observers that, even though the numbers in the province are less than ideal, they can still be positive over time because of the way the force is structured and the way it is used.

At the beginning of 2009, US metrics reportedly showed that Oruzgan was the only province in the south where enemy activity had actually decreased over the previous year. This fall was in the order of 25 per cent compared to Helmand, Kandahar and Zabul, where the figures had increased significantly.

This reduction in activity relative to other provinces is apparently not a result of the Taliban’s lack of interest in Oruzgan. The province has symbolic value as the birthplace of Taliban leader Mullah Omar, the home of many other leaders, and has long been a key sanctuary. The Taliban have ‘fought like mongrel dogs’ to maintain a dominant presence there and yet, it is claimed, they are currently well and truly on the back foot, reverting predominantly to remote methods of harassment (mainly improvised explosive devices), with their leadership located as far away as Quetta.

Through accident or design (or, apparently, a little of each), the ADF contribution is structured and works as an effective, unified force, combining successfully with the Dutch in the fight against the Taliban.

How, then, can the Oruzgan force be performing so effectively despite its less than ideal size? The answer evidently lies in synergies between the Dutch and Australian forces and within the Australian force.

The Australian special forces component is comparatively large and extremely capable. It concentrates on anti-leadership operations in the area where most of the population lives and where most of the Taliban activity occurs. In addition, the special forces conduct operations which assist the other components of the task force and the Afghan troops to do their job. The disruptive effect is reportedly ‘huge’.

The engineer component of the Oruzgan force is key to this success because it is ‘protected’. The engineers have their own armoured vehicles and combat element, apparently a unique capability in the south, which allow them to operate in insecure
areas and directly assist other combat elements. Over the last 18 months, the engineers have built combat outposts, patrol bases and forward operating bases in the heart of the Taliban area around Tarin Kowt. As a result, the Australian-mentored Afghan battalion has established a permanent presence that is proving very disruptive to the Taliban. By the end of 2009, unless military activity outside Oruzgan begins to have an impact on the province itself, one particularly positive view suggests that the Tarin Kowt area, out as far as Baluchi, could be virtually clear of all but individual Taliban fighters.

The key to Australian effectiveness lies in the composition of the task force. Resident within the force are the vital counterinsurgency abilities necessary to clear areas of Taliban using special forces, and to hold those areas with Australian-mentored Afghan troops supported by an Australian combat team. This will provide at least some protection and control of the population. The result is the creation of an environment in which governance and the economy can be built, at least in these areas.

Reports indicate that the Afghans are also playing their part. The Australians mentor the 2nd Battalion of the 4th Brigade, with the 1st Battalion mentored by the Dutch. A third manoeuvre battalion and two support battalions are soon to be formed, all apparently to be mentored by Australians who are reportedly set to take over almost the entire brigade in the next year or so. The Afghans are reputedly naturally courageous soldiers and, with good mentoring provided by the Australians, they are increasingly effective in the roles they currently fill. The Afghans appear to respect the Australian approach, particularly the determination to provide them safe bases from which to operate. They are regarded as part of the Australian force and have developed a solid rapport with Australian soldiers. For their part, the mentors ‘have worked wonders’.

Australian confidence within Oruzgan is based on observed results in the areas for which they are responsible. The Australian force is small compared to other forces in Afghanistan but seems to be proportional to the Australian area of responsibility and appears to be achieving results because it is being used aggressively and with unity of command—at least within its own organisation. The US command in Afghanistan has expressed its satisfaction and reportedly sees Oruzgan as a sound structure and a model for success. With the addition of the US aviation battalion, US commanders are confident that they will be able to leave the Australians to ‘get on with it’.

The British in Helmand province, which borders Oruzgan, face a different problem altogether. They have a much larger and more volatile area to control—an
area in which the Taliban have even fought conventionally from trenches akin to those of the Western Front in the First World War. The British have only a brigade of roughly 5000 troops in the province itself and a proportionately much smaller special forces element, responsible for perhaps ten times the Australian special forces’ area. Reports indicate that the British believe they too are making progress in setting up ‘development zones across the central Helmand belt where ordinary Afghans can get on with their lives unimpeded by the Taliban’ but admit that they are stretched and need more boots on the ground.\textsuperscript{22} Those boots are likely now to be US boots, mostly in southern Helmand.

Despite some success in Oruzgan, the Australian situation is complicated by the fact that the Dutch may leave, or at least draw down their commitment in the province. If this occurs, the ratio will move down from 7 or 9:1000 to about 4 to 5:1000 before the Afghan troops are capable of replacing the Dutch.\textsuperscript{23}

The Iraqi experience in training local troops indicates that the lack of coalition manoeuvre troops in Oruzgan will make it almost impossible to train the Afghan Army past the stage of very basic group tactics, especially as there are three manoeuvre battalions that require training. When the new Afghan forces enter the train/fight/train stage—that is, they are past their individual training and move to a real battlefield for short periods before they are returned for further group training—they must be cosseted by effective troops (referred to as ‘partnering’ in Iraq) to ensure that they do not fail.\textsuperscript{24}

While some Afghan Army units have obviously already entered this phase, the development of a true combat capability within these forces, based on developing indigenous combat leaders, rests with ensuring that they are not defeated in these initial nursery actions. If they take too many casualties at this early stage, Iraqi experience suggests that up to six months’ development within that group of soldiers may be lost.\textsuperscript{25}

So what does all this mean? The military component of Obama’s strategy in Afghanistan is based on an ability to disrupt, dismantle and defeat his opponents, and so establish some level of security. Other aspects of the strategy (diplomatic, governance, economic, information) depend on success in the security sphere before they can be applied. It would seem, however, that the current inadequate level of resources jeopardises the US’s ability to implement the Obama strategy—there are simply not enough boots on the ground.

This is not unusual. Resources are frequently insufficient in the early stages of a war, and the United States must remain in a holding operation until adequate resources are provided. These resources will inevitably come from the United States.
because Europe and other allies such as Australia appear unwilling to provide them, although the United States will probably only be able to supply 10,000 more troops in 2010. Indeed, given the lead time required to create new US forces and the timetable for the withdrawal from Iraq, the United States will probably be unable to provide anything approaching the number of troops required until 2011. The United States must ‘hang on’ in Afghanistan until it can generate sufficient troops. This is a precarious situation that needs to be seriously managed. It would be tragic if Australian forces performed brilliantly at the tactical level in their area of responsibility until the day the war was lost, as happened in Vietnam.

The shortfall in resources (that is, troops) ultimately may be filled by Afghans, albeit not in sufficient numbers in the short term. A minimum period of three to five years is required to produce troops that are even mildly effective, and the challenge for Afghanistan is that this effort must be matched by progress in development and governance—all this in a situation with less financial investment than in Iraq.

Fortunes can—and will—fluctuate in the period of a holding operation in Afghanistan, and the casualties will certainly mount. Pakistan might solve its own insurgency problem and this would be tremendously beneficial to Afghanistan; however, realistically, Pakistani failure is just as likely. The ability of Afghanistan to influence Pakistan or vice versa will be a major factor over the next three to five years. If the West is not prepared to commit more troops to Afghanistan, then Western countries may not be able to absorb the worst of a consequent backlash from Pakistani operations, or to capitalise on positive developments in Pakistan. If the position of Western forces across Afghanistan is precarious, as it was for so long in Iraq, then potentially they may fail to either manage the bad or capitalise on the good.

The longer the Taliban has the ascendancy in Afghanistan, the longer Western soldiers will be exposed to danger and the greater the risk of a weakening collective Western resolve. And there is much that might divert the West, from the global financial crisis to instability in many other parts of the world.

Yet, because Australia has decided not to commit a substantial number of troops today, does not mean the decision cannot be reversed tomorrow. If the Dutch leave Afghanistan in 2010, and there is no US brigade to replace them, Australia may face some very hard decisions. If the increased US troop presence is successful in the east and the south, what is the likely impact on Oruzgan? Will the displaced Taliban move into Oruzgan province because Australian forces cannot control the unpopulated areas? This may make Oruzgan even more dangerous just as Australian forces are trying to train new Afghan troops in group tactics in nursery fights without sufficient troops to protect them and to shape the battlefield for their success.

Australian success appears to be due to the superior quality of the Australian task force which, although comparatively small in size, is focused on a commensurately
small area. In addition, the Australian force seems ideally suited to the tactical conditions, consisting of a large special forces element, engineers capable of operating in insecure areas to assist the main tactical plan, very well mentored Afghan forces that are being used aggressively and partnered by both the special forces and other combat units, all under the direction of an Australian tactical commander who is permitted to use them offensively. Once new Afghan forces are raised, a US aviation battalion becomes operational, and as long as the partnering relationships can be maintained, the impact on the Taliban can only be greater.

The challenges that the Australians face in the future mirror those that the ISAF/NATO force as a whole will confront. The Australian effort will come to nought unless the ISAF/NATO effort is successful and, given the current troop density across Afghanistan, this success remains doubtful. Now that new US forces are flowing into Afghanistan and, in certain areas, troop density will be sufficient to successfully affect the Taliban, the Iraq experience indicates that the first consequence may be an increase in activity in areas previously of no interest to the Taliban. The Taliban may elect to return to Oruzgan, using the province in a different way, either as an alternative to other provinces where bases, infiltration routes and influence have been lost, or in an attempt to dislocate operations elsewhere.

It is critical that the ratio of effective counterinsurgent mentoring and partnering of the Afghan forces now being raised be maintained at the level that is currently delivering success in the Australian area of Oruzgan. The Afghan Army and police will probably need to increase in number many times over before signs of success appear across Afghanistan as a whole, as was the experience in Iraq. This means that the number of foreign troops will need to double, and to remain at that level for three to five years while the Afghan Army achieves a self-sustaining level of effectiveness. Despite success at its current troop level, as the Afghan Army increases in size in Oruzgan, Australia may have to commit more combat troops for both the critical partnering role and to influence areas that have previously been quiet.

The Australian effort in Oruzgan is vulnerable to external developments, both positive and negative. The Dutch forces may leave in 2010, or may at least surrender leadership in the province. An increased level of military activity in neighbouring provinces, especially in Helmand and in Kandahar, may change the dynamics of the Taliban use of the unpopulated areas of Oruzgan. The failure of the Pakistani Army to control the incumbent Taliban may have an effect across all of Afghanistan,
especially southern and eastern provinces such as Oruzgan. And there is always a chance that the situation in Iraq will deteriorate and the United States will be unable to withdraw troops for use in Afghanistan. Any of these developments will necessitate the provision of an increased number of effective non-US troops—troops that the Afghans simply may be unable to provide.

Alternatively, counter-Taliban activities in Pakistan may be successful and deprive Taliban forces of their bases and sanctuaries. The Dutch may not leave; more US forces may become available for use within Oruzgan. The impact of operations in bordering provinces may not affect Oruzgan, allowing Australian forces to remain effectively focused on the populated areas of the province. When success beckons, as it did in the Sons of Iraq movement in Sunni areas of Iraq, an adequate number of troops must be available to take advantage of an unforeseen opportunity which, once missed, may never recur.

Australia would appear to be in a good position to take over command in Oruzgan province if the Dutch decide to withdraw. There are many Australians currently working in the provincial headquarters, and Australia has a number of officers with recent senior experience in Afghanistan. The significant question remains as to Australia’s willingness and ability to provide and sustain a significant number of additional troops, should that be necessary. The application of troop density ratios indicates that up to 10,000 counterinsurgents ultimately may be required in Oruzgan if success, even to the Iraq level, is to be achieved.

Judgment informed by Iraq experience, the quality of Australian forces and a second-hand knowledge of the geography of Oruzgan indicates that, rather than the 10,000 suggested by the troop density ratio, it might be possible to manage the province and the development of the Afghan 4th Brigade with as few as 6000 foreign troops over three to five years, the period when the Afghan Army and police will require the greatest support. The larger figure of 10,000 would then come ultimately from the Afghan Army and police themselves, as happened in Iraq, and would take many more years.

To this judgment must be added the capability of the Australian military to provide even the bulk of these troops, if worse came to worst. Evidence suggests the probable nature of this requirement, but can Australia provide all or even part? If the Dutch withdraw and there are no volunteers to replace them, then Australia might be pushed to make a greater contribution. That contribution, given the many other commitments of the ADF, might be structured as follows:

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... Australia may have to commit more combat troops for both the critical partnering role and to influence areas that have previously been quiet.

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• An infantry battalion structure supplemented by specialists (logistics and fire support) of about 700 personnel with the ability to mentor and partner the entire Afghan 4th Brigade, which will ultimately comprise three manoeuvre battalions spread across Tarin Kowt and Deh Reywud as well as a headquarters, fire support and logistic support battalions.
• An increase in the currently deployed infantry/cavalry combat team (about 150 strong) to a battalion-sized unit of about 600 strong to provide security to the critical engineer task and a disruption capability across both the east and west of Oruzgan once the Dutch have gone and if they are not replaced.
• A proportionate increase in the engineers and other support elements so that they can support the new Afghan battalions in the way that they currently support the one Australian-mentored Afghan battalion.
• An assumption of responsibility for the (currently Dutch) headquarters that conducts all operations across Oruzgan and provides the support elements of attack helicopters, fighters, tanks, artillery, logistic units and civil military teams.
• Maintenance of the special operations task group at its current level.
• Utilisation of the US aviation battalion scheduled to be established in the province by the end of 2009.

Even this skeletal structure would strain the ADF if it is unable to withdraw from Timor Leste and other commitments. Such a deployment might increase the number of Australian personnel in Oruzgan province from its current 1550 to about 3500 and, with the US aviation battalion, the total number of foreign troops could rise to between 4000 and 4500. If such an increase is not possible in the event that the Dutch leave without being replaced, the Australian Government must explain why the Australian Army is so appallingly short of capability.

It would seem prudent to assume that, as a last resort, Australia might still have to provide the bulk of additional troops in Oruzgan for a period of three to five years, to either sustain or to build on its success thus far. If current Australian operations continue the march towards peaceful reconstruction in Oruzgan province, and even if the extra ‘boots on the ground’ turn out to be American, little will be lost in prudent Australian preparation in the current climate.
ENDNOTES

1 While General Petraeus was commander of operations in Iraq, he had the advantage of being the designer, the builder and the driver. Once past the early stage of his tenure, no one doubted that there was unity of command. Petraeus is now Commander, US Central Command, with control over operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

2 During the 2007 surge, US Special Forces were under the command of General Stan McChrystal, recently appointed commander in Afghanistan to replace General McKiernan. This suggests that such effective counterinsurgency technique as intelligence-led precision bombing may still be used, despite the negative publicity this technique attracts.

3 I always differentiate between the invasion of Iraq, which I do not try to defend, and the subsequent counter-insurgency, which I do defend. My view is that the only action that would have made the invasion morally worse would have been a precipitate withdrawal once the counterinsurgency and sectarian violence was in full swing.

4 Paddy Ashdown, the former leader of Britain’s Liberal Democrat Party and the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina between 2002 and 2006, was quoted by Hamish MacDonald in ‘Ashdown throws down the gauntlet’, The Sydney Morning Herald, 19–20 January 2008, as commenting that ‘we are putting into Afghanistan one twenty-fifth the number of troops and one fiftieth the amount of resources per head of pop that we put into Kosovo’.

5 Some reports have the request from the Afghanistan Commander (Commander ISAF/NATO, General McKiernan) at 30,000, but Commander Central Command (General Petraeus) has recently put the requested total at 34,000. While there is no sense that this is the total number of troops that the United States will commit to this war, there is a strong sense that this is the total number currently available. President Obama has stated clearly that there will be an ‘on-going process for re-evaluation’, and that he will consider additional requests for troops. Reported by the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy in the House Armed Services Committee hearing on ‘The New Strategy’, <http://cspan.org> 2 April 2009.

6 Ibid.


8 See also On Point II – Transition to the New Campaign, Combat Studies Institute Press, US Army Combined Arms Centre, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, p. 171.

9 The ratios were not explained. Witnesses at the hearings informed the committee that the CIA has questioned the current estimates of the Afghan population, which has generally been assumed to be 30 million, suggesting that it could be somewhere between 20 and 25 million. A ratio of 7:1000 for an Afghan population of even...
20 million implies a current effective force in Afghanistan of 140,000. This could be a combination of the 62,000 foreign troops, with the balance being either elements of the Afghan army and police assessed as effective, or an assumption about the inflow of troops currently in progress.

10 The 9:1000 figure was not explained but is probably the increase in foreign troops to 90,000, plus an increase in Afghan security forces over the same period.

11 Steven Lee Myers, 'Concerns Mount on Preparedness of Iraq's Forces', *The New York Times*, 8 May 2009. Myers quotes a Pentagon report. After seven years of enormous effort and great financial expenditure, only seventeen of 175 Iraqi Army combat battalions and only two of 34 police battalions can conduct independent operations. 'Independent operations' is the highest level of assessment—battalions are likely to have some effectiveness at lower levels.

12 Some indication of this is the presence in Iraq of fourteen of the then available fifty brigades that the US Army and Marines can field. The rule of thumb that was used when there were twenty brigades in Iraq (following the first 'surge' at the end of 2004) was that a total of twenty brigades deployed on operations was the maximum that the US military could sustain, and even this required an extension in deployment periods to 12 months in duration. When even more troops were required for the second 'surge' at the end of 2006, the deployment period was again raised—from 12 months to 15 months—with less time between deployments.

13 The assumption is always that the gains made in Iraq can be sustained. See Thomas Ricks, 'Understanding the Surge in Iraq and What's Ahead', Foreign Policy Research Institute, <http://www fpri org/enotes/200905 ricks understandingsurgeiraq.html>, May 2009.


15 The population of Oruzgan was listed as 627,000 in 2006 in Wikipedia. Assume that it is 500,000 with effective Dutch and Australian troops around 3200 in number. With the inclusion of a proposed US aviation battalion of no more than 1000 personnel, the troop density becomes (generously) 4200 within a population of 500,000.

16 Throughout the many conversations, there were only two dissenting voices. Neither denied that tactically the Australian forces, in particular, are dominating the Taliban they encounter, but both maintained (in the words of one well-informed journalist) that 'we are fighting the same clever fights in the same places against the same people, we kill a few of them, they kill a few of us and we both kill civilians'.

18 The Dutch currently look after the Deh Reywud area and western Oruzgan and are described as 'pretty effective', allowing the Australians to focus totally on the east of the province.

19 This is the Tarin Kowt-Chora-Chernatu triangle.

20 Other engineer units in the south apparently are located centrally and spend most of their time maintaining the roads to facilitate the critical movement of supplies, rather than more directly assisting local counterinsurgency operations.

21 Matt Brown, 'Interview with Brigadier John Caligari, the Australian National Commander in Afghanistan', AM, ABC Radio, Radio Program, 27 April 2009. Caligari said that the head of the international force was very pleased with the way the Australians were mentoring and hoped to see 'results' in two to three years. He added that Australians were considered the best at mentoring in Afghanistan, although others might regard them as too aggressive. He reinforced the Australian pattern of operation: to patrol and so establish a persistent presence, a method based on experience in Malaya, Borneo and Vietnam.


23 In Jonathan Pearlman, 'Faulkner wants limited Afghan role', The Sydney Morning Herald, 15 June 2009, it states that the Dutch Minister for Defence, in a conversation with his Australian counterpart, reportedly commented that: 'The Australians have clearly stated they do not want to take our role.' This is likely to be an accurate report. It is understandable that the Australian Government does not want to take a larger role in any conflict and such a statement at this stage serves to maintain pressure on the Dutch to continue their troop commitment in Oruzgan. In reality it still does not preclude a greater Australian participation in the future in Oruzgan if the Dutch do ultimately withdraw and the United States cannot provide troops.

24 The training of local troops in the midst of a war comprises individual or basic training, usually within protected bases, followed by several episodes of group combat training where the local troops are organised into groups of perhaps fifty, with foreign trainers present and often taking leadership positions. Local troops are initially trained in safe areas and then introduced to a simple battlefield (but against a real enemy) for combat experience (especially for leaders) and then returned to safe areas to confirm and progress the training. This last phase is referred to as 'train/fight/train'.

25 In Iraq, it was necessary to train units by taking them into combat early, but it was essential that they crawl or walk before they try to run. The technique employed was to pick a relatively soft target, to use other effective units to shape the battlefield by protecting the unit in training until it was set for its simple combat task, and then let the training unit be blooded. If the unit took too many casualties, then often its members would simply desert.
THE AUTHOR

Major General Andrew James ‘Jim’ Molan, AO, DSC, joined the Army in 1968 and retired in 2008. Major General Molan has served with a number of Infantry battalions, including 6RAR as Commanding Officer. He has lived in Indonesia for five years, first as the Army Attache and then as the Defence Attache during the fall of Suharto and the Interfet period, for which he was made an Officer of the Order of Australia. He has commanded both 1 Brigade and 1 Division, and was the commander of the Australian Defence College. Major General Molan deployed to Iraq in 2004 to serve for a year as Chief of Operations of the Coalition forces. For command and leadership in action he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross by the Australian Government and the Legion of Merit by the United States Government. His book Running the War in Iraq is a bestseller and is in its second printing. In July 2009, he was awarded ‘2009 Australian Thinker of the Year’.
THOUGHTS FOR AUSTRALIAN PLANNERS IN AFGHANISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Afghanistan is an increasingly complex environment set to test our traditional approaches to planning and problem solving. With an evolving commitment, an ambitious force development plan up to 2030 and competing demands, there is a need for planners from all services to consider more innovative and adaptive approaches to mission planning. This article offers a few thoughts based on the author’s experience in Afghanistan to aid in stimulating new approaches to both this and future operational thinking and planning.

With the release of the Defence White Paper 2009 in May, it is clear that in the short term, Afghanistan will be Australia’s primary operational focus. Additionally, in the long term, the ADF will be called upon to solve increasingly complex problem sets in support of Australia’s national security, economic and diplomatic interests. While this White Paper sets ambitious goals for 2030, in terms of the acquisition of air and maritime platforms, it is also clear that the ADF will need to find increasingly innovative means of meeting its directed objectives. Consequently, it is prudent that ADF planners at all levels re-focus their efforts on the most appropriate approach to planning and conducting meaningful operations in the various theatres, particularly Afghanistan. Standard operating
procedures and doctrine may provide little more than a framework around which to build a plan that truly meets the commander’s intent—as well as getting inside the adversaries’ decision cycle.

This article is a thought piece informed by the author’s own experiences, which include operational planning for kinetic targeting and strike in Afghanistan throughout 2006 as well as subsequent reflection. It considers the need for flexible and perhaps non-traditional approaches to the processes of operational and tactical level planners deployed in Afghanistan. Ultimately, this piece offers planners—and perhaps commanders—a few thoughts on different ways to approach planning and execution. It will not focus on Australian-based campaign planning issues to any great degree.

Afghanistan is a unique operating environment, with a coalition that brigades a plethora of loosely coordinated assets across the battlespace. Every part of this environment is constantly changing. However, the planner’s kitbag of tools—such as doctrine, experience, imagination, assets, and other partners’ assets—allow one to adapt and harness available resources in order to achieve successes in the spheres of import.

Afghanistan is a microcosm of warfare in the twenty-first century full-spectrum conflict. Increasingly defined as ‘Hybrid Warfare’ (or in official US lexicon, ‘Irregular Warfare’), this modern paradigm implies more than simply asymmetric and conventional conflict, and more than counterinsurgency and the ‘three-block war’. Afghanistan has become a petri dish of experimentation and development. It blends the new and the medieval—and that is just the adversaries’ approach to conflict. In coalition terms, Afghanistan has been exposed to several distinct styles of operations since October 2001. Commencing with a special operations and air support-enabled rout of the Taliban by a loose conglomeration of militias, it has been followed by elements of classic counter-insurgency; pockets of conventional and combined-arms operations executed in linear fashion, as well as through traditional peace support and humanitarian assistance operations. At any point in time, the nature of conflict varies between provinces and regional commands. Operation ENDURING FREEDOM is the US counter-terrorism operation that continues alongside the NATO/ISAF stabilisation and counterinsurgency operation. With more than twenty nations comprising ISAF, each maintains a multitude of unaligned intents and caveats. As a result, the likelihood of true unity of effort remains low and the complexity of Afghanistan’s operating environment is further multiplied.

Afghanistan is a microcosm of warfare in the twenty-first century full-spectrum conflict.
Thoughts for Australian Planners in Afghanistan

Australia’s operational experience in Oruzgan province has seen its own complexity, with a blend of special operations, close combat, reconstruction and indigenous mentoring undertaken by not less than four partner nations in the same battlespace. This ensures that the planning principles and assumptions contained within Adaptive Campaigning are particularly relevant. However, given that this operational concept has not yet achieved deep absorption within Army, the following are some nested thoughts for consideration and application.

Provocatively, almost four years after Australia’s military re-engagement in Afghanistan, a clear and coherent campaign plan for Australian operations would only just seem to be emerging; a process no doubt complicated by the most recent troop increases and updated objectives. At task force and task group level, there have been ‘campaign’ or operational plans (OPLAN) created in an attempt to provide purpose, order and meaning to tactical operations. Anecdotally, most of these plans have not survived the rotation of deployed contingents, although once again there is some evidence that this may be changing. In the past, this has come from the lack of an overarching plan and the natural impact of commander’s individual personalities. Tactical level planners need to be cognisant of this during their tours. Their bias should be toward generating effects and sequencing operations that support enduring military objectives, which naturally transcend the rotation of contingents.

Another danger for deployed planners is the generation of operational plans and documents that read well, but are more difficult to action and are perhaps unrealistic in their objectives. It is unrealistic for the ADF to suggest that it might bring peace to Oruzgan in six months through the conduct of isolated operations with domino-like effects. In 2006, a coalition element generated a ‘campaign plan’ with a mission statement that clearly advocated indigenous capacity-building on a grand scale. This was supported by appropriate specified tasks. However, the element did little to achieve the mission, and instead spent most of their tour attempting to target leadership (an unstated task) using armed uninhabited aerial vehicles (without ground-based observation), and through launching unilateral kill/capture missions. In addition, their intelligence was usually dubious, single-source material; their plans hasty and flawed; and their support elements dispersed and confused by the contradiction between campaign plan and activity. The coalition element failed to achieve their stated and executed mission. Accordingly, they failed to meet their higher commander’s intent or contribute to the success of the theatre campaign plan. As much as one
might suggest this could not happen to Australians, this example reinforces the importance of creating a realistic overarching plan at each level and actioning it.

The Military Appreciation Process (MAP), when used effectively, remains one of the most meaningful ways of avoiding such pitfalls. It is the most applicable foundation for a planning methodology we have. However, it must be tailored for the Afghan operating environment and must not assume a prescribed ‘battle rhythm’ can be maintained with uniform windows for planning. Planners should be prepared to use a combination of the individual (IMAP) and the joint (JMAP) approach in modified format. The tempo experienced by a small task group headquarters allows little opportunity for traditional ‘JMAPing’. However, tempo is no excuse for haphazard planning. Planners must be able to commence a mission analysis at the individual level or in a small group, concurrent to identified ‘S’ codes and nodal liaison officers, hunting and gathering resources and assets. A compressed Course of Action (CoA) analysis and back-brief to the commander allows for rapid CoA development.

**Development using a joint working group inclusive of coalition contributors.** This can bring the plan to an actionable state in only a few hours following streamlined analysis. If a few hours are not available, then variations on existing feasibility assessments can provide some structure to the use of intuition, which at times is more appropriate than detailed MAP. In all cases practitioners should avoid templated solutions. To follow the last operational experience—or someone else’s experience—and doctrine alone, is to do so at one’s peril. However, at the same time, all of these offer something to a new plan, which must be unique and borne of a thorough appreciation.

**Fusion.** If planners cannot operationalise the intelligence cycle through realistic and robust fusion of information, targeting and planning, they have little chance of out-maneuvering the adversary physically or temporally. Fusion and targeting relies on an intelligence cell that is agile in its process, operates beyond the traditional intelligence cycle and has organic inter-agency representation. The process requires that planners work in lockstep with both analysts and those responsible for choosing targets. Despite the inference, this process is not just about enabling offensive or kinetic operations—it can be universally applied. While adaptation of this nature has occurred within Australian task groups, it is not yet enshrined in education and training, and is subject to interpretation. A mixed blessing of our small size is the need to multitask and overlay responsibilities, which lends itself to the process of fusion. However,
planners need to actively shape and focus the process every day, linking it back to lines of operations in the OPLAN. With so much information available, there is a constant danger of the intelligence staff becoming a ‘mile wide and inch deep’ in their analysis, resulting in them becoming a news and interpretation source rather than an operational support tool. However, with this in mind, information and fusion will only get a staff so far.

Harvest assets beyond the immediate and the obvious. Australians are famous for being ‘good blokes’ and good fighters. It is amazing what an impromptu trip down to the A-10 Squadron or the French compound for a ‘grip and grin’, a brew and an offer of some good jobs can do for the task group. Despite national caveats, most coalition partners—particularly US units—are enthusiastic about supporting a dynamic task with clear and tangible outcomes. The Special Operations Task Group’s first successful effort to clear a valley of Taliban in 2006 was achieved over a ten-day period, using assets and in excess of 500 personnel from no less than seven nations. These resources were corralled (not without frustrations) through the efforts of the operations planners, the intelligence staff and the network of liaison officers. By visiting every coalition unit they could access, staff were able to outline the plan and successfully arrange specific inputs. In its smallest form, one partner provided one sortie of one aircraft, for one photographic pass, on one suspect location in order to improve the intelligence picture prior to execution. This sortie was well worth the effort. When meshed with the contributions of other coalition partners, these resources provided the Australian task elements with the best chance of success.

Rebuilding Afghanistan through security sector reform, economic growth and social prosperity are three of the key objectives of both NATO and UN strategies. These strategies rely heavily on international donors and sponsorship. Australian task groups have in the past used local knowledge and networks to seek out resources from USAID and non-government organisations in order to enhance the effects of their operations. While often stockpiled and warehoused, the distribution of aid has proven problematic from a logistics and security perspective. An offer from the ADF to distribute aid as part of its patrolling and local confidence building operations in Oruzgan province has provided a cost neutral option, and is encouraged in support of future operations. Just like harvesting military assets, brigading other less obvious resources is also a force multiplier. Whether the focus is man hunting, humanitarian assistance or construction, Australian activities remain the enabler for every other agency and department that has resources to impart on the province regardless of nationality. They are an enduring resource base that can have significant impact on priority lines of operations and should be exploited.

Having got this far, planners must avoid adopting a scattergun approach to operations. This is a statement of the obvious. However, similar situations have developed...
amongst Australian task groups on a limited scale, and across coalition elements on a broader and more prolific scale. Planners must maximise and reinforce continuity and collaboration between Australian and coalition elements in the same battlespace. Colonel H R McMaster’s simple philosophy of taking a town (or a Province) one piece at a time through a ‘Clear, Hold, Build’\textsuperscript{3} approach is not new and has significant merit for Oruzgan. By way of simple example, there is little sense in conducting intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations in Western Oruzgan if all reconstruction and Afghan National Army-mentored operations are occurring in the north and east of the province. This is an issue that should not be affected by national caveats, and with a little work it is best achieved at the tactical level.

In kind, planners need to maximise continuity between rotations. The operations of Australian task forces and task groups—not to mention the operations of most coalition partners—harbour numerous examples of initiatives and objectives that were not sustained and reinforced between elements and across their rotation cycles. Operating anywhere in Afghanistan is like the proverbial act of putting one’s hand into a bucket of water. You can dip it in, splash it around, have any number of immediate effects, but as soon as you remove your hand, the water will retain no memory of you ever having been there. In an attempt to counter this phenomenon, Australian planners must attempt to nest plans and actions to make the transition between rotations seamless and subordinate to a homogenous national and international plan.

Finally, never forget the Taliban have proven to be more agile at exploiting open source media and conducting information operations than the coalition. On 28 April 2008, following the ADF’s announcement of Commando NCO, Lance Corporal Jason Marks’ death in Afghanistan, \textit{The Sydney Morning Herald} suggested Prime Minister Rudd was proving to be a credible wartime leader by not demonstrating shock or doubt as the Taliban might have hoped.\textsuperscript{4} Suggestion or implication or reinforcement of what the Taliban’s hopes might be illustrates their global reach and span of influence. While the combat action was tactical in nature, the Taliban may study the effect on the Australian people and its psyche through the open source media in order to divine higher order effects. The Taliban may also study the proliferation of tactical information related to ongoing operations in the media. Using an adaptation cycle that appears at times to be more responsive than Western cycles, the adversary will attempt to use this information against us. Hence, it is the purview of planners to ensure their planning and decision cycle is as responsive as possible and cognisant of the Taliban’s capacity to exploit any and all information available.

\begin{quote}
Planners must maximise and reinforce continuity and collaboration between Australian and coalition elements in the same battlespace.
\end{quote}
This article may appear simplistic in nature. It is certainly not an intellectual tome. However, international military forces will almost always be on the back foot. It does not mean the Taliban and other protagonists cannot be outsmarted versus outlasted. Naturally, Australia is not going to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. Without a significant change in policy, Australia will not bring peace to Oruzgan unless it chooses to take responsibility for the province. However, the Australian elements deployed in Afghanistan are capable of greater efficiencies and innovations in their approaches to planning and operations. It is a particularly dynamic point in time as concepts such as ‘war amongst the people’ and ‘complex adaptive systems’ are gathering momentum and starting to influence the concepts for capability building and decision-making in the near future. In the non-linear battlespace of Afghanistan, where influence is more important than systems overmatch, Australian planners are encouraged to depart from traditional methods and use them rather as the foundation for more adaptive processes.

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ENDNOTES


THE AUTHOR

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A PROACTIVE MENTAL APPROACH

LESSONS OF A CONTEMPORARY COMBAT TEAM COMMANDER

MAJOR J M GREENSHIELDS

ABSTRACT

In this article the author contends, from his own experience as a combat team commander, that commanders must first undertake significant self-preparation before preparing for command. This, coupled with a deep understanding of the combat team and the stressors that confront them, will enable commanders to exercise their command with maximum effectiveness.
INTRODUCTION

The good general is simply a good company commander in his post-graduate course.

– S LA Marshall

One of the most rewarding aspects of command is seeing the groundwork you have laid come to completion. I saw this most vividly on the evening of 24 April 2007 when, due to sustaining an injury, I was unable to deploy with my troops as part of a recovery mission to extract a destroyed vehicle. I was forced to sit and monitor the activity from the confines of the Operations Room. During the planning, and then listening to the situation unfold, there was an expectation that contact was imminent. Then it occurred. ‘Contact small arms fire, wait out!’ As the situation developed, nervous energy brewed in my stomach. I realised what this was—it was pride. My soldiers were out there doing their part in the mission and reacting exactly as their training had prepared them. Commanders were commanding and making decisions and soldiers were taking action when it counted most, under fire.

The aim of this article is to provide a discussion of contemporary combat team command on operations. I will examine leadership aspects and the role of the combat team commander to contend that a commander must first prepare themselves for command if they are to reach the full potential in the preparation of their team. Experiences gained during deployment as the combat team commander within the Overwatch Battle Group (West) – Two (OBG(W)-2) force elements in Al Muthana and Dhi Qhar provinces of southern Iraq will be the basis of the discussion that follows.

Sub-unit command in the Australian Army is the culmination of command at the coal face. The compression of strategic, operational and tactical levels of military operations means battle group commanders are increasingly involved in looking outside the organisation because of the requirement to deal with strategic issues. Current operations have demonstrated a heavier emphasis on manoeuvre at the combat team level and below to achieve a battle group directed and coordinated series of objectives. Given these trends and S LA Marshall’s comments above, it is surprising that not much has been written about experiences in command at the sub-unit level. With the aim of engendering discussion, the following ideas originate from my experience as a combat team commander.

OUR OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

The environment OBG(W)-2 faced met all prerequisites stated in the Future Land Operational Concept – Adaptive Campaigning. Al Muthana province transitioned to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) in July 2006. The previous Australian battle group
relocated to the US Air Base at Tallil in Dhi Qhar province to the south of the provincial capital, An Nasiriyah. In doing so, the battle group lost a substantial ability to maintain full situational awareness of Al Muthana due to geographic dislocation. OBG(W)-2 followed the lead of our predecessors and allocated each combat team a province to hold as their primary area of responsibility. This was done to ensure continuity in the personnel dealing with the Iraqi administration and security forces, and it worked very well.

The OBG(W)-2 mission was to provide Operational Overwatch or, put simply, maintain a level of situational awareness of the province, enabling assistance where mandated and to provide training to the security forces. Because the provinces were under PIC and a large fanfare had been made at the handover, it felt as if we had to justify our presence. Our measured presence, however, was essential to maintain the required level of situational awareness. This meant that the information campaign flashed to the forefront. We were not there to conduct direct action against a designated militia. In fact, the operating environment was such that a major contact in the centre of town would signal a degradation of security and, therefore, a decline in complete indigenous control. The result would mean strategic failure. A decisive skirmish would be different to a protracted contact. There remained a need to deal effectively, yet proportionally, with the enemy so as not to be seen as a soft target. At the same time, there was a need to avoid the perception of heavy handedness. There was also the requirement to empower the security forces, without doing their job for them.

**UNDERSTAND YOURSELF THEN LEAD YOUR TEAM**

*The* internal mental place from which a leader operates matters; in other words, the quality of consciousness determines the quality of performance.

– Tacito Nobre⁴

Commanders cannot reach their full potential if they do not fully understand themselves. Tacito Nobre confirms this in his remarks and Sun Tzu linked self awareness to victory when he said ‘if you know the enemy and yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.’⁵ Without a detailed self-understanding, commanders will not know what they stand for or the essence of their command philosophy. Command requires moral choices, but without truly knowing themselves
current operations • major j m greenshields

commanders will falter. if commanders do not respect themselves, they do not have a foundation to treat their soldiers with respect. Commanders will be found wanting if they have not developed self-awareness before assuming command.

prepare yourself

mental preparation is the most important element commanders must undertake to sustain the pressures they will be under for the duration of a deployment. Sub-unit command is a great responsibility to be vested in an individual. This responsibility is exhausting due to the constant mental and emotional exertion in all aspects of the command. This commitment ranges from tactical planning and execution of operations, group dynamics of the combat team, and personnel issues dealt with on a daily basis. This preparation should involve an intensive self reflection, including personal moral values, conflicting priorities, and who you are as a person. This will provide a better foundation for decisions, not only involving the combat team but also regarding the local population. Do not judge the population and their customs based on a Western mindset. In many cases, they will have operated this way for centuries and it will cloud a commander’s ability to devise workable solutions.

on operations, commanders will be confronted with numerous situations that they have never thought about before. This is by virtue of commanders and their soldiers being tested in battle—operating in a foreign culture where they will see the best and worst of human nature. To assist in preparation, commanders may list those situations they consider relevant and analyse them in the context of the deployment. One of the key issues, given the environment, is the severe wounding or death of soldiers. Some mental health practitioners suggest conditioning through such things as hospital visits or viewing medical photographs. Thought must be given, however, to how one will deal as a leader with such a predicament. Commanders need to truly absorb themselves in the situation to gain the most out of this analysis. With respect to my preparations, I asked myself a series of questions. How would I feel? Were there any extra procedural things that I would want to do? How would I assist my soldiers in dealing with the situation? If the nature of the injury allows, would I wish the individual, rather than the system, to notify their next of kin? If so, how would I achieve this, and would I be granted that freedom by my commanding officer or the higher headquarters? I found this analysis was an essential part of preparing myself to fully accept and deal with some of the harder aspects of my command.

mental preparation is the most important element commanders must undertake to sustain the pressures they will be under for the duration of a deployment.
A PROACTIVE MENTAL APPROACH

My self preparation taught me that a critical element was not forgetting my wife and family. A lesson I would commend to others is not to devote all your time to your soldiers and forgot the people in your life who mean the most. You can run the risk of deploying mentally, as well as be physically dislocated from them. The time to strike a balance needs to be during your pre-deployment training, not after you have deployed. You need to know your family is fully with you in spirit. Being comfortable in your own mental space also means striking the balance between your personal and professional responsibilities.

The first of David Kilcullen’s 28 Articles is ‘Know your turf’. From the outset, it must be stated that while on deployment you are a foreigner, and your understanding of interested parties in your area may be better termed your ‘level of ignorance’. This will ensure you never develop a false sense about your level of knowledge. You must realise the difficulty in assessing second and third order effects of your actions. That said, you should make every effort to have a detailed understanding, but your plan must also take this complexity into consideration. You need to start by asking a series of demographic questions. Do tribes form the social nucleus of the area? What are the inter/intra-tribal relations like and which ones hold the power? Do the tribes have legitimate militia, or are the militia from different tribes? Does this affiliation bring with it a level of tolerance to their actions? Ask questions about the security forces and their dynamics with the population. This is by no means an exhaustive list; however, to answer these will require extensive reading of the situation. A good insight into the tribal society of Mesopotamia is provided by Austin Long of the RAND Corporation in his analysis of the Anbar province. Your understanding of these linkages will enable you to use them in shaping and sending key messages to your target audience.

PREPARE YOUR COMMAND

Self preparation will be an ongoing process and one of the most important parts of that process will be establishing who you are. Then, as a commander, you must prepare your subordinates for what they may face. During pre-deployment training, my command team (sergeant and above) sat down and discussed in detail the types of emotions we would expect to encounter. We discussed how this would affect us and our team, including indicators within the group, and some management strategies. This paid dividends during the deployment when incidents occurred and my command team immediately and instinctively began monitoring the emotional rollercoaster that soldiers experience.
Various stages of the deployment will see subordinates influenced by different factors of which a commander must be cognisant. The Deployment Handbook, published by 1 Psychological Unit and issued to deploying members, states that there are three primary phases to the deployment cycle: pre-deployment, on deployment, and post-deployment. Irrespective of the indications contained in the handbook, I experienced and observed the emotions outlined in the following paragraphs.

Soldiers’ morale and operational enthusiasm for the deployment could be seen in three phases. The initial phase commenced with deployment notification, lasting through the departure and commencement of operations, and ended when the combat team took its first pause. The mood of this period was characterised by high individual and group excitement and enthusiasm. The length of this phase will be different for each organisation based on factors such as operational tempo, initial job satisfaction and casualties. In fact, it could very well last through to the final phase, if these external variables provide the right environment. There are some anomalies that may occur when soldiers redeploy for their second or third tour—especially if they deploy into the same area of operations but on a different mission. Expectations will have to be managed, dealing with everything from the types of activities being conducted to how a different battle group conducts its day-to-day procedures.

The second phase saw the organisation reaching a level of operational sustainability, which meant the soldiers’ enthusiasm stabilised. This mood, however, would fluctuate continually as it was dependent on operational stimuli. The challenge for the commander in this phase is to maintain the momentum, to foster enthusiasm and minimise the effects of complacency.

The final phase was the period leading up to the return to Australia, during which there was a general trend of soldiers’ minds drifting towards their return home.
My command team identified that this may have led to a drop in concentration or hypersensitivity to the need to conduct some types operations. The Centre for Army Lessons (CAL) has identified this as a perennial issue for commanders at all levels, particularly amongst personnel who have had multiple deployments.

Understanding what phase Combat Team EAGLE was in assisted my command team to recognise stressful influences and enabled us to be proactive in taking appropriate measures. I found it extremely beneficial to have discussions with my command team during the different phases about the emotional and mental state of the soldiers, as well as any influencing factors. Their feedback ensured that I was not misreading or incorrectly interpreting the situation.

**MORALE – TRUE OR FALSE?**

When monitoring soldiers’ morale, it is important to understand the difference between ‘true’ and ‘false’ morale. False morale generates a hype which will crumble under pressure. A general indicator is an organisation that takes short cuts, often done so consistently that the soldiers become convinced that they are acting correctly. Young lieutenants can often be drawn unwittingly into this situation by their soldiers and may require assistance to extricate themselves. True morale is built upon intensive training and disciplined culture that will enable the job to be done correctly irrespective of the external pressures. False morale will not stand up to first contact. Elements of my combat team had false morale at various stages; however, to the credit of the junior leaders, hard training prevailed and resulted in everyone knowing exactly what their job was. True morale won the day, breeding team and individual resilience.

**THE ESSENCE OF TRUST**

Good training not only develops true morale, but is also vital in generating trust between commanders and their subordinates. Mission command is the command philosophy espoused by the Australian Army. In an article on the practical application of this philosophy, Colonel Roger Noble stated that ‘trust is the essential moral component of mission command’. Junior commanders will often say it is not practised. This a something which CAL hears frequently during their lessons seminars with soldiers. We talk about the practice and we articulate clearly that trust is central, but that is often where the discussion stops. How is trust developed and then maintained? Can a new commander immediately adopt a mission command style without truly knowing how the organisation they command operates? In my opinion, it would be foolish to do so.

When a group forms, a commander must be directly involved in developing the team at all levels—from soldiers right through to the headquarters staff. If not directly involved, commanders cannot realistically expect subordinates to understand
their expectations or vice-versa. However, this involvement does not necessarily mean running all discussions or plans. Simple oversight and feedback will often be enough. The latter is critical in setting the foundations for mission command and must be both ways. If you as a commander have the right level of self confidence then you will be able to receive constructive feedback from all directions. If you are uncomfortable with this then you need to look internally at your own self esteem. The practical application of involvement is where commanders often overstep the bounds of intent-based command. The better the team's competence at the commencement of training, the sooner a commander can transition to monitoring instead of supervision.

It must be understood that there are soldiers or small teams that cannot respond to intent-based operations. This may be for a variety of reasons including military cultural background, experience or simply competence level. If training does not rectify an inability to respond to mission command, then either the training is not appropriate or that member may need to be replaced. Replacement should not be the first option exercised because some people take longer to develop. A combat commander should not, however, allow a subordinate to deploy if there is any doubt as to their competence under fire. One of the worst interpersonal experiences I had during pre-deployment training was the removal of a junior commander. Attached personnel may present situations when command styles need to cater for their different unit culture.

Training is an investment in stress management. The better an organisation is at their base skills, the better they will instinctively perform their job. By the conclusion of training, trust will have been developed between competent commanders and their teams. This will occur because of the level of interaction and establishment of a shared mental understanding of the mission and the team's capability to conduct the operation.

The level of trust established through training is only the starting point of an effective relationship. The trust must be maintained between both parties. To enable this, commanders must be competent at what they do. They must not get bogged down at their desk at the expense of getting involved in training. Too much time spent at your desk or in meetings will lead to not knowing what your soldiers are really doing or feeling, and will result in a reduction of your basic instinctive skills. Mastery of the basics is an element that wins respect and then trust from subordinates.

On the other hand, commanders must remember their job is also to champion the cause of their organisation. This requires a lot of time meeting everyone from
the commanding officer to supporting agencies, not to mention planning for operations. A balance must be found. Listen to senior soldiers, because they will provide objective feedback as to command effectiveness. Commanders may think they have found balance, but it may be evident to an onlooker that equilibrium has not been achieved.

You Command Your Soldiers!

Commanders ‘command’ their soldiers—no one else. A commander will be pressured by ‘supporting agencies’, which do just that—support the chain of command. By virtue of the definition of command, it means that commanders are responsible for the soldiers’ welfare as well. Commanders and their command team know their soldiers best and are the continuity in their welfare management. OBG(W)-2 had four medical officers and numerous rotations of psychological support teams over the course of the deployment. This is not conducive to continuity of medical or psychological care. Each new rotation of specialists required deployed members to become familiar with different medical interpretations, priorities and interpersonal relations. Our battle group, thankfully, had an exceptional Padre who assisted greatly in the welfare management of our soldiers by working tirelessly with the chain of command.

On two separate occasions, I had cause to disagree with specialist advice and order a soldier not to deploy until re-examination. The last case resulted in the individual being medically repatriated to Australia as soon as possible. Seek and be open to specialist advice, however, do not be afraid to ask questions or seek a second opinion. The commander should be present with the individual during the delivery of career or tour ending information. They must act as the rational mind and be poised to ask the specialist questions during the interview. There is no easy way to break this news to a soldier. The commander must, however, convey to the soldier that they are not alone and still remain part of the team. The best way for this to be instilled from the outset is for the commander, or their direct representative, to be with the soldier when they receive the information from a medical practitioner.

My policy was that no significant welfare information should be communicated to my soldiers if I was not present or, if I was unavailable, a command team member in my place. For the medical staff to understand this, a relationship must be developed with specialists to ensure they are aware that the best interests of the soldier are being looked after. If I was not available, the command team representative would
be briefed beforehand so that a strategy for the interview could be formulated prior to informing the member. Remember, a commander must act in the best interests of the soldier.

As a commander responsible for the lives of your soldiers, you need to be prepared for your command. This will position you with the ability to prepare your team for the experiences you will face together. Building trust in the team needs to follow. Then, and only then, will a team be truly ready to embark on the mission.

**COORDINATOR OR COMMANDER?**

*The most far-reaching act of judgement that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish ... the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, not trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.*

— Clausewitz

Commanders must understand the type of operation they are conducting. Clausewitz’s statement, even though talking at the strategic level, is extremely pertinent to sub-unit commanders in the Australian Army. Not fully understanding the strategic reasons for the deployment will make it difficult to understand certain operational constraints. It became evident very soon after arriving in theatre that the operation we were undertaking was not the one I or the rest of the battle group command team was expecting. The Iraqi people did not really care for our presence unless we had something to give. It may be asked, why are you there if the locals do not want you?

The combat team developed an overarching plan that was information focused. This centred on developing a detailed understanding about the workings and demographic dynamics of the province. The aim of each operation on which we deployed, be that key provincial leadership engagement or security force training, was focused on developing this understanding.

There were many players operating in the province, with most outside my span of command, and some conducting activities of which we were not aware. These included the non-government organisations, the United States State Department Provincial Reconstruction Team, and private security contractors. With all these elements, it was impossible to develop an overarching plan of which we had complete oversight. A lot
of these organisations needed security assistance to conduct their activities. This led me to assume an unofficial coordinating role. Heavy synchronisation was required with the battle group operations officer; however, I had the lead for the province and was better positioned to provide this coordination. This function also provided the ability to develop relationships that led to information-sharing, providing not only enhanced situational awareness, but also an opportunity to educate the external agencies about possible negative consequences of some actions. Although termed a combat team commander, provincial coordinator was at times more apt.

When attempting to forge relationships with other government agencies and non-government organisations, I would emphasise the coordination role I was undertaking. This softer approach helped to break down the barriers and open the information flow a lot quicker. Informing the combat team of this approach and the reasons for it, ensured that the soldiers understood the necessity of these relationships, and provided support in their day-to-day operations.

Given the current nature of stability operations, combat team commanders are often likely to be in the middle of contacts. A heavy schedule of meetings with local elements means commanders might find themselves getting shot at, while the majority of their force elements are on the periphery. This has two implications. First, commanders must be good at the basics of their craft. Second, commanders will have to command from inside a fire-fight. The implication for preparatory planning is that it should provide enough information to enable attachments to be proactive in support of contact. During orders a heavy emphasis needs to be placed on the ‘what ifs’ or ‘actions on’ to deal with contingencies. This situation will also highlight heavy reliance on the combat team’s second-in-command to provide relevant information from headquarters, while being capable of relaying information to provide much needed breathing space. A primary function of command will be the ability to generate the appropriate level of combat power at the right time. The complex operating environment will provide a challenge where another mental recalibration is required.

**CONCLUSION**

Contemporary combat team command not only provides individuals with a rewarding opportunity, but also enormous responsibility. There will be competing demands on priorities from the time of notification through to the post-deployment leave. It may be unrealistic to say that you will meet all priorities appropriately.
I certainly learned more from my mistakes than from conducting the correct course of action initially. The more preparation you conduct, however, the better foundation you have to deal with the unexpected. Self-preparation and developing self-awareness will enable you to be more balanced when preparing your command. You need to understand what is influencing your command at any point in time and the stressors your team may be experiencing. This will enable you to act or, if necessary, modify action as appropriate, and this should flow through into your training. Setting the foundations for the practice of mission command will develop trust within your organisation. This will enable you to truly command. A commander who is prepared and has prepared their team, and then demonstrates the flexibility required, will do just that. Soldiers will follow you because they trust you, not just out of hope.

ENDNOTES

3 Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) is where the security and governance responsibilities for the province are given to the Iraqi authorities. Coalition forces operate under a Memorandum of Understanding, which dictates what they can and cannot do, where they can and cannot go, and methods for assistance to the provincial authorities in the case of emergency. Al Muthana was the first province in Iraq to transition to PIC, and Dhi Qhar was the second.
6 Conflicting priorities refers to you as a commander and the positions you will find yourself in. You will not just be torn between the individual, the team and the mission, but also between elements of the local population and national objectives. At any point in time your priorities may be different.
A PROACTIVE MENTAL APPROACH

10  *ADF Deployment Guide*, 1st Psychological Unit, Department of Defence, 2006, p. 5.
12  Evans and Ryan (eds), *The Human Face of Warfare*, p. 192.

THE AUTHOR

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CURRENT OPERATIONS

SUPPORT TO OPERATION VICTORIAN FIRES ASSIST

FOUR LESSONS IN DEFENCE BASE SUPPORT

COLONEL CHRIS FIELD

ABSTRACT

The Victorian bush fires of February 2009 swiftly destroyed nearly two thousand homes and took over 170 lives. Yet, equally as swift, and in spite of the extensive damage, the ADF responded quickly and efficiently to this disaster with Operation VICTORIAN FIRES ASSIST. While the success of this operation was obvious for all to see, the author identifies several lessons that can be drawn from this unique experience, examining what worked as well as what did not—and how matters could be improved. To this end, the author offers a number of practical and innovative suggestions for how the ADF can better utilise its mix of contractor and military provided base services to better support ongoing warfighting tasks while mounting an equally effective response to similar contingencies in future.

On Saturday 7 February 2009, bushfires devastated 400,000 hectares (988,400 acres) of land in the state of Victoria, killing 173 people, an estimated one million wild animals and 13,000 livestock. The fires destroyed 2029 homes, in 78 communities, along with 61 businesses, five schools and kindergartens and three sporting clubs.
The Australian Defence Force (ADF) quickly responded by raising Joint Task Force 662 (JTF 662) led by Headquarters 4 Brigade from Watsonia, on the northern outskirts of Melbourne. Combined with fire authorities, police, emergency services and community organisations, JTF 662 coordinated engineering, aerial fire spotting, search, medical, counselling, liaison, forensic, catering, and relief effects for victims of the fires under the ADF codename: Operation VICTORIAN FIRES ASSIST.3

In support of JTF 662, but with no command and control relationship, was Victoria’s largest Defence base—the Puckapunyal Military Area (PMA).4 ADF doctrine defines a Defence base as ‘an area or locality containing installations which provide logistic or other support’.5

The aim of this article is to identify four lessons from PMA’s role as a Defence base in supporting Operation VICTORIAN FIRES ASSIST, and to relate these lessons, more broadly, to support for ADF operations. These four lessons involve: supporting/supported relationships, influence versus command, Defence base designation, and community support.

PMA was established as a Defence base in 1939, at the outbreak of the Second World War. It consists of 50,000 hectares (120,000 acres) of land, and hosts 2260 people including regular and reserve ADF personnel, Australian Public Service personnel, Defence families and contractors.6 The February bushfires came to within 20 kilometres of the Puckapunyal Military Area.

SUPPORTING/SUPPORTED RELATIONSHIPS

The command and control arrangements for PMA, and all Australian Defence bases, are designated in Defence’s Base Accountabilities Model.7 At PMA, command and control consists of a supporting/supported relationship8 between the Senior ADF Officer – Puckapunyal (SADFO-P)9 and the Base Support Manager – Puckapunyal (BSM-P). BSM-P is a member of the Australian Public Service.

SADFO-P provides broad leadership of PMA’s military personnel and represents ADF interests on PMA through a collegiate ‘whole-of-Defence’ approach.10 The SADFO-P’s management of whole-of-Defence matters includes Defence assistance to the civil community, community engagement and ADF reputation management. Importantly, a key measure of effectiveness for a change in the supporting/supported relationship between SADFO-P and BSM-P is that the SADFO-P assumes command of the PMA in the instance of a security, safety or emergency event requiring coordination of Defence base personnel and resources.11
Despite the devastation in Victoria caused by the bushfires, the ‘security, safety or emergency event’ metrics for a change in base command relationships were not enacted. Therefore, SADFO-P and BSM-P continued their cooperation on issues by employing a continuation of the extant supporting/supported relationship.

Defence base support for ADF operations – Lesson 1: The peace-time supporting/supported relationship established for Defence base SADFO and BSM may not be adjusted even in the most extreme security, safety or emergency events. Therefore, leaders should not predicate plans on changes in command and control arrangements. Instead, they should develop cooperative, transparent and trustworthy relationships between Defence base SADFO and BSM in order to ensure a supporting/supported relationship functions effectively even in the most extreme circumstances.

INFLUENCE VERSUS COMMAND

In addition to the SADFO-P and BSM-P relationship, PMA has resident ADF units that, apart from their PMA lodger status have, in the main, no command and control relationship with the SADFO.12 Instead, PMA resident units and organisations have separate chains of command to Defence Support Group, Defence Health, Defence Housing Authority, Defence Community Organisation, Joint Logistic Command, Land Command – Army, Training Command – Army,13 and Defence contractors. To complicate this arrangement, PMA has resident organisations that are outside of the Australian Defence Organisation including: a State primary school, childcare services, retail businesses, banks, PMA newsletter The Boomerang, and the Puckapunyal District Neighbourhood Centre.

Given these disparate organisations and stakeholders, achieving unity of command is not viable for PMA.14 Few people in PMA work for SADFO-P, and the majority of people in PMA have their own chains of command for orders, direction and reporting. Operation VICTORIAN FIRES ASSIST did nothing to change this command and control construct.

Therefore, to support Operation VICTORIAN FIRES ASSIST, SADFO-P, in partnership with BSM-P, was required to synchronise capabilities and effects from PMA resident units on an ad-hoc basis. Initially, this synchronisation occurred at twice daily SADFO-P meetings, but in less than a week these meetings were cancelled, and thereafter PMA synchronisation was made on an as-required basis.

The command and control situation in PMA for SADFO-P sounds bleak. For an outside observer it appears that at PMA, commonly understood ADF command and control arrangements, including unity of command, are ignored. And yet, support from PMA to Operation VICTORIAN FIRES ASSIST occurred—on time, at the correct locations and in appropriate quantities to support the efforts of JTF 662.
PMA’s independent, and stove piped, command and control structures established to support peace-time functions can work in a coordinated manner through simple influencing actions by a SADFO. There is no magic involved in influencing actions. To influence units and organisations outside a SADFO’s command chain, all the SADFO needs to do is talk to people; visit people; make sure Defence base emergency procedures are current, understood and preferably rehearsed; and keep in contact with key leaders both on the Defence base and in positions that may influence Defence base operations in the wider community and ADF.

Defence base support for ADF operations – Lesson 2: A SADFO can expect to command few people, but have responsibility for all. Except in the most extreme circumstances, it is likely Defence base command and control arrangements will not change to support a SADFO’s authority. Therefore, a SADFO must concentrate on influencing people through visits, discussions and procedures in order to gain an optimal outcome for all Defence base stakeholders, including Defence as the paramount stakeholder.

DEFENCE BASE DESIGNATION

PMA’s primary role is training and support. As a result of this role, many Defence base functions and services have been outsourced to civilian contractors, including logistic support, medical support, transport services, catering, mess services, cleaning, range control, fire services and security.

During Operation VICTORIAN FIRES ASSIST, PMA’s outsourced functions and services, especially logistic support, provided by the contractor BAE Systems through the Joint Logistics Unit – Victoria, were timely, responsive and complete. Support of logistics and equipment to JTF 662 included graders, dozers, heavy lift equipment, troop lift, bulk fuel, potable water, rations, tents, sleeping bags and stretchers.

Given the performance of PMA’s outsourced functions and services during Operation VICTORIAN FIRES ASSIST, Defence could be satisfied that the current model of contractor support to Defence bases is both efficient and effective.

But the issue of Defence base designation requires careful consideration.

PMA as a training and support base—without high readiness ADF units in residence—has fewer mobile force elements and greater reaction time in responding, almost exclusively, to domestic emergency and/or security events.
In contrast, Defence bases with high readiness ADF units in residence—which are required, almost exclusively, for offshore deployments—contain highly mobile units on varying degrees of notice to move. Defence provides these Defence bases with proportionally less outsourced functions and services than bases such as PMA, especially in the areas of logistic support, medical support, transport services and catering. However, Defence bases with high readiness ADF units do utilise some outsourced functions and services, especially in mess services, cleaning, range control, fire services and security.

In the ADF’s current and expected future high tempo operational environment, are these mixed contractor support arrangements for Defence bases still appropriate? Should Defence consolidate outsourced functions and services on training and support bases such as PMA? And should Defence allocate additional highly responsive ADF-owned support functions and services to operate on high readiness Defence bases?

To help answer these questions, perhaps Defence may consider two distinct designations for Defence bases: Force Projection Bases and Force Support Bases. Force Projection Bases could be Defence bases from which the ADF would seek to project forces in order to support Australian national interests, especially offshore. Force Support Bases, such as PMA, could be Defence bases from which the ADF trains and supports other ADF and Australian community activities, including domestic emergency and/or security events.

The advantage of unequivocal Defence base designation is that the ADF’s allocation of base support assets could be clearly demarcated so that Force Projection Bases could be provided with the bulk of highly responsive ADF-owned functions and services, while Force Support Bases could be provided with more constrained contractor based functions and services.

This system would assign limited ADF assets, and perhaps reduce the number of single-Service Defence bases in the ADF inventory, to support short-notice and long-term ADF deployments from Force Projection Bases, while contractors could be employed to support more predictable rear support and training functions from Force Support Bases.

Should Defence consolidate outsourced functions and services on training and support bases such as PMA?
allocating outsourced functions and services in support of other ADF and Australian community activities including domestic emergency and/or security events.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

PMA is blessed with strong community support, generated from a combination of PMA’s 70-year connection with the people of country Victoria, and some strong-willed and experienced people in PMA involved with Defence Health, Defence Housing Authority, Defence Community Organisation, pastoral and philanthropic care, retail businesses, PMA newsletter The Boomerang and the Puckapunyal District Neighbourhood Centre.

Of these organisations, clear leaders during the aftermath of the 7 February 2009 bushfires were the Puckapunyal District Neighbourhood Centre (PDNC). PDNC is a small, volunteer, self-trained, experienced and highly motivated community-based organisation located in PMA.

PDNC quickly adapted to the conditions in local communities resulting from the Victorian fires, and immediately provided support to families within the Puckapunyal and surrounding areas, encompassed by the Mitchell Shire.15 Importantly, PDNC provided tailored and focused support to communities, based on experience PDNC had gained from caring for Kosovar and East Timorese refugees in 1999.16

The value of PDNC’s tailored and focused support is not to be underestimated. Once the full devastation of the bushfires was understood, Australians gave generously to bushfire victims, both in cash and household goods. The support was overwhelming and it took some time for charity and government organisations to create the infrastructure and knowledge to effectively synchronise support to shattered communities.

In parallel to these efforts, and employing tailored and focused support, PDNC’s leaders showed significant agility and were able to identify community needs, move critical household necessities to affected communities, link as required into ADF capabilities, and adjust to new and unexpected contingencies.

Demonstrating the enduring efforts of the PDNC, the organisation intends to coordinate fundraising and material support for the victims of the Victorian bushfires, through an adaptive and evolving plan over the next 12–15 months.

Defence base support for ADF operations — Lesson 4: The ADF begins and ends with the communities with which it interacts. The ADF must understand that the
communities from which we originate, interact and influence hold significant capabilities including local knowledge, self-organisation and enthusiastic drive. If these community capabilities are synchronised with ADF efforts, they can become significant partners in ADF mission success.

CONCLUSION

The 7 February 2009 Victorian bushfires created a tragic set of circumstances in southern Australia. The Puckapunyal Military Area, given its geographic location, was able to support whole-of-nation efforts to assist the affected people of Victoria.

This article has identified four lessons in Defence base support relating to the PMA’s role in supporting Operation VICTORIAN FIRES ASSIST, and has related these lessons, more broadly, to support for ADF operations.

First, in the most extreme circumstances, and despite demands being placed on people, infrastructure and resources, the supporting/supported relationship between the Senior ADF Officer (SADFO) and the Base Support Manager (BSM) must continue to operate.

Second, due to multiple chains of command, a SADFO can expect to influence rather than command Defence base resident units, in order to gain an optimal outcome for all Defence base stakeholders, including Defence as the paramount stakeholder.

Third, Defence could consider a base designation review to determine national requirements for Force Projection Bases and Force Support Bases in order to allocate scarce ADF-owned functions and services to support short-notice and long-term ADF deployments, while outsourcing functions and services in support of Australian-based ADF and community activities.

And finally, efforts to synchronise community capabilities with the ADF should be encouraged and nurtured, so that communities, both in Australia and internationally, can become significant partners in ADF mission success.

ENDNOTES

3 Operation VICTORIAN FIRES ASSIST: The ADF nomenclature for civil assistance operations have, in recent years, assumed the common title of ‘assist’ to designate military operations performed in support of essential civil functions. Other recent ‘assist’ operations include: Operation BALI ASSIST 2002 (Bali bombings); Operation SUMATRA ASSIST 2004–05 (Boxing Day Tsunami); Operation PAKISTAN ASSIST
Current Operations  ~  Colonel Chris Field

2005 (Earthquake, Dhanni Pakistan); Operation LARRY ASSIST 2006 (Cyclone Larry, Innisfail, North Queensland); Operation PNG ASSIST 2007 (PNG floods, Oro (Northern) Province); Operation KIRIBATI ASSIST 2008 (World War II UXO).


6 These 2260 personnel comprise: 450 Australian Regular Army, 100 Army Reserve, 240 Australian Public Service, 370 contractors, 700 Defence dependents and 400 trainees.

7 Chief of Army Directive 22/09, Appointment of Senior Australian Defence Force Officers (SADFO) for Army Bases (R3839733), Department of Defence, 30 March 2009.

8 In the context of a support command relationship, the Supporting Commander aids, protects, complements or sustains another commander’s force, and is responsible for providing the assistance required by the supported commander. Source publication: US JP 1.02 (2006), Australian Defence Glossary, v5.1.1, accessed 14 April 2009.

Supported commander: (US Joint) In the context of a support command relationship, the commander receives assistance from another commander’s force or capabilities, and is responsible for ensuring that the supporting commander understands the assistance required. Status: Authorised Term. Context: Military Operations > Joint. Sponsor: Vice Chief of the Defence Force. Source: Publication: US JP 1.02 (2006).


9 SADFO in PMA, in February 2009, was locally known as the Senior Army Representative – Puckapunyal (SAR-P).


11 Chief of Army Directive 22/09.

12 The exception is the Land Warfare Development Centre which, as an Army Headquarters unit, is also commanded by the Senior ADF Officer in the Puckapunyal Military Area. Annex A to Secretary and Chief of Defence Force Directive 04/08 does try to bolster a SADFO’s ability to influence disparate chains of command on a Defence base, by stating the SADFO may issue a ‘relevant command or general order … for the purposes of good order and discipline, security,
emergency, or safety matters’ over common areas or facilities on a Defence base ‘which are not allocated for the long-term exclusive use of a particular resident unit on that [Defence] Base.’

13 From 1 July 2009, Land Command – Army and Training Command – Army merged to form Forces Command – Army.

14 ‘Unity of Command’ is a method of command where one commander is vested with the authority to plan and direct operations, and is solely responsible for success or failure. The commander also has the authority to direct and control personnel and resources assigned to the task. *Australian Defence Glossary*, v5.1.1, accessed 14 April 2009.


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‘BEYOND CULTURAL AWARENESS’

ANTHROPOLOGY AS AN AID TO THE FORMULATION AND EXECUTION OF MILITARY STRATEGY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

COLONEL ROGER NOBLE

ABSTRACT

This article contends that the experience of the early twenty-first century has highlighted a long-term systemic weakness in the formulation and execution of Western military strategy. The need for strategists to focus on people, culture and society is not just a counterinsurgency requirement; rather it should be an indispensible and enduring strand in all strategic calculations. There is a need to immigrate the thinking, methods, products and approach of anthropology into the formulation and execution of strategy. This is no easy task and the article identifies how this could be done through doctrine, education and practice.

The administrator (or strategist) uses social sciences the way a drunk uses a lamp post, for support rather than for illumination.

– War Without Mercy
In the early twenty-first century it would be fair to say that drunks, administrators and strategists have much in common. They face an unpredictable future armed with blurred vision, shifting frames of reference and a deep uncertainty concerning the likely outcomes of their decisions and actions. All are looking for reliable aids and support to assist with the difficult business of getting home in the dark. While drunks can find a bench and sleep off their problems, strategists cannot risk the delay. Under the blowtorch of Iraq and Afghanistan, strategists and administrators have turned to the social sciences, especially anthropology, for both support and, eventually, illumination. Given the political and social nature of counterinsurgency (COIN) it is unsurprising that this has occurred. The challenge of ‘war amongst the people’ has driven a largely ‘bottom up’ resurgent interest in culture, people and society which has now spread widely into areas of national policy, military doctrine, training and education, strategic planning, campaign design, force preparation and tactical action.

This article contends that the experience of the early twenty-first century has highlighted a deeper, long-term systemic weakness in the formulation and execution of Western military strategy. The need for strategists to focus on people, culture and society is not just a COIN requirement; rather it should be an indispensible and enduring strand in all strategic calculations. The realm of strategic theory, long dominated by political scientists, Cold War warriors, game theorists and international relations experts, has ignored, or been unaware of, the insights and illumination that can be gained from paying close attention to the work of the ‘soft sciences’. Recent experience has revealed the weakness and it is time to fix it—we need illumination.

Anthropology, while no ‘silver bullet’, is an undeniable and indispensible aid to those charged with the formulation and execution of military strategy. The article will review the complex nature of contemporary strategy formulation and execution followed by an analysis of anthropology and its inherent strengths and weaknesses. Based on a realistic assessment of the limitations of anthropology, especially in a conflict zone, the article will examine ways to integrate anthropology systematically into the process of strategy, military thinking and practice. The article draws on a variety of sources including a series of targeted surveys passed to a range of highly experienced Australian and American officers (major to brigadier), anthropologists, scientists, academics and officials from other government agencies.

Anthropology, while no ‘silver bullet’, is an undeniable and indispensible aid to those charged with the formulation and execution of military strategy.
THE CHALLENGE OF CONTEMPORARY STRATEGY: THE NEED TO SOLVE INCREASINGLY COMPLEX PROBLEMS

A review of the business of contemporary grand and national strategy reveals that it is not getting any easier. Recent experience confirms the observation that military strategy and the use of force are now regularly employed as part of a wider solution to increasingly complex problems.

Contemporary conflicts have been described as ‘war amongst the people’, which demand a ‘whole-of-government’ integrated response founded on a comprehensive understanding of ‘context’. At least one leading analyst of contemporary strategy has observed that this has led to a ‘conflation’ of military strategy and national policy. This is further exacerbated by the nature of contemporary adversaries who are often diverse, diffuse, complex and non-Western. As one expert concluded strategic effectiveness will increasingly ‘be based on the capacity to think like a networked enemy’.

Therefore, the military strategist needs to understand a complex environment and a diverse range of interests, actors and issues while retaining the capacity to ‘simplify, focus, decide and execute’. This demands increasingly adaptable, informed and capable strategists supported by information and tools that improve understanding and aid in decision-making.

ANTHROPOLOGY: INCOMPLETE BUT INDISPENSIBLE INSIGHTS

People are everywhere the same except in ways they differ.

– Social & Cultural Anthropology: A Very Short Introduction

It may be surprising to many but it is hard to find a comprehensive, NATO-style definition for anthropology. The American Association of Anthropologists (AAA) defines it as the study of ‘all aspects of human kind’ and includes archaeological, linguistic, biological, physical, political and socio-cultural studies of humanity. This is a key to understanding both the central limitation and strength of this particular science; it is at once broad, fundamental and all-encompassing, while also ‘soft’, fuzzy and imprecise. It offers profound insight but little certainty.

The principal strand of relevance to strategists is socio-cultural anthropology. This is the study of human culture, society and identity. It is concerned with kinship, marriage, family, institutions, function, caste, tribe, nation, production,
consumption, belief systems, ritual, symbols, religion, and concepts of the person and self. As a result there is considerable overlap with other social sciences, such as sociology, and within anthropological areas of specialisation. There is a ‘cross fertilization and blurring of disciplinary boundaries’ and, for the purposes of this article, anthropology would include any useful social science contribution.

What truly distinguishes anthropology, however, is the scientific method of ‘participant observation’. This requires first-hand observation of the people, culture and society to be studied. This method rests on dialogue and interaction. As a result, the field has ‘elaborated unique and valuable tools for understanding the diversity of human cultures and societies’. Perhaps even more importantly, it has given us an informed, if incomplete, way to think about and approach the complex ideas of ‘culture’, ‘society’ and ‘humanity’. That this field is relevant to the contemporary strategist is largely commonsense. It would, therefore, be logical to expect to find the products and ideas of anthropology embedded in the contemporary ‘process’ of strategy formulation and execution. The next section in this article will review the place and role of anthropology in contemporary Western strategy and current military thinking.

THE STATE OF PLAY: CONTEMPORARY ANTHROPOLOGY IN STRATEGY, OPERATIONS AND TACTICS

The rising profile and contribution of anthropology to the conduct of contemporary campaigns, operations and tactics is undeniable. Driven by the pressing need to understand the enemy and the population to counter violent insurgencies in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the US military has employed anthropology and its products as part of a dramatic effort to raise the level of ‘cultural awareness’ across the force. This trajectory of anthropological inclusion is similar among most Western coalition militaries. With the deployment of Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) into Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States is arguably at the leading edge of the practical tactical and operational employment of anthropology. Survey respondents universally accepted the potential and utility of anthropological insights and products and report their effective, if patchy, use across a diverse range of operational areas including Malaya, Vietnam, Rwanda, the Solomon Islands, Bougainville, Afghanistan, Iraq and the Former Yugoslavia.

Anthropology has had a clear influence in shaping contemporary Western military doctrine and education. The recent US Army USMC FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency
Field Manual now formally embraces a socio-cultural approach to the analysis of the operational environment, especially in the area of social network analysis and threat evaluation. Arguably this has extended into more capstone emerging doctrine such as the 'persistent conflict' approach of the new FM 3-0 Operations. The influence of anthropology can be seen in the doctrine of key partners and allies. There is no end to articles written by enlisted soldiers through to generals covering the need for socio-cultural awareness and understanding of beliefs, social structures, identity, kinship and tribal dynamics.

Anthropology has recently played a greater but less pervasive role at the strategic level. It has arguably been more limited to solving the ‘intractable’ insurgency problems in Iraq and Afghanistan. For example, General Petreus’ 2006 Joint Strategic Assessment Team (JSAT) conducted a systematic review of the campaign in Iraq and included a mix of military and civilian experts, including leading anthropologists. The US Department of Defense’s $50 million dollar Project MINERVA initiative is deliberately designed to increase the input of social scientists into the strategy formulation and defence business. Some survey respondents report heightened awareness of and interest in socio-cultural issues at the strategic level, notably in tribalism and sectarianism. The trend towards anthropology has clearly been detected by the traditional strategic theory community, and not always without scepticism:

To wage war become an anthropologist. Lose the fascination with Clausewitz, and embrace culture as the way to understand conflict.

The quote above reflects the essential character of traditional Western approaches to strategy and the range of inputs used to shape it. Strategy formulation has been traditionally reliant on international relations theory, military history, the concepts of the great military theorists, game theory, and assessments of ‘technology, numbers and organisation.’ This approach still dominates with at least one commentator warning ‘we should also be cautious about the culture-driven revolution.’ It is important to assess whether anthropology threatens to assume a role beyond its worth or station in strategic thinking.

A review of some recent strategic works indicates that, far from taking over the strategic field, anthropology is yet to be confirmed as a key contributor. For example, Robert Kagan's recent book, The Return of History and the End of Dreams, approaches the world with a largely traditional emphasis on nation-state power relationships,
viewing states as having 'the attributes of humans who create and live in them', but lacks any detailed reference to the complex nature of particular cultures, societies or belief systems. For example, his analysis of radical Islam concludes that we face a clash of traditionalism versus modernity in which 'traditionalism cannot win'. By adopting this approach he ignores insights from more detailed anthropological studies of radical Islam which paint a complex picture of anti-Western rather than purely anti-modern organisations. Perhaps more dangerously he ascribes superiority to Western liberal ideas that he assumes will inevitably trump local culture and identity. Kagan is by no means alone in adopting this approach, nor is he necessarily 'wrong', but he has not used the potential insights available through anthropology.

It is reasonable to conclude that anthropology has not yet made itself a default, integrated component of traditional Western strategic thinking, despite the experience of the last few years. This is despite the fact that it offers a range of potential insights that would complement the more traditional strategic inputs and aid in more comprehensive strategy formulation. Nor is it used consistently and systematically to provide a sharp filter with which to assess strategic generalisations and assumptions.

We should not replace Clausewitz with culture; we need both.

**THE ORGANISATIONAL UTILITY OF ANTHROPOLOGY**

*We should not expect too much from a paper study by some academic in a different country. Whatever we choose to do will be implemented as we shoot people’s sons. Their reactions are at best uncertain.*

– Brigadier Justin Kelly

As the quote above correctly identifies there are limits to the utility of a 'soft science' with poor predictive properties. While sceptics and die-hard traditionalists will always question how anthropology can be used effectively to formulate and execute strategy, this field of study regularly provides relevant insight and context across most areas where people, culture and society matter. In this way anthropology offers potential illumination across the full breadth of defence business, from the battlefield to the committee room. Some major example areas of obvious high pay off utility include providing insight into the ethnography of a strategic problem, and...
“BEYOND CULTURAL AWARENESS”

Beyond Cultural Awareness

the human parameters influencing conflict termination planning and execution. It is also an essential enabler for any effective cross-cultural strategic communications strategies, such as those currently required for the Middle-East and Central Asia. Anthropology can also be turned on ourselves and our allies to better understand our own culture and increase self-awareness. This offers potentially profound support for strategic decision-making across a diverse range of complex organisational areas, including recruiting, retention, force structuring and capability, and investment decision-making. While it is beyond the scope of this article to address these uses of anthropology in detail, it is important to note that the utility of an anthropological perspective is largely only limited by imagination and the limitations imposed by traditional organisational practice and culture.

INTEGRATING ANTHROPOLOGY: PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

The article so far has outlined the potential utility of anthropology for assisting in the difficult business of twenty-first century strategy formulation and execution. A more difficult question is how to integrate this social science into the process of military strategy? Before this can be answered, it is important to point out a range of issues that inhibit, restrict and shape the practical use of anthropology as an effective aid to strategists. These key issues include cultural disparity between soldiers and anthropologists, the practical limits to anthropology in a conflict zone, and the nature and specialisation of the field itself.

A POTENTIAL CROSS-CULTURAL DISCONNECT

It is not without irony that it must be said that a key impediment to the effective integration of anthropologists into the business of military strategy is cultural. The professional culture and ethical system of anthropologists holds strong biases against the unconstrained application of the science in support of the military or the pursuit of national security objectives. For example, in October 2007 the Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association pronounced the Human Terrain System to be an ‘unacceptable application of anthropological expertise’. This view reflects a significant professional body of opinion that anthropology, ‘long the handmaiden of empires’, should not now be used ‘as new military tools-weapons’. These concerns stem from an ethical construct and interpretation that soldiers will find hard to follow as it bears little resemblance to the military ethic founded.
on just war theory and international humanitarian law. Primary concerns relate to issues of consent with regard to interviews during field work in a conflict zone, the confidentiality of the information collected and conclusions drawn, and whether its use will cause harm. A review of a range of articles that hold to this view reveal a limited understanding of the process of national security, the conduct and nature of military operations, intelligence collection and targeting or even the roles and responsibilities of a military force as an agent of a democratic government’s policy. Despite these significant weaknesses, these professional and ethical concerns are seriously held and do serve as a limitation to the availability of anthropologists and the scope and nature of their work.

The cultural issue cuts both ways, with the military holding concerns over the viability of integrating anthropologists into military organisations and cultures. This was a common concern among survey respondents and is summed up by the warning by one officer that ‘they are not of the company and their loyalties lay elsewhere’. Further, while the majority of survey respondents readily understood the specialised, academic nature of anthropology, they were concerned with its practical utility as summed up by the comment that ‘adolescent sexual practices in Samoa might be interesting on DVD but are unlikely to engage the institutional Army’. Or to reverse the observation, ‘our (military) work is national security, not academics’. This is also a reservation expressed by some anthropologists working with the military now who have noted that anthropology is a ‘marginal contributor to US national security policy at best’ and is ‘intent on studying the exotic and useless’. This is exacerbated by the dense academic writing style and preference for scientific jargon adopted by many anthropologists. The political concerns of anthropologists are perhaps also returned by certain sections of the military community who fear ‘the potential “dangers” of civilian liberals lurking within the HQ or staff’. A non-military survey respondent succinctly summarised the ‘worst case’ challenge:

Every military needs integrated professional anthropological advice. Every military is allergic to integrated anthropological advice.

The logical conclusion that can be drawn from this cross-cultural assessment is that the integration of anthropology and anthropologists requires careful thought and must account for significant cultural, ethical and professional differences.
THE NATURE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

The specialist nature of anthropological studies and the method of participant observation constrain the practical application and integration of anthropology into the process of military strategy. The specialised nature of anthropological study and the often bounded socio-cultural nature of particular military problems mean the available pool of experts is almost invariably limited:

We are not looking for ‘anthropologists’ but ‘anthropologists with a research background in Afghan tribal dynamics in the late 20th and early 21st Centuries, deep contemporary experience on the ground in Afghanistan and a Top Secret clearance.’

A linked issue is the time consuming, ‘face to face’ nature of participant observation. The conduct of such work in conflict zones is often complicated and limited by the threats to both the anthropologist and the subject. The influence of the situation on the subject, anthropologist and information gathered must also be carefully considered. The complex, violent nature of armed conflict poses security risks and ethical uncertainties beyond that found when conducting ‘peacetime’ interviews with adolescent Samoans. The record shows that it is done and can prove effective. One study of Fatah al-Islam extremists through third-party observers is an excellent example of the considered application of the anthropological method in a high threat environment.

The work of the Human Terrain Teams operations ‘on the ground’ in Afghanistan has been also proven effective with one claim of a 60–70 per cent reduction in ‘kinetic’ operations as a result of practical, on the ground integration of anthropology and military operations. Any integration of anthropology must take account of the specialist nature of the science, the limited pool of experts, and the practical difficulties related to the practice of anthropology ‘on the ground’ in a conflict zone.

HOW TO INTEGRATE ANTHROPOLOGY INTO THE BUSINESS OF MILITARY STRATEGY

The integration of anthropology into the business of military strategy must begin and end with the nature of the military strategic process. As described earlier the formulation and execution of contemporary military strategy requires dynamic, complex problem solving within the context of grand or national strategy. Strategy
has increasingly become an iterative, ‘accordion like’ ‘process … where the result—also called strategy—is a compromise between the ends of policy and the military means available to implement it’.

Therefore, the integration of anthropology into the strategic ‘process’ will require action on the philosophical, doctrinal and practical levels. A longer-term and deeper cultural integration founded on education is also required.

THE CULTURE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING: TOWARDS A MINDSET OF INCLUSION

A ‘mindset of inclusion’ must become the norm for strategic planning and execution activities. Consideration of anthropological perspectives needs to become ‘habit’ and must be noticed if missing. The recent use of anthropologists in strategic planning groups provides a potential template for their employment in future strategic and campaign planning. This should be extended to other areas of organisational strategic action and policy-making. The US employment of anthropologists as strategic advisors is an example of their practical utility when the right person is used in the right place. Anthropological products and perspectives must be sought and provided as a matter of course. This inclusion will need to be military-led with a view to expanding the idea, by example, into broader inter-agency forums. The new draft Australian Counterinsurgency manual captures the idea that ‘the operating environment [is] a complex system’ and concludes that successful twenty-first century problem solving will ‘involve expertise from outside the military and there is no theoretical limit to the resources and personnel that may be used’.

HOW DO WE GET MORE ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND ANTHROPOLOGY?

A key issue is how to access expert anthropologists, or an anthropological perspective, when needed given the limitations of the nature of the field? The first step is to cultivate and grow the small number of experts already effectively operating in these areas. This will require ongoing support for their involvement beyond the needs of counterinsurgency. It requires the clear articulation of the coherent ethical logic behind their work and refuting any professional ‘blanket moral condemnation’. This should be backed by moves to expand the field of ‘capable’ anthropologists through initiatives such as Project MINERVA and establishing ‘long-term relationship building between the military and reputable academic institutions to facilitate the participation of high quality anthropologists’. One officer suggested the entirely prudent ‘back up’ concept of developing a comprehensive situational awareness of the ‘field’ in order that the military can identify:
A ‘pool’ of people who knew enough in an anthropological sense to find the right anthropologists to ask them the right questions (at the academic level) that may be enough to assist the development of sensible early actions. 42

An alternative approach is for the military to ‘grow its own’ anthropologists. This approach runs into familiar difficulties related to time, expense, and the opportunity cost of educating military anthropologists. The idea of ‘pumping some bright young arms captains through mission focused’ anthropology studies is appealing, and for a select few this may be a reasonable option. Alternative ideas include the expansion of the US Foreign Area Officer program to include options for anthropological study and possibly field work. 44 A number of survey respondents identified that expert, ‘trusted advisors’, 45 who held an anthropological or cultural perspective rather than a formal qualification, also provided high quality advice and assistance. It is likely, given the nature of the science that the military will need to adopt a combination of all of the measures outlined above if it is to generate the required body of expertise on an as required basis.

**DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE: THE INTEGRATION OF ANTHROPOLOGY INTO MILITARY PRACTICE**

There is a clear need to integrate anthropology and the social sciences more fully into military doctrine and practice. This has already begun and is well advanced in the area of strategic and campaign planning. A number of intelligence survey respondents stressed the need to absorb anthropological sources and information into the process of threat and environmental assessment. One respondent termed this an effort to develop ‘cultural intelligence’ — another development of a ‘societal Order of Battle’. 47 This construct would see an expansion of the US COIN doctrine of social network analysis into broader strategic and generic doctrine for the conduct of military appreciations. A linked issue is to delineate clearly the operational security rules governing anthropological information and to address the need for ‘balancing sharing information (across multiple ‘whole-of-government’ stakeholders) with security requirements’. 48

The most pressing area requiring attention is the conduct of anthropology during strategic execution. Integration is currently strongest at the tactical level, especially in the area of ‘cultural awareness training’ and the conduct of mission specific pre-deployment exercises. The employment of anthropologists as part of an ongoing campaign has highlighted the need for comprehensive doctrine that
explains and integrates anthropological actions into the broader military framework. This is required to protect the anthropologist’s professional and ethical interests and to explain those limitations to the broader military force. Clarity over the use of information and its relationship to the targeting process will also assist in developing an understanding of the benefits and impacts of anthropological work in support of the military. One detailed ethical study argues that if military processes and the role of anthropologists were better understood, then the current Human Terrain Team analysis effort in Afghanistan would be seen as ‘not only morally permissible, but praise worthy’ by a far broader professional audience.49

EDUCATION: THE CRITICAL LONG-TERM ACTION

The key to the systematic integration of anthropology into the process of military strategy is to establish it as a constant presence within the military education continuum. One survey respondent noted the important point that, ‘for the military commander, all we can do is educate his judgement’.50 It is critical that anthropology and the broader social sciences provide perspectives and information that will shape the commander’s world view and enable him or her to ask key questions that span critical social, political and cultural issues. This must become a matter of course for future effective strategists. One survey respondent summarised the way to approach education:

Socio-cultural anthropology is relevant at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. Its understanding should be incorporated in early professional military education, developed through ongoing study (including language training and/or exchange postings), and be ultimately reinforced through pre-deployment cultural training.51

There is, however, a need to insert the work and products of anthropology into the standard military body of reading and information sources. Not only is the work of political scientists, soldiers and strategic theorists required to educate a commander’s mind, but also broader theories of culture, society and identity. A general understanding of the complex and dynamic concepts of culture as argued over by anthropologists will alone provide significant insight and illumination. This should be further supported by the use of specific anthropological case studies in support of practical problem
solving exercises to show how the specific can help our ‘understanding [of] what is, and is not, possible in a cultural context’. Anthropological papers and perspectives should be provided through all military problem solving exercises at both War and Command and General Staff College. Currently, in the case of the Australian Command and Staff College, this style of information and perspective is notably absent. Consideration should also be given to the approach already adopted by the United States Marine Corps of including selected anthropologists as members of military academic faculties. In short, the future commander must be educated to look for and ask informed socio-cultural questions as a standard part of making tactical through to strategic judgments.

CONCLUSION: INDISPENSIBLE INSIGHT BUT NO ‘SILVER BULLET’

The metaphor of the silver bullet applies to any straightforward solution perceived to have extreme effectiveness. The phrase typically appears with an expectation that some new technology or practice will easily cure a major prevailing problem. Colin Gray has made the key point that ‘for every complex problem there is a simple solution, and it is always wrong’. Anthropology provides no simple solutions, or silver bullets, for the dilemmas and uncertainties faced by the contemporary military strategist. Embracing anthropology will not simplify a problem, remove the need for a comprehensive understanding of traditional strategic theory or political science, nor will it provide greater certainty or comfort. It will, however, explain the context, assist in framing problems and potentially shed invaluable light on the nature of a conflict, what outcomes may or may not be realised, and how we may successfully proceed. The latest round of contemporary counterinsurgencies has reminded us of the central importance of people and populations and has highlighted the potential utility of anthropology in assisting the struggling strategists to ‘simplify, focus, decide and execute’.

The strategic utility of anthropology extends well beyond the battlefield and into the many diverse areas of military organisational strategic action including net assessment, capability development, force preparation and force structuring. Anthropology must be cemented as an accepted and normal aid to judgment. This will require the adoption of a mindset of inclusion, the careful fostering of effective players within the military anthropology community, and an expansion of the available base of anthropological support through a combination
of flexible ‘in-house’ and external policies. Military doctrine and practice must continue to systematically incorporate the work and products of anthropology into organisational business. Finally, the military must adopt ‘a very deliberate not so fast approach’ to education that broadens the career-long exposure of soldiers to anthropology and opens their minds to the potential illumination it may offer them in the trying strategic times ahead.

ENDNOTES

7 Ibid, p.146.
8 An example of the scale and depth of this effort is the US Army Battle Command and Training Program’s effort to prepare Army formations for the Contemporary Operating Environment by focusing on Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure, Information, Physical Environment and Time elements of that environment. Battle Command and Training Program Briefing, US Army Combined Arms Centre, February 2008.
9 HTTs are a recent development by the US Army to provide brigade commanders in counterinsurgency environments with cultural support in the form of ethnographic, social, and cultural information research, as well as social data analysis. B N Karabaich, US Army, Memorandum – Human Terrain Team (HTT) Debrief, 31 October to 1 November 2007.
11 *FM 3-0 Operations*, Headquarters, Department of the Army, Washington DC, Final Approved DRAFT 5 February 2008.
12 For two examples: Australian Army Land Warfare Doctrine 3-0-1 *Counterinsurgency*, 12 June 2008; and UK Joint Discussion Note 4/05 *The Comprehensive Approach*. 
17 Smith, *The Utility of Force*, p. xii.
20 Ibid, p. 81.
22 Anthropology also potentially serves to arm the critical strategist with a new way to question and assess strategic proposals. For example, the popular author Robert Kaplan has claimed that ‘criminal anarchy emerges as the real “strategic danger” in an “undeveloping world”’. One anthropological critique of this statement notes ‘people always self-organise somehow, and they know who is gunning for who … Anarchy — case after case suggests — is nothing more than an intellectual construct … it never really exists.’ A Simons, ‘War: Back to the Future’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 28, 1999, p. 92.
23 Brigadier Justin Kelly, Australian Army, Australian Anthropology Questionnaire Response.
CONCEPTS  ~  COLONEL ROGER NOBLE


28 Colonel M Brewer, Australian Army, Australian Anthropological Questionnaire Response.

29 Brigadier Justin Kelly, Australian Army, Australian Anthropology Questionnaire Response.

30 Professor G Rudd, USMC SAW, US Anthropological Questionnaire Response.


32 Lieutenant Colonel M O’Neill, Australian Army, Australian Anthropological Questionnaire Response.

33 C J McNicol, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Anthropological Questionnaire Response.

34 Professor G Rudd, USMC SAW, US Anthropological Questionnaire Response.


38 For example, the political anthropologist Dr David Kilcullen has been employed as Chief Strategist. Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, US Department of State.


41 Colonel M Brewer, Australian Army, Australian Anthropological Questionnaire Response.

42 Ibid.

43 Colonel J J Frewen, Australian Army, Australian Anthropological Questionnaire Response.
Beyond Cultural Awareness

44 Professor G Rudd, USMC SAW, US Anthropological Questionnaire Response.
45 Major M Bye, Australian Army, Australian Anthropological Questionnaire Response.
46 Name not disclosed, Australian Army, Australian Anthropological Questionnaire Response.
47 Lieutenant Colonel M Ryan, Australian Army, Australian Anthropological Questionnaire Response.
48 Name not disclosed, Australian Army, Australian Anthropological Questionnaire Response.
51 Colonel JJ Frewen, Australian Army, Australian Anthropological Questionnaire Response.
52 Ibid.
53 The author was Director of Studies – Land at the Australian Command and Staff College over the period 2007–2008 and was responsible for joint operations instruction in which no specific anthropological texts or products were issued to inform campaign or strategic planning.
54 Dr Paula Holmes-Eber is a Professor of Operational Culture at the Marine Corps University and one of the authors of Dr B Salmoni and Dr P Holmes-Eber, *Operational Culture for the Warfighter: Principles and Applications*, Marine Corps University Press, Quantico, 2008.

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A SOMewhat HERETICAL PROPOSAL FOR THE FUTURE OF COMMUNICATIONS IN THE ARMY RESERVE

MAJOR P J BEOR

ABSTRACT

Communications capability, equipment and training requirements have become increasingly complex over recent years, and this trend is only going to continue. As the subject matter experts, RASigs will have to look closely at communications at all levels, especially those which are traditionally performed by regimental signallers. This trend is even more pronounced in the Army Reserve, where the doctrinal role of the Formation Signals Squadron has been largely negated. Reserve Signals Squadrons have to adapt to this new paradigm if communications capability within the Army Reserve is to be maintained. This article examines three fundamentally different options to address this issue.
INTRODUCTION

With current demise of deployable brigades (and arguably battalions) within the Reserve, the doctrinal role of the Brigade Signal Squadron has virtually ceased to exist. If (as thought by many commentators) this is the raison d’être for the existence of RASigs within the Reserve, then its future viability is indeed in question.

It is the contention of this article that this not the case, and that such a view represents a very blinkered and uninformed perspective on communications as a whole within the Reserve. After a brief review of the current situation, the paper will examine a number of options for the way forward for RASigs. These options will be appraised in terms of the partially filled glass analogy—the pessimist saying that it is half empty, the optimist half full, and the engineer that it is overdesigned.

BACKGROUND

Over the past few years the Reserve has undergone more radical changes to its structure than at any time since the implementation of the Tange report of the 1970s. The first of these, the introduction of the multi-user depot, provided a means of renewing Second World War depots and increasing our recruiting base in the most economic manner by minimising duplication of common requirements. Project FOCUS brigaded virtually all Reserve administrative and logistic functions to free up Australian Regular Army (ARA) clerks, storemen and craftsmen to address shortages within 1 Division units. Project Pozieres combines all the regional training assets into Regional Training Battalions under the local brigade in order to again lower staff overheads. Reserve Field Batteries have become de facto Brigade Mortar Companies due to the lack of resources to renew their gun/howitzers, and the almost total demise of assault pioneers has had the Field Squadrons taking up some of this role.

The common theme arising from all these initiatives is that, regardless of the specific reasons:

a) structurally the Reserve is increasingly diverging from the ARA, and
b) its units are becoming increasingly functionalised around single core/corps functions.

With this in mind, the future of RASigs and communications as a whole within the Reserve can now be examined.
PREMISE

Communications capability, equipment and training requirements have become increasingly complex over the recent years, and this trend is only likely to become more pronounced in the future. As the subject matter experts in the field, RASigs will have to take a much more active role in communications at all levels, especially those which traditionally fall within the bailiwick of the regimental signaller. This has been illustrated recently on operations where Reserve 266 radio operators were in considerable demand as regimental signallers. Each of the three options outlined below addresses this issue in a slightly different way.

THE GLASS HALF EMPTY

This option basically retains the status quo. The squadrons provide a centre of expertise of RASigs competencies within each formation—in effect, becoming a remote campus of the School of Signals for on-the-job training. Regimental signallers are retained within their corps though some blue lanyard (RASigs) augmentation, provided by posting the occasional senior non-commissioned officer (SNCO) into a Signals platoon or having a RASigs captain Regimental Signals Officer (RSO) as their ‘non-corps’ posting.

There are many advantages to this option, the primary one being that it provides for maximum competency of RASigs personnel within the Reserve. Despite the lack of brigade level activities within the Reserve, the capability will remain within each squadron to stand up formation level communications facilities. This is necessary for situations as on Operation ANODE, where there is a need for an operationally deployed Reserve headquarters. In addition, Reserve signallers will be able to backfill ARA operations slots with minimal additional training so that High Readiness Reserve (HRR) commitments can most easily be met.

The other brigade units will also retain their autonomous Signals platoons and maintain individual corps affiliations. RASigs personnel can also enhance these units’ own capabilities with an experienced SNCO or junior captain, who can then bring this wider experience back into the squadron on reposting.

The fundamental disadvantage of this option is that it is not sufficiently flexible to cope well with the current dynamic environment. Already Operation ANODE is in the process of being modified to incorporate a full-time ARA Headquarters...
and future operations in Timor Leste and other likely locations will be similarly structured. The number of senior Reserve officers who have utilised even a portion of the range of capabilities provided by a Signals squadron, as part of a deployed brigade headquarters, is very small and diminishing rapidly. Will a customer who has never utilised or even experienced a particular capability value retaining it?

In addition, the other brigade units are hard pressed enough to fill their own corps specific roles without having to dual hat a regimental signaller, especially when the regimental headquarters does not deploy. Already RASigs personnel occupy most of the Signals roles (of all varieties) within the various Reserve Response Forces.

Finally, the likely RASigs HRR roles, being with 17 Command Signals Regiment (CSR), do not mirror the ARA/Reserve brigade relationships established within the rest of the HRR, which further distances us from our local customer base.

**THE GLASS HALF FULL**

This option extrapolates the trend discussed in the introduction and quite simply brigades all Signals roles. Regimental signallers either join their formation Signals squadrons or revert to their primary corps role in either infantry or artillery. All unit signals requirements become task requests on the Army Capability Management System (ACMS) to the Brigade Signal Squadron.

The advantages of this option is that it provides (in the very short term) an increase in squadron numbers, a much greater range of interesting tasking for unit members, and a ‘one stop shop’ for all communication queries and tasks. It enhances the standard of communications procedures throughout the Reserve and provides for a measure of communications security (COMSEC) oversight which it is currently lacking, merely by having all these responsibilities under the control of the subject matter experts.

The introduction of new personal communications equipment and the upgrade of the existing equipment will be greatly simplified and there will be a net reduction in unit training liability, as the old regimental signaller courses are dropped and everyone attends Exercise BALCOMBE SPIRIT. There will also be economies in facilities and Q accounting. Complete communication capability bricks can also be supplied by the Signals squadrons in this model.

There are, however, a number of quite significant disadvantages to this approach. The number of personnel who would be prepared to change corps affiliations and
move from units which have been their home throughout their Reserve service would be small. The Signals squadrons are already hard pressed to complete the required training to maintain competencies with their current levels of support requests; if these increase markedly then overall competency levels will most likely fall.

The supported units will also experience a reduction in communication capability due to either poor forecasting or poor administration in preparing or forwarding support requests. Even if a support request is received it may not be able to be filled as it may conflict with higher level needs known only within the squadron. While the correct decisions will most likely be made by Squadron Operations, the end result will often be a unit without communications.

The other issue with this option is that BALCOMBE SPIRIT does not currently address the requirements of a regimental signaller and, if adopted, a number of already content heavy courses would become even heavier. A unit's communication needs are generally an order of magnitude simpler than those practiced by a squadron. Having the squadron provide all the communications runs the risk of unnecessarily (in their eyes at least) over complicating the unit's communications procedures.

By brigading all signals personnel, there may be a real degradation in the provision of intra-unit communications. The negative implications in the HRR context are also noteworthy as this option tends to lock RASigs out of any integrated brigade contribution.

THE GLASS IS OVERDESIGNED

The model chosen for this option, and the recommended one, is that of a classical RAEME structure. While this may at first glance appear bizarre, there are a number of close analogies between the considerations for RAEME support and that of RASigs.

Both corps have a strong, centralised and accredited trade structure, both have to maintain a formation level unit to ensure that all trade competencies are maintained, and both have a formation or higher focus. Where the analogy is most applicable, however, is in the provision of support to other units.

A field workshop provides second line (i.e. formation level) logistic support, which can be considered roughly analogous to the communications support provided by a Signals squadron. Similarly, the range of capabilities within a field
workshop, like a Signals squadron, are really only exercised to their full potential in a complete classical brigade setting.

It is the technical support sub unit (TSSU) where the analogies become more interesting. A TSSU provides first line support to a unit, generally an order of magnitude simpler in extent, scope and equipment complexity to second line support. To phrase this in a Signals context, the communications support provided by regimental signallers is an order of magnitude simpler in extent, scope and equipment complexity to squadron level support. Most RASigs personnel would consider this a given.

This is not to say, however, that supported units do not require some particular skill sets which are not practiced at the higher level—the requirements for communications and repairs in a cavalry squadron or artillery battery being an example.

Before examining how this can be applied in the Signals context, it is instructive to see how the RAEME model is structured and how it operates.

The TSSU is an integral part of the supported unit, under the full command of the commanding officer. The members, while retaining their corps affiliation, are in all other ways considered unit members. As the centre of expertise, the field workshop retains technical command, oversees all trade related issues, and manages the careers of the TSSU members and the make up and competency mix of the TSSUs themselves—balancing resources brigade-wide.

In practice the system works in the following manner. Craftsmen Spanner and Wrench, after scraping through their recruit camp, join the field workshop. On completion of their respective Initial Employment Training courses, Craftsman Spanner goes to Foxhound Battalion Tech Support while Craftsman Wrench stays in the workshop. During the next few years, Wrench and Spanner meet up often at trade courses at the school. On completion of their respective promotion courses, Spanner moves back into the workshop on promotion to corporal, while Wrench gets the corporal spot in the battalion. Over the next ten years Wrench and Spanner often cross paths, sometimes serving together and sometimes following each other until they have both been the Artificer Sergeant Major (ASM) of a TSSU and of their specific trade in the relevant workshop platoon. They are both then eligible to become the overall brigade ASM.

This model entails RASigs taking over all regimental Signals platoons, though these maintain their command status within their parent units. The platoons will be run by blue lanyard SNCOs (with RASigs RSOs) with the troops being primarily
ECN 660 on their second posting after completing training at Kapooka. While at the unit the 660s have to complete their basic trade courses and only stay in the unit for a year or two (depending on vacancies and qualifications). They then return to the Signals squadrons to enhance their collective detachment skills, and it is within the squadron where they have their first experience as detachment commander. Once they have gained experience in this role they would then return to the supported unit as the communications detachment section commander and prepare for sergeant.

The advantages of this model is that the unit commanding officers do not lose their integral communications capability; COMSEC requirements are better met by subject matter experts; the introduction of new kit can be much better managed; and the overall standard of unit level communications should improve. RASigs becomes much more customer focused, and the posting and promotional opportunities within the corps are enhanced. There will also be much greater scope to integrate training and a net reduction in overall training liabilities, as all formal Reserve communications training comes under the auspices of BALCOMBE SPIRIT. In addition, the corps will be able to supply complete capability bricks at a number of levels and would considerably increase its employment flexibility. Complete blue lanyard communication capability bricks can also be provided in this model.

The disadvantage, however, is that to operate successfully this model requires considerably more signalmen and women than is currently the case—otherwise we will always be in a position of ‘robbing Peter to pay Paul’. Once such tradeoffs become the norm, overall capability suffers and individual competency levels fall. It can be argued that it is only within a squadron that many of the collective skills required by the corps can be maintained. There are also potential problems with rotating members out of units who may not want to move, or commanding officers who are not prepared to release specific personnel. The question of whether there are sufficient SNCOs in the corps must also be considered, as well as the issue of whether a RASigs corporal is purely an ECN specific detachment commander or a generalist communications detachment section commander. While this model may suit operators, what about the ‘lineys’ and ‘geeks’?

In the end, this last option presents many problems and raises even more issues. Where it is different to the first two presented above is that all these problems and issues have arisen before in the RAEME context and have, by and large, been solved. Despite appearances, they are not insurmountable, unless of course you believe the RAEME contention that they are supermen.
CONCLUSIONS

The radical changes in Army Reserve composition and responsibilities over the last five years means that all of our established roles and structures can no longer be taken for granted. If RASigs as a corps does not plan ahead to deal with these and any future changes, they may be forced upon it, and in a manner which may possibly not be in the best interests of communications in the Reserve as a whole. The options presented above hopefully provide some indication of likely courses of action and their implications. This list is neither exhaustive nor complete. The recommended RAEME model is only one of a number of potentially successful options. It is, however, the only one that we know works.

ENDNOTES

1 Traditional names for RAEME units are used in order to best illustrate the point.

THE AUTHOR

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THE ARMY COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

BECOMING A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

WARRANT OFFICER CLASS ONE GLYNN POTTER

ABSTRACT

In these times of economic frugality, the Army needs to consider all the avenues and opportunities available for the training and development of our soldiers and throw away some long held beliefs about how and by whom competence can be assessed and awarded. This article examines workplace learning and the contribution of Communities of Practice, Learning and Labour Networks to the gaining of knowledge, competence and expertise by our soldiers.

‘Communities of practice’ is a term coined to describe groups of people bound by shared knowledge and purpose. These communities of practice effectively facilitate both individual and organisational learning. In addition, within a community of practice itself, understanding or learning can also occur in a number of ways. As a consequence, the practices of the community itself will have significant bearing on the learning that takes place and the way in which this learning occurs.

The Army, as a workplace organisation, is a community of practice within which exists a multitude of diverse communities of practice. As a community of practice, the
Army is as much a learning environment as it is a functioning workplace organisation. There are many forms of learning evident within this environment, variously categorised as explicit, tacit, conceptual, procedural or a combination thereof. All these forms of learning occur within the context of ‘learning networks’.4

This article will examine Army communities of practice in light of their contribution to situated learning within the workplace. The discussion ultimately focuses on the ways in which communities of practice and situated learning can be harnessed to enhance the learning environment within the Army.

DIMENSIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is usually described in terms of two dimensions: the explicit (tangible or observable) and the tacit (intangible)—both of which are required for the effective performance of work.5 Similarly, knowledge can be categorised as procedural (‘knowing how’) or conceptual (‘knowing that’).6 Using these descriptors individually or in combination, it is possible to track the development of knowledge and the forces that act on that development within the various learning networks evident in the workplace. For the purpose of this article, I will focus on the vertical, horizontal and liberal learning networks evident within the Army.

VERTICAL LEARNING NETWORKS

Vertical learning networks use linear learning programs in hierarchical structures. Such networks form the backbone of training within the Army workplace. The resulting knowledge is generally of an explicit procedural nature and very task specific. In the early stages of a soldier’s career, the tasks that he or she will be required to perform will generally be of a practical nature and directly related to job function. Some examples include driving a truck, deploying an artillery gun, performing basic clerical tasks or operating a radio. As such, demonstration of the knowledge required will be explicit and in accordance with the procedures for conducting the various tasks. Learners in their ‘novice’ state are described as ‘being without situational experience’ and reliant on ‘context free rules’ to guide them.7 At the stepping-off point in their careers, soldiers require knowledge that will enable them to perform workplace tasks in a safe and effective manner. Thus they will be expected to perform work tasks in accordance with operating drills or procedures.

… the Australian Army prides itself on the resourcefulness and independent nature of its soldiers …
However, the Australian Army prides itself on the resourcefulness and independent nature of its soldiers and this is embodied in its core values and ‘I am an Australian Soldier’ ethos. These attributes cannot exist if the soldier does not move beyond the simple application of drills, procedures and context-free rules. Thus the Army requires young soldiers and junior leaders to be able to perform tasks while demonstrating some appreciation for the context in which they need to occur. In today’s world, there are many factors that influence the way in which soldiers work—factors that simply did not exist only a few years ago. These factors include the high tempo of military operations in which the Australian Army is involved, the invasive nature of the modern media spotlight, the lack of distinct and identifiable battlefield boundaries and the almost invisible nature of threat and hostile elements. Likewise, the nature of the work soldiers perform can vary significantly within a brief period of time. An Army vehicle mechanic deployed on operations may be servicing vehicles one day, and the next day set out on a security patrol wearing body armour and armed to the teeth. An infantry soldier may be involved in humanitarian assistance in the morning, and in the afternoon be fighting for his life in a contact. This is now the reality of operational deployment. Add to this the need to meet the requirements of governance in OH&S, Equity & Diversity, Cultural Awareness and Risk Management, and it quickly becomes apparent that today’s Australian soldier must be able to draw on an immense database of knowledge and be capable of demonstrating expertise in a number of diverse areas.

It is the acquisition of both procedural and conceptual knowledge that leads to expertise. Clearly, Australian soldiers need to be able to employ more than just explicit procedural knowledge to be effective and expert in the workplace. What is required is a deeper conceptual understanding across a broad range of situational dimensions in varying contexts. Soldiers not only need to understand how to do their job, they need to understand the implications of rapidly changing contexts for their performance and actions within the broader workplace picture, whether this workplace is within their barracks or within an area of operations in a foreign country. The message for the Army is that training for explicit procedural knowledge is no longer sufficient. New methodologies are required to ensure that tacit conceptual understanding is developed in concert with explicit procedural knowledge. Key to this will be fully exploring the potential of the other forms of learning networks that exist within the organisation.

**HORIZONTAL LEARNING NETWORKS**

Workplaces contribute to learning in two broad areas: ‘those associated with the activities individuals engage in and those related to the support and guidance they receive while undertaking work activities.’ This engagement in activity and
accompanying guidance generally takes place within the network of workplace groups or teams. These interactions form the horizontal learning networks within an organisation. 10

Soldiers spend most of their careers in a small team environment. In their early years they are part of a small team ‘at the coalface’ of their workplace, such as in an infantry section, artillery gun detachment, workshop maintenance team or catering kitchen shift. As they progress they may move into command and management teams; however, the one constant will remain their membership of a small team. Within these teams, soldiers will perform work activities and interact with other team members. The team will comprise members with varying types and levels of knowledge and experience, which is shared across the horizontal network of the team and, as such, produces learning opportunities for the other team members. For example, a member who has recently been deployed on operations can share learning gained through the performance of work tasks in a combat zone. Likewise, a member who has completed an exchange posting with an allied nation’s army can share insights into the way other armies tackle similar work issues.

Within these horizontal networks, the application of explicit procedural knowledge, supported by guidance from more experienced co-workers and supervisors, contributes to the development of tacit conceptual knowledge. This is then applied back to the explicit procedural performance to further enhance the depth of tacit conceptual understanding of work tasks and the contexts in which they are performed. The deeper tacit conceptual knowledge and the ‘compilation’ of explicit and tacit learning resulting from interaction within horizontal networks, moves the learner from novice to competent performer. 11 As such, it is the learning that takes place in horizontal networks, and the enhanced explicit procedural and tacit conceptual knowledge developed within these networks, which contribute most to the ‘on the job experience and training’ elements of a soldier’s career development.

LIBERAL LEARNING NETWORKS

Liberal learning networks are created when learners construct their own learning as a result of workplace experience and reflection. 12 Within this network, individuals create their own learning from the repetition of tasks within an organisational context and from interaction with other learners; this is described as ‘experience based learning’. 13 David A Kolb explored this concept and created a model of experiential learning to illustrate this process. 14
KOLB’S MODEL OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Soldiers will develop deeper understanding as a result of applying skills and knowledge within the varying contexts of the workplace (concrete experience). These contexts can vary from barracks work in peacetime to combat situations on operations. The reflective observation of individual work performance and the performance of others contributes to tacit knowledge and conceptual understanding (abstract conceptualisation), which is further refined through active experimentation to create new concrete experience, thus resulting in even greater tacit and conceptual knowledge.15 Through this process, a deep level of knowledge and understanding is developed which leads to true expertise. This form of learning is most effective in learners who have the ability to think critically about work performances and outcomes—a fact recognised by the Army, which has initiated research on the development of thinking skills. It is this type of learning network that is ideally suited to supporting the ‘adapt’ phase of the Adaption Cycle as described in the Army’s concept of Adaptive Campaigning.16

Of course, as in any essentially uncontrolled process, there is scope for what is described as ‘learning inappropriate knowledge’.17 Examples of this can range from shortcuts resulting in unsafe practices, to unsatisfactory attitudes with respect to OH&S or Equity & Diversity. Inappropriate learning generally results from the less than ideal attitudes and practices of co-workers and also from the offerings of ‘armchair experts’—workers whose professed expertise is substantial, but whose...
actual expertise is minimal. Once learned, inappropriate knowledge can be very
difficult to discard or correct. Commanders and supervisors at all levels within the
Army workplace must be vigilant and monitor the learning that takes place within
liberal networks to ensure that the knowledge gained is appropriate and complies
with workplace requirements and Army values.

THE CONGRUENCE OF LEARNING NETWORKS AND KNOWLEDGE

In reality, learning networks in the Army workplace and the type of learning that
takes place within these never fall neatly into one category. The vertical paradigm
of Army learning is as much a result of the vertical organisational structure as it is a
result of design. However, cutting across this at many levels are the horizontal and
liberal networks formed among learners and work groups within the organisation.
Command learning policies, such as the Commander’s Mission Essential Task Lists,
cross all networks and reach into every level of learning. In fact, all training and
work activities must link back to the Mission Essential Task Lists in some way so
as to provide justification for the expenditure of resources. Likewise, a learning
activity may comprise components from different network models. One example is
the adoption of a vertical network approach to a learning program which addresses
a learning need in a horizontal learning network. Similarly, use of a horizontal
approach may be the best way to develop knowledge required for a linearly planned
learning policy for career development and management.

Workplace learning—and the resulting knowledge—is just as complex. In any
one day a soldier may be exposed to formal, informal and accidental learning
opportunities. These may occur as a result of structured learning activities, *ad hoc*
learning activities, the conduct of normal duties, the requirement to conduct other
than normal duties, self-reflection and any number of other circumstances. All of
these will contribute in some degree to the soldier’s explicit procedural knowledge
and his or her tacit and conceptual knowledge.

SITUATED LEARNING

The increasing demands placed on the Army today take many forms, the most
obvious of which is the tempo of military operations around the globe. Not so visible
is the demand to rationalise resource expenditure at all levels. The government and
people of Australia expect more ‘bang for their buck’ and, as a result, a significant
portion of expenditure is focused on acquiring the personnel and resources with
which to achieve results. Training, while necessary to produce these results, does
not achieve the high profile of the more visible outputs of the organisation. Training
establishments and units are under increasing pressure to find more cost-effective
methods for the conduct of training. With this in mind, there is a real need to examine the potential contribution of the many other opportunities for learning that exist within the organisation. In particular, situated learning in the workplace is a key opportunity that needs to be exploited.

Many of the Army’s trades require the learner to complete a period of ‘on the job experience’ as part of a formal qualification. Generally, however, this is applied and managed in an *ad hoc* fashion at best. In the past, Training Command has demonstrated some reluctance to allow Land Command units to grant qualifications and competency, a reluctance that may be addressed under the new Forces Command structure. Given that the most important knowledge is gained through the actual performance of work in the horizontal and liberal networks of the workplace, a significant opportunity is clearly in danger of being lost. The Army’s units are well structured for the conduct of situated learning. Unit workplaces contain both the equipment used in the performance of work, and competent and qualified personnel to act as instructors, coaches and mentors. In addition, a major component of the focus of daily work is training.

Situated learning is, quite simply, ‘learning through goal-directed activity situated in circumstances which are authentic, in terms of the intended application of the learnt knowledge’.18 One example of situated learning is the Army’s Ground Based Air Defence (GBAD) trade. GBAD soldiers complete formal training at the School of Artillery training establishment and are then posted to the Air Defence Regiment. On arrival in the regiment, they move into a structured on-the-job training and experience program (workplace-situated learning). This program recognises the importance of the learning that takes place within the small team environment of an air defence detachment. The detachment commander assumes responsibility for the soldiers’ ongoing development and sets objectives in accordance with articulated requirements that will see the soldier progress to the level of full job competency and the resulting award of an increase in pay. Through this process, soldiers are mentored and guided by their supervisors and peers in the learning that takes place through the performance of work tasks situated in a range of authentic environments.

**LABOUR NETWORKS AS LEARNING PROVIDERS**

While the Army’s vertical networks generally support the development of basic explicit procedural knowledge, it is via the horizontal and liberal networks that depth of tacit conceptual knowledge for work will be built. As such, it is these networks that are best able to provide the framework around which effective situated learning can be structured. This is particularly pertinent to situated learning, as it is within the labour networks that situated learning will take place. Learning theorists describe four theoretical types of labour network: entrepreneurial, machine
bureaucratic, adhocratic and professional. While there are examples of entrepreneurial and professional labour networks in the Army, these are generally limited to highly specialised work situations. Given the Army’s inherent command structure, one would expect that the predominant labour network would be machine bureaucracy. To a certain extent, within the context of the learning that takes place early in a soldier’s career, this is the case. Simple tasks and duties are performed under the supervision of the commander or a senior soldier so that the junior soldier can gain experience in a relatively safe and controlled manner. Yet, while this type of labour network is evident within the context of the junior soldier, the Army would not function if it were the predominant form of labour network throughout the entire organisation.

Using the theoretical types proposed, labour networks within the Army workplace could best be described as ‘adhocratic’ work groups influenced by the machine bureaucracy. Work can range from the simple and narrow to complex and broad in content. However, this work is team based and organic to the organisation, with a constant focus on improvement or learning. The small team must be able to function both autonomously and within a centrally controlled context, or any variation in between, and the variety of work tasks and contexts requires that the team be multidisciplinary. This form of labour network—and the associated horizontal and liberal learning networks that exist within it—is ideally suited to the facilitation of structured situated learning. The on-the-job training and experience program for GBAD soldiers, for example, owes its success to the effectiveness of learning within this labour network and demonstrates that situated learning is a viable option for many other Army trades.

For the Army to fully reap the benefits offered by situated learning within labour networks, several key barriers need to be addressed. Not the least of these is the tendency to believe that competency and qualifications can only be awarded as a result of attendance on formal ‘off job’ training courses at an Army training school. This is a misconception, as competency is not achieved until learning is transferred to the workplace. No soldier has ever left a training establishment course ‘competent’. Recognition of the contribution of workplace learning and experience, wherever and however gained, also provides a barrier to the implementation of situated learning programs. While the Army currently espouses both Recognition of Current Competency and Recognition of Prior Learning (RCC/RPL) policies, their implementation is problematic. Indeed, many soldiers find it more of an imposition.

Given the Army’s inherent command structure, one would expect that the predominant labour network would be machine bureaucracy.
to apply for RCC/RPL than to simply complete the required training. Soldiers are unlikely to support situated learning if it is of no perceived benefit in the long term, particularly if they are going to have to duplicate this training when they attend career and promotion courses. These barriers are often linked to ill-informed attitudes and are present within both the learning and labour networks of the Army. To some extent this is a generational issue. Change in this area is being championed by those who have a genuine desire to become expert in the field and challenge the paradigm.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AS LEARNING PROVIDERS

Competence develops within the context of the workplace, professional and social communities to which learners belong, and in which competence must be demonstrated. Within these ‘communities of practice’, learners develop knowledge and understanding through joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire. It follows then that these communities of practice can be invaluable resources in the quest for effective situated learning in the workplace.

Within the Army there are many communities of practice. They exist within the various specialty skill sets and trades, within the individual rank groups and within the individual corps of the Army. Communities of practice such as sporting teams, associations and interest groups also cross many of these boundaries. Soldiers will inevitably belong to several of these communities and it is within these that they will develop and advance through their careers, moving in and out of many communities as they go. The communities to which they belong in the performance of their work will provide context to that work. The communities to which they belong outside, but incidental to the workplace, will provide context to their place in the wider Army. These communities are ideally suited to the support of situated learning.

While these communities of practice currently make a considerable contribution to learning within the Army workplace, the Army is yet to recognise their potential as defined ‘communities of practice’. However, many recent developments across the Australian Defence Force as a whole appear to exhibit a community of practice approach. Such developments include engagement between the three services in combined service operations; engagement with regional and allied forces; adoption of standardised military terminology across allied defence forces; the move to a common model for training (the Defence Training Model); and the move to standardised Standard Operating Procedures.
OPTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

The implementation of structured situated workplace learning programs requires careful management if these programs are to provide the benefits outlined. There is, however, a need for a paradigm shift. This shift involves the recognition that learning in the workplace is a major contributor to knowledge and skill development and the key to expert performance. With this in mind, focus can be directed towards identifying the various communities of practice and labour networks in which this learning is taking place. Once identified, the communities and labour networks can be analysed in order to establish the nature of the learning networks in action and the type of learning taking place. The value and relevance of the learning will need to be assessed, and poor learning and practices rectified and excluded. The result should be a virtual map of learning practices, where these occur, and the learning mechanisms at work. A comparison of the learning map with the competency and career development requirements of the soldiers concerned should allow an assessment of those elements of workplace learning that directly support the development of knowledge and skills necessary for the effective and expert performance of work tasks. As a corollary, learning programs can be designed that capture and direct learning in a structured sequence so that enhanced individual and organisational outcomes can be achieved.

“The quality of direct interaction accessible in a workplace is a key determinant in the quality of learning outcomes.”  

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Above all, a more flexible approach to assessment will be required to underpin the implementation of these training programs. Assessment formats are currently prescribed by the training establishment that sponsors the particular qualification. They tend to be rigid, centralised and focused on the training environment. Assessment
in support of situated learning must be sufficiently flexible to be adapted to whatever context may be prevalent in the workplace at the time of assessment. If the soldier is deployed, then assessment needs to adapt to this context, providing all critical aspects of performance are met. Quality control will be a key issue in any move to decentralise assessment, and strict guidelines will be required to guarantee the maintenance of quality. One option is to embed training establishment personnel in the workplace while ensuring that they report directly to trade and training sponsors within the relevant training establishment rather than to individual unit commanders.

CONCLUSION

Situated learning has always existed within the Army workplace, yet it has never received the recognition necessary to harness its potential. The implementation of well planned and robust situated learning programs can provide a viable and effective option for the enhancement of learning outcomes for the Army. Properly designed, developed and resourced, and staffed with competent and committed personnel, situated learning within the Army community of practice can be a key contributor to an optimally functioning Army learning environment.

ENDNOTES

9 Ibid.
10 Poell et al., 'Learning-network Theory'.
12 Poell et al., ‘Learning-network Theory’.
15 Ibid.
17 Billett, Learning in the Workplace.
21 Adhocracy – a term from the theory of management of organisations. Adhocracy refers to the opposite of bureaucracy, or the absence of hierarchy. All members of the organisation have the authority to make decisions and to take actions affecting the future of the organisation. Webster’s Online Dictionary, <http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/definition/adhocracy>, accessed 23 June 2009.
22 Wegner and Snyder, ‘Communities of Practice’.
23 Billett, Learning in the Workplace.

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DOCTRINE AND TRAINING

PREPARING OUR SOLDIERS FOR OPERATIONS WITHIN COMPLEX HUMAN TERRAIN ENVIRONMENTS

MAJOR JASON HAYES

ABSTRACT

This paper examines whether Army is preparing our soldiers with the skills to operate within a complex human environment. Recent operational experience has outlined that the key to success on operations is winning over the hearts and minds of the local population and denying support to the insurgents both physically and morally. Currently, our training is predominantly focused on providing the hard warfighting skills to be successful in a conventional war. There is no argument that this is important; however, our training also needs to provide soldiers with the key soft warfighting skills which are critical if we are going to be successful within a complex human environment.
Doctrine and Training

Major Jason Hayes

*Machines don’t fight wars. Terrain doesn’t fight wars. Humans fight wars. You must get in the minds of the humans. That’s where the battles are won.*

Colonel John R Boyd (USAF Ret)

**INTRODUCTION**

It has been over four years since the Chief of Army’s Senior Advisory Committee (CASAC) endorsed *Complex Warfighting* for use as the Future Land Operating Concept (FLOC). *Adaptive Campaigning – The Land Force Response to Complex Warfighting* has built on this concept and the two documents combined have become Army’s FLOC. The FLOC discusses the concept of the complex human terrain and states that war is fundamentally a human activity; therefore, warfare in the land environment is ‘human centric’. *Adaptive Campaigning* takes this further by describing warfare in its entirety through five interdependent and mutually reinforcing ‘lines of operation’. A fundamental premise of adaptive campaigning is the ability to influence populations and perceptions. To be able to do this the land force must be capable of developing intimacy with the population while conducting operations within a complex environment. Land Warfare Doctrine One (LWD 1) – *The Fundamentals of Land Warfare*, identifies one of the major challenges of land warfare as the perception battle—the battle for hearts and minds to canvass support of domestic and international audiences—as a decisive element of warfare.

The current Chief of Army (CA), Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie gave a speech at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, in which he said,

> contemporary operations are characterised by the need for our deployed land forces to work among the people, and establish a broad relationship with the supported population … Such warfare requires small teams of highly skilled and flexibly employed soldiers, who can rapidly transition between different types of operations … and it leads us to an environment that demands we prepare our people for levels of contextual awareness, flexibility, expertise sensitivity and precision which have rarely been required of the soldier in past conflicts.¹

Australian doctrine states quite emphatically that if we do not understand the human component of warfare it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to win the land battle. The CA also said that ‘the conduct of operations is our core function and we must constantly pose questions to ourselves on how we can better enable the success of our deployed soldiers’.² This article will examine the question of whether Army is providing soldiers with the skills to operate within a complex human terrain environment on operations.
PREPARING OUR SOLDIERS FOR OPERATIONS

THE PERCEPTION BATTLE AND THE COMPLEX HUMAN TERRAIN
OF WARFARE

*Complex Warfighting* examined twenty-first century conflict from the perspective of land forces and identified that war is fundamentally a human, societal activity rather than a technical or engineering problem. It points out that globalisation has caused a corrosion of religious beliefs and eroded the fabric of traditional societies, contributing to social, spiritual and cultural dislocation. Due to this, conventional warfare has ceased to be the major form of military confrontation and asymmetric warfare has taken primacy. The concept identifies the conflict environment as complex, with armed forces having to deal with insurgents, terrorists, criminals, government agencies, civilians and many other elements, often in a short period of time. This makes understanding the human dimension of warfare more important than ever. *Complex Warfighting* acknowledges this specifically by identifying complex human terrain as one of three ‘complex terrain’ environments.

The land force response to *Complex Warfighting—Adaptive Campaigning*—emphasises the importance of understanding complex human terrain in contemporary warfare. It states the purpose of ‘adaptive campaigning is to influence and shape the perceptions, allegiances and actions of a target population and control the overall environment to allow peaceful political discourse and return to normality’. Shaping and influencing perceptions is a human activity that requires personal contact, proximity and an enduring presence. To achieve this *Adaptive Campaigning* outlines five interdependent and mutually reinforcing ‘lines of operation’: Joint Land Combat, Population Support, Indigenous Capacity Building, Population Protection, and Public Information. Each line of operation relies on land forces being able to effectively shape and influence the perceptions of the local populace, in order to be successful in a land environment.

Complex human terrain is where numerous population groups coexist in the same physical space, most likely in an urbanised area. These groups may coexist peacefully, ignore each other or compete. When land forces operate in this environment, it can be very difficult to distinguish the various groups and requires the soft skills of cultural understanding, negotiation and language. The application of force in this type of environment can have unintended consequences. Soldiers need to have an understanding of the potential second and third order effects of their actions; not just the strategic consequences, but more importantly the impact of their actions in the area in which they are operating. A recent example of this occurred…
in Afghanistan where it was reported that Taliban detainees were locked in ‘dog pens’. This immediately received international and local media attention. The media reported that the Islamic community leaders in Australia reacted with fury to the Australian Defence Minister’s admission that four suspected insurgents were held for 24 hours in a compound to house dogs. Muslims consider dogs to be impure. The Afghan Ambassador to Australia, Mr Jayhoon, said that ‘it was a matter of concern because … it provides propaganda for the Taliban’. The effect of these actions had a widespread impact at the strategic and tactical levels. It was later discovered that the detainees were not held in ‘dog pens’; however, this information came out too late to change the perception amongst the local and international community. This perception battle is described in The Fundamentals of Land Warfare as the battle for the hearts of minds of domestic and international audiences and is acknowledged as one of the major challenges of land warfare. It also discusses the human dimension of land power that requires close human interaction, by stating:

> to local populations, soldiers represent the human face of warfighting. Tough, courageous and aggressive in combat, they also show flexibility and initiative, and demonstrate discrimination and compassion when required to do so.

To be successful in the perception battle and the human dimension of warfare, our soldiers need to have an understanding of the complex human terrain in which they are operating. This can be supported by training in cultural awareness, information operations, language, media, community engagement and negotiation skills, as well as enhancing those intangible skill sets that enable rapport-building with the local populous.

**THE CURRENT OPERATING ENVIRONMENT**

> Our contemporary operations are characterised by the need for deployed land forces to work among the people, and establish a broad relationship with the supported population. We must ensure that our force protection measures don’t compromise that capacity to actually work with people. We cannot separate ourselves with multiple layers of armour if we expect to establish the kind of rapport that is essential to success in the type of operations we currently find ourselves conducting.

Lieutenant General KJ Gillespie, AO DSC, CSM, 29 October 2008

The current military operating environment is complex. Contemporary warfighting indicates that the present environment of diverse groups, each with different beliefs, allegiances and behaviours will continue. Therefore, the outcome of current conflicts
Preparing our soldiers for operations will increasingly be decided by the hearts and minds of the local and international audiences rather than on the battlefield. To succeed in this environment the land force will need to use soft warfighting skills and discriminating force to shape and influence perceptions of the target population. This requires soldiers to operate in close proximity with a number of diverse groups. Therefore, ‘close combat’ remains the key to operating in a complex human environment and it is still the most effective way to influence that environment.

An adaptive approach to counterinsurgency operations was recently undertaken by the 1st Reconstruction Task Force (RTF) in Afghanistan. The underlying principle of this operation was that winning the adaption battle was key, based on the premise that denying the enemy support of the people would make the Taliban irrelevant. To do this the RTF operated in the cognitive realm by winning over the hearts and minds of the local population and denying support to the insurgents, both physically and morally. Members of the RTF describe that what made the operation complex was not necessarily the physical terrain but the human terrain. The intricacy of the human dimension of Oruzgan was a challenge as the environment was constantly evolving as a result of the actions of coalition forces, the Taliban, governments and locals. The RTF continually adapted to the changing security situation in Oruzgan; this was a result of the RTF learning about its strengths and weaknesses, and acting upon them through a comprehensive after action review process. Lieutenant Colonel Mick Ryan, the Commander of the RTF, states that ‘military organisations must be able to adapt themselves, from top to bottom, to be able to remain effective and a relevant option for governments in countering the likely range of insurgencies in the coming decades.’

In a recent article from the US Infantry magazine, the members of Task Force Dragon of the 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team discuss the importance of human terrain mapping. In the article the authors state that the centre of gravity in all counterinsurgency operations is the population, and you must have an ability to influence and shape a population to dislocate the insurgents through lethal and non-lethal means. In order to be able to do this you need to ‘truly get to know the population, you must really understand it.’ The authors argue that the US military was not attuned to this during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM; however, through the experience of multiple rotations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US military now recognise it is central to the current fight. They now consider the population as the centre of gravity and the key to their success was finding ways to separate the insurgents from the population. To gain
an understanding of the population, Task Force Dragon, operating in south-east Iraq, used ‘human terrain mapping’ to fill the void of the information gap of what they knew and what they needed to know. To attain this information the entire battalion focused on the systematic collection of information about the people. The method used was decentralised patrols to gain the required information. The commander of the patrols focused on building relationships with key leaders and individuals, while other members would talk to as many individuals as possible to answer particular intelligence requirements. Often the patrols were reinforced with civil affairs teams, human intelligence collectors and psychological operations teams. A company commander of the task force said:

I believe it was vital to the initial impressions of the locals in our [area of operations] that they saw us out walking amongst them, knocking on doors, shaking hands and asking specific questions to that family or tribe. I feel it put a human face on our company and opened the door to many of the initial dialogues that we are currently exploiting with great success.

The authors noted that counter-insurgency operations are probably the most complex because there is a requirement for soldiers to interact with human beings. They state that building a relationship with the population is not hard; however, it does take a significant amount of time and effort.

This experience of the task force taught them that the benefits of human terrain mapping were not just having the information but, more importantly, also the ‘doing’: getting out and building relationships to attain the information that will shape and influence the environment. This was an example where the experience gained on operations predominantly contributed to their success, rather than the training they had received prior to deploying.

Just as Australian and US forces have adapted to the complex human terrain on operations, it is important that Army adapt to provide training to soldiers on how to effectively operate within a complex human terrain environment. Effective training and comprehensive handovers will reduce the requirement of the current ‘learn by doing’ approach.
THE CURRENT TRAINING FOCUS

As Army changes, so too is there a requirement for Training Command–Army to change. Our structures and practices are still rooted in the post-Vietnam peacetime Army and while we are good at delivering training, and deliver good training, we are not evolving at the same rate of the environment in which we operate changes. We need to better support the individual soldier. We need to better support the combat force. We need to better support the Army.

Major General RG Wilson, AM, 3 April 2007

In 2007, the previous Training Commander, Major General Wilson, noted that Army had transitioned from an army at peace to an army at war. He acknowledged that in some areas our processes and structures have not made the transition and that we need to evolve our training to best meet the challenges of contemporary warfare.14

One of the biggest challenges of contemporary warfare is the ability to operate effectively within complex human terrain and win the perception battle. Has our training adapted to meet this challenge? An analysis of the content of the training programs of the current 2008 All Corps Officers’ courses at the Land Warfare Centre determined the following:

Figure 1. The Module Breakup of the Current Grade Two Course15
This analysis of training at the All Corps Officer level at the Land Warfare Centre indicates that we are predominantly focused on conventional warfare tactics with little attention given to how to effectively operate within a complex human terrain environment. One of the major issues in focusing on conventional warfare is that it often ignores the complex human terrain and emphasises lethal rather than non-lethal options. It also has a tendency to focus on only one line of operation—Joint Land Combat—and can ignore the other lines of operation of population support, indigenous capacity building, population protection and public information. These lines of operation require soldiers to have well developed soft warfighting skills to be able to operate in the capacity building stage of warfare. These soft skills are predominantly only available to select sections of the Army; namely our linguists, special forces, intelligence and civil and military liaison personnel. This type of training needs to be broadened to provide all members of the Army with the skills to deal with the complex human terrain across all the lines of operation. There have been recent moves to address this with a heavier emphasis on contemporary warfare, in particular urban operations. However, the focus is still on urban ‘tactics’ rather than the soft warfighting skills, which are crucial in winning the perception battle.

The battle operating system (BOS) that most closely aligns to having an in-depth understanding of complex human terrain to win the perception battle is the Information Dominance and Influence BOS. The recently released developing doctrine Information Actions LWD 3-2-0 states that gaining ‘information dominance
over the enemy is critical to the perception battle. Joint doctrine uses the better known terminology of information operations (IO) and describes how IO activities are conducted to influence the will, understanding and capability of a target audience. 17 To be effective in achieving information dominance you need to train soldiers on how they can influence and shape perceptions through their actions and the messages they give out. This would require soldiers to be trained in understanding the complex human environment in which they are operating and an ability to apply soft skills to win over the hearts and minds of the target populace.

If you look at each of the other seven BOS you will note that we spend a significant amount of time training our soldiers to be effective at operating within that BOS alone. However, the Information Dominance and Influence BOS does not have any formal training construct within Army. The major reason for this is that the Information Dominance and Influence BOS is relatively new and does not come under a particular corps, as it is rightfully considered an all corps responsibility. By providing formal training on how to achieve information dominance and influence it will, in part, address some of the issues discussed within this paper.

A WAY FORWARD

The previous Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Peter Leahy, outlined his development intent to modernise the Army to operate across the five lines of operation through the conduct of sustained close combat to win the land battle. He provided fourteen guiding principles to meet his intent. Of those guiding principles the following have particular relevance for developing a force that can operate within complex human terrain:

- The Army is to apply a command philosophy, training and education system that empowers junior leaders for complex, unpredictable tasks.
- The Army is to regard linguistic and cultural capability as a combat capability in its own right, and is to train, organise, and employ combat linguists and regional specialists accordingly.
- The Army is to develop a comprehensive array of non-lethal capabilities throughout the force both at the individual and collective level.
- The land force is to be capable of planning, integrating, balancing and executing actions across all five lines of operation at the individual, Combined Arms Team, Battle Group and Joint Interagency Task Force levels. 18

... gaining ‘information dominance over the enemy is critical to the perception battle’.
The very nature of 'Complex Campaigning', of which Lieutenant General Leahy based his development intent, means that to modernise the Army we must equip soldiers with soft as well as the hard warfighting skills to operate effectively across the five lines of operation. It could be argued that four of the five lines of operation will be more reliant on soldiers having the soft skills of cultural understanding, negotiation and language to be successful in winning the land battle. The question that needs to be asked is, are we equipping soldiers with these skills or are we still predominantly focused on providing them with hard warfighting skills? The answer to most of us involved in the day-to-day training of soldiers would be that our focus is on using hard warfighting skills to win the land battle with minimal training being provided on soft skills. There have been several directives recently released that address this issue, either directly or indirectly. The key points from these directives are:

- **CA Directive 26/07 – Adaptive Campaigning Implementation Directive.** The directive outlines Line of Development (LOD) One as being organisational learning and adaptability. Lieutenant General Leahy stated: ‘Ensure Army remains a world class and fully capable, learning organisation able to defeat highly innovative, adaptive adversaries employing both asymmetric and symmetric capabilities. This will be achieved through relevant and adaptive doctrine, training, education and leadership aimed at enhancing professional mastery throughout Army.’ One of the key intents of this is to ensure the Army is able to operate across all five lines of operation and win the land battle in complex warfighting environments. The CA Development Intent also outlines the requirement for Army to be optimised for sustained close combat, predominantly in urbanised terrain, as part of a joint inter-agency task force. When operating in urban environments there is a requirement to have an in-depth understanding of the human terrain as well as the physical aspects of the tactical environment. This development intent will require Army to train soldiers on how to operate in a complex human terrain as well as the complex physical and informational terrain environments.

- **Commander Training Command Individual Training and Education Development Directive 2007-12.** The directive provides specific guidance within LOD Two where it states Training Command must redesign training and education to ensure expertise in contemporary warfighting. ‘Army training must reflect the way that Army will fight.’ As well as providing training in weapons and tactics, training must also provide the soft skills needed to successfully navigate the...
Preparing our soldiers for operations—language, media and cultural training must be routinely available to all soldiers. To meet this intent, training command establishments have been tasked to develop an urban operations training capability, and Training Command will establish a ‘soft skills’ training and education capability which will include language, culture and negotiation skills training.

- **Commander Training Command Project Directive 01/08 – Army Strategic Plan.** In this directive the Training Commander states that ‘Commanders and instructors are to seek opportunities to ensure training is contemporary and meets the needs of the combat force. Our training needs to be relevant and be delivered at the right place at the right time.’ He also outlines a requirement for training and education to change to meet the requirements of an ‘army at war.’ Within the individual training and education plan he outlines that soldiers require expertise in contemporary warfighting; the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to operate within a complex human terrain environment being key areas to be developed. He also states that complex warfighting is to be adopted as the default training context, and urban terrain as the default operational environment for Training Command–Army courses.

- **Languages Other Than English and Cultural Awareness Capability Implementation Plan.** The previous CA’s vision within this plan is that ‘Army’s soldiers are prepared for the challenge of operating in complex human terrain.’ He states that the ‘Land Force must be capable of developing intimacy with the population while conducting operations within the complex operating environment. Influencing people and their perceptions is fundamentally a human activity which requires personal contact, proximity and an enduring presence.’ The implementation plan outlays a requirement to increase the number of linguists within Army and provides a framework for providing cultural awareness training to the broader Army. Headquarters Training Command–Army has been tasked with conducting a training needs analysis on the inclusion of language and cultural awareness training as part of the all corps soldiers and officer training continuum.

The direction provided is clear. Training establishments need to adapt to meet the requirements outlined by providing training that is contemporary, relevant, and assists trainees in attaining the skills to operate within complex human terrain.

‘Our training needs to be relevant and be delivered at the right place at the right time.’

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THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION

Are we preparing our soldiers with the skills to operate within a complex human terrain environment on operations? You may have your own conclusions but from my perspective the answer is ‘no’. We are still predominantly focused on providing hard warfighting skills to operate within a conventional warfare environment. There is no doubt that this is critical, as conventional warfighting skills provide the foundation for all types of operations. However, what we do need to do is find time for training soldiers in those equally important soft warfighting skills of cultural awareness, language, media, community engagement, information operations and negotiation skills. It is acknowledged that this is being done to varying degrees throughout different sections of the Army; however, what is required is a concerted effort to train all members with these skills before they deploy by making it a regular part of the training cycle.

Finding the right balance between training soldiers in hard and soft warfighting skills is not easy, and we must be careful that we do not over-emphasise a single type of warfare at the cost of another to achieve the training requirements. This was well stated by Lieutenant General Sir John Kiszely, Director of the UK Defence Academy, in his article ‘Post Modern Challenges for Modern Warriors’ where he says that

we should recognise that over focus on a single type of warfare—large scale, conventional warfare—inhibited understanding of other types of warfare, and of warfare as a whole. We should, therefore, beware the potential over-focus on post modern warfare having the same result.27

There are several directives within Army that outline a way to achieve a more even balance between hard and soft warfighting skills training. Time will tell whether Army has had the ability to achieve a more even balance and has the flexibility to adapt.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined whether Army is preparing our soldiers with the skills to operate within a complex human terrain environment. The FLOC states that war is fundamentally a human activity. Therefore, warfare in the land environment is ‘human centric’ and requires the land force to be able to develop intimacy with the
Preparing our soldiers for operations while they are conducting operations within a complex environment. Recent operational experience of US and Australian soldiers has outlined that the key to success on operations is winning over the hearts and minds of the local population, and denying support to the insurgents both physically and morally. Currently, our training focus is predominantly based around providing the hard warfighting skills to be successful in a conventional war. There is no argument that this is important; however, our training also needs to provide soldiers with the key soft warfighting skills that are critical if we are going to being successful within a complex human terrain environment. This training requirement has been acknowledged, either directly or indirectly, in a number of recently released directives. Implementing these directives will see a greater emphasis on providing soldiers with the soft skills required to operate within a complex human terrain environment and will even the balance between hard and soft warfighting skills training.

ENDNOTES

1 Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, ‘Getting the Thinking Right’, Chief of Army speech given to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 22 August 2008.
2 Ibid.
3 Complex Warfighting, Department of Defence, Canberra, 7 May 2004, p. 3.
6 Ibid, p. 5.
7 Soft skills are essentially people skills, the non-technical, personal habits, personality traits that determine your strengths as a leader, listener, negotiator and conflict mediator.
8 Land Warfare Doctrine 1 – The Fundamentals of Land Warfare, p. 15
9 Ibid, p. 18.
10 Complex Warfighting, p. 25.
12 Ibid.
15 Statistics were taken from Grade 2 Course Program 19 May to 27 June 2008.
16 Statistics were taken from Grade 3 Course Program 7 April to 15 May 2008.
19 Hard skills are the technical skills required within the work place.
23 Ibid, p. 4.
24 Commander Training Command – Army, ‘Project Directive 1/08 Training Command – Army Strategic Plan (TC-A 2016)’.

THE AUTHOR

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MILITARY HISTORY

DEADLY PRIDE AND THE INFAMOUS CASE OF ‘POST 11’*

CRAIG STOCKINGS

ABSTRACT

This article provides an in-depth exploration and examination of operations against and around Post 11 as part of the Australian assault on Bardia. Despite the interesting nature of such operations in their own right, it aims at more than simply recounting details of this remarkable action. Events in and around Post 11 some 67 years ago provide a number of salutary lessons for modern commanders. In particular, the destructive effects of inflated ego and personal pride, stubbornness in the face of commonsense, command negligence and tactical incompetence are brought to the fore. These types of problems are as timeless as they are dangerous. Post 11 is what happens when they reign unchecked.

On the morning of 3 January 1941, the first significant land battle of the Second World War planned and fought by an Australian formation began. With the first rays of dawn the soldiers of Major General Iven Mackay’s 6 Division attacked the Italian colonial fortress town of Bardia, a small harbour on the Mediterranean coast of what was, at that time, Italy’s Libyan colony. Situated a

* This article has been peer reviewed
short distance west of the Egyptian border in the province of Cyrenaica, it had been
developed between the wars as a military outpost and was fortified with a string
of concrete defensive posts, almost 30 kilometres long, built in an arc around the
town. Although Bardia, throughout the 1930s, had been a sleepy village with a quiet
garrison, Mussolini’s declaration of war against Britain in June 1940 dramatically
increased its strategic significance and sealed its fate. The fortress was initially used
as a staging area for a rather unspectacular Italian invasion of Egypt in September
1940. Two months later, following a strikingly successful British counter-offensive,
Bardia found itself on the front line as an obstacle to the continuing British thrust
into Libya. In the last weeks of 1940 it was besieged. At this point the Australians,
having begun to arrive in the Middle-East in February 1940, were called to put into
effect what they had been so busy practising.

Following a successful break-in by 16 Brigade on the western face of the Italian
perimeter on the first morning of the attack, after close to 55 hours of fighting, the
last Italian defenders laid down their arms. The victory cost 6 Division 129 men
killed and 329 wounded. Italian casualties totalled close to 1000 dead, 3000 injured
and a further 36,000 taken prisoner, including the five divisional commanders. In
numerical terms alone, leaving aside the vast quantities of military stores and equipment captured by the
attackers within the Bardia perimeter, the battle was
a monumental Australian success.

As the opening artillery barrage for the main
6 Division assault against the western face of the
Bardia perimeter erupted, Lieutenant Colonel A H L
Godfrey launched the Victorians of 2/6 Battalion
against the line of posts on the southern face of the
Italian line at Wadi el Muatered. He had been ordered
to create a diversion to distract Italian attention from the main point of break-in,
11 kilometres to the north-west, but did nothing of the sort. Instead of a feint attack,
Godfrey mounted a full-scale assault to seize and occupy the posts on northern bank
of Wadi el Muatered. In doing so, he sentenced many of his men to death for no
good operational purpose. Once the assault began, Godfrey’s men and the Italians
opposing them fought some of the hardest and most costly actions of the entire battle.
The centre of gravity for both sides became the struggle for Post 11 on the extreme left
of the 2/2 Battalion attack—an epic which has passed into Anzac legend. Ivor Hele’s
famous oil painting of the action hangs to this day in the Australian War Memorial.
However, for all Hele’s imagery of savage combat and horrible aftermath, this engage-
ment, like the rest of Godfrey’s attack, should never have unfolded as it did.

From the time 2/6 Battalion deployed opposite the Italian perimeter in late
December, an intensive patrolling program made Godfrey well aware of two important
facts. First, the terrain to his front was difficult and dominated by Wadi el Muatered, around 90 metres wide and between 110–140 metres deep, with precipitous sides, running across the entire front of 2/6 Battalion’s position. Certainly, there were covered approaches from the south available to Godfrey’s men in the form of two tributary wadis. Brigadier Savige, 17 Brigade’s commander and Godfrey’s immediate superior, christened the eastern most of these ‘Rowan Wadi’, after Captain JG Rowan, who commanded C Company stationed closest to this branch. Further west was ‘Little Wadi’, named after Captain MCD Little, who led D Company positioned in this area. At the same time these tributaries offered no easy way to overcome the natural obstacle of Wadi el Muatered, even if it could be entered. The ‘mouths’ of Rowan and Little Wadis were well covered out to a distance of almost 400 metres by Posts 7 and 11 respectively, sited on the northern banks of the wadi.¹

The second key aspect of Godfrey’s position was the obvious strength of the Italian line facing him. In addition to the known concentration of artillery in the area, local Italian commanders had worked hard to develop the natural advantages of their position. There was no doubt that the defensive line on north bank of Wadi el Muatered was superior to any other point on the Bardia perimeter. The posts in the area were generally larger and more formidable than those elsewhere. Due to the nature of the broken terrain they were also closer together, enabling mutual support, and the Italians had built sangars and machine-gun posts in between to cover any sheltered approaches. Post 11 was particularly strong. It was sited opposite Godfrey’s extreme left flank, and stood where Wadi el Muatered made a wide arc, which provided the defenders with an excellent field of vision and fire. In addition, in the bed of the Wadi el Muatered the Italians had built rows of double apron wire, around three metres wide, to entangle and expose an attacker to fire from the northern bank. All ground south of the Italian line—with the exception of Wadi el Muatered’s northern lip and the tributary wadis noted—could be swept by fire out to around 1000 metres. A successful attack on any Italian post in this vicinity would require an advance over open ground, or else advance using the tributary wadis deliberately covered by Italian posts. On reaching Wadi el Muatered, an attacker would have to climb down the steep southern bank, pausing in an exposed position to cut the wire, then climb up the northern side, deal with any sangar complexes discovered, and finally attack the posts themselves. All of this would have to be done under pre-registered and well sited Italian indirect and small arms fire.²

In the days leading up to 3 January, Godfrey’s men had essentially succeeded in carrying out the pre-attack divisional deception plan of attracting Italian attention...
south to prevent it wandering in the direction of the true break-in point further north-west. In the last days of December, patrol and intelligence reports noted a substantial increase in Italian activity opposite 2/6 Battalion. The posts along Wadi el Muatered were being packed with men and weapons, just as the divisional planning staff had hoped. Captured Italian documents confirmed up to eight full regiments had been drawn to the southern perimeter to face the expected Australian attack. The Italians had long planned their defence with an attack from the south in mind, and were actively preparing to receive it. This was as clear to Godfrey as it was to Brigadier Savige and Major General Mackay. It was, after all, a key reason why Colonel Frank Berryman, the senior division operations officer, had advocated a main divisional attack from the west and not the south. Experience had also shown that the Italian troops in the vicinity of Wadi el Muatered, drawn predominantly from 63 Cyrene Division, were far more aggressive and alert than those encountered further north-west. Their reactions to Australian probing in the area were vigorous, and at the same time displayed a high level of fire discipline. The night before the scheduled ‘demonstration’, patrol reports from 2/6 Battalion concluded that the ‘enemy is now very much on the alert and appear to be now conserving ammunition for the expected attack’.

It would seem logical then, all things considered, that actually mounting an attack against the Italian line at Wadi el Muatered might not be the wisest course of action. What would be the point? The effort to deceive the Italians as to the true location of the break-in had already succeeded. Certainly a demonstration, like that actually ordered, might insure against the unlikely eventuality of Italian concentrations in the vicinity moving north-west. Moreover, such a diversion, perhaps by fire only, might accomplish this without undue risk. For all the associated danger of assaulting a well prepared enemy position, exactly where it was expected, and at its strongest point, a full-scale attack could achieve no more. Physical possession of the posts was meaningless. If the main divisional attack succeeded, they would quickly become isolated, vulnerable to the rear, and essentially untenable. The posts along the Wadi el Muatered could not hold out while the rest of the Bardia defensive system crumbled. Against explicit orders, however, an all-out assault is exactly what Godfrey launched. The question is why?

Godfrey’s decision to attack rather than demonstrate against the Italian posts on the northern bank of Wadi el Muatered, in clear contradiction to the instructions he had received, was not simply a case of disobeying orders. The complex trail of decision-making that led to this point began in the confusion created by inconsistencies between Brigadier Savige’s brigade orders to Godfrey on 1 January—based on agreements reached at a series of divisional conferences—and a written divisional
order received by 17 Brigade late that night. It is clear that in his original orders Savige directed 2/6 Battalion to capture the Italian posts along the Wadi el Muatered. Godfrey was to ‘occupy’ the area ‘from Post 5 to Post 11’. When Savige received written divisional orders, however, he was surprised to read 2/6 Battalion was now to stage only a ‘demonstration’ against the south-western corner of the southern sector.

In challenging Mackay’s written orders, Savige complained that 2/6 Battalion would at the very least need to occupy the northern bank of Wadi el Muatered shortly after H-hour for the main divisional attack. In his reply, Mackay amended his instructions but not the fact that Godfrey’s men were still to stage a demonstration only. However, Mackay now added the caveat that if (and only if) a favourable situation arose, Savige might use his discretion to occupy Italian Posts 5–11. This was not to be done from the outset, but only as favourable circumstances permitted. Savige re-issued instructions to Godfrey to amend his battalion plan along these lines with clear orders to ‘demonstrate by fire’. However, Godfrey ignored the alteration and chose to go ahead with his original plan, directing his men to ‘capture enemy positions on Wadi el Muatered from Post 3 to Post 11’. He told Captain Little: ‘I will see you then in Post 11 tomorrow morning, or I shall not see you at all.’ Such orders were a direct and unequivocal contradiction of both divisional and brigade instructions. As it turned out, in the case of Post 11, Godfrey pressed his attack for three days, much more than a demonstration and certainly not a reaction to any ‘favourable situation’.

Godfrey’s actions have baffled authors for more than 60 years. In 1947, Gavin Long, Australia’s official historian of the Second World War, wrote to a number of officers present to see if they could shed some light on the issue. Long never received a credible explanation. Within this vacuum he took an uncritical approach and gave the first of a number of well-worn excuses in that Godfrey did not have time to change the orders he originally issued after receiving Savige’s amendments. This is nonsense. Savige issued his amended orders at 9.30 am on 2 January, giving Godfrey 20 hours to react. Savige himself managed to rewrite and reissue new brigade orders three hours after receiving Mackay’s amendments. Godfrey had plenty of time to change his plan. He chose not to. Godfrey confirmed his orders at 7.00 pm on 2 January, directing an attack.

Many historians have also justified Godfrey’s decision by claiming that a lack of clear instructions caused him to misinterpret Savige’s orders, thinking that they somehow implied the need to capture Post 11 and the other Italian positions on the northern lip of Wadi el Muatered. Again this is nonsense. Godfrey himself undermined this argument after the battle in praising the ‘clear orders and instructions
received from the Brigadier'. Any lack of clarity was removed by Mackay’s orders of 2 January. Savige’s amendments of the same day were unequivocal. So were Godfrey’s own orders to his men, written in his own hand. There is no basis to support the contention that the higher plan had not been made sufficiently clear. A slight spin on the ‘confusion’ argument is that there was some ambiguity about what a ‘demonstration’ might actually mean. How far should it be pressed? The answer to such questions must vary as circumstances dictate, but clearly, regardless of terrain or tactical disposition, a demonstration is not an assault aimed at capturing and holding an enemy position.

The final justification used by various authors to soften criticism of Godfrey is the idea that tactical necessity demanded the occupation of the Italian posts on the northern bank of Wadi el Muatered. This was the angle pursued by both Godfrey and Savige after the fact. The argument is that only the north bank of the wadi provided sufficient cover from shellfire once the ‘demonstration’ began. Being on the north bank would itself necessitate the capture of nearby posts. This logic is circular and flawed. The battalion had already shown itself capable of mounting fighting patrols under shellfire without taking casualties, and the companies themselves were dug into sheltered positions. A demonstration using fighting patrols, and certainly one ‘by fire’, would have borne no unacceptable degree of risk. It would have been much less dangerous than the assault actually mounted. Godfrey’s insistence about the need to capture the posts ‘at the earliest’ makes sense only if it is based on an assumption that no demonstration could occur without occupation. This was obviously untrue, even to Godfrey.

If traditional excuses fail to explain Godfrey’s actions, what then were the true reasons for disobeying orders at such a hefty price? The first part of the answer lies with Godfrey’s character and leadership style. As patrolling operations in front of Wadi el Muatered in late December proved, he was an aggressive commander. He was often to be found further forward than was prudent, and he was killed in November 1941 leading a brigade at El Alamein. Savige called him ‘a bold fighter’, ‘inclined to be impulsive’. In Godfrey’s first battle of the war, Savige later reflected, ‘he would, I think, resent the enemy holding up his advance with the likelihood that his soldierly pride might force him into retaliatory action which otherwise he might not contemplate.’ If it was soldierly pride that tipped Godfrey’s hand then this is a severe indictment. Further evidence points in a similar direction. On the eve of battle, Godfrey stressed to his men that this was their first great test. He wanted, in no uncertain terms, to teach the Italians a lesson. His attitude was that, ‘whenever the AIF went into the lines in the last war the Germans knew that,
whatever the outcome, they were going to get hurt.\textsuperscript{15} ‘We shall give these birds,’ claimed Godfrey, ‘to understand the same.’\textsuperscript{16} He was quite determined to ‘give the enemy such a thrashing that they will never stand up to an assault by Australian infantry again.’\textsuperscript{17} A simple demonstration would never do. Godfrey always intended to attack. However, an untempered aggressive streak, a desire to make his name, or a romantic determination to outshine his Anzac forebears, does not justify unnecessary loss of life.\textsuperscript{18}

Despite the circumstantial evidence, Godfrey does not bear the responsibility for 2/6 Battalion’s needless assault alone. Brigadier Savige must share the blame. In the final equation it was Savige’s tacit agreement with Godfrey’s plan that encouraged and facilitated the attack. Despite the letter of the orders he passed down from Mackay on 2 January, the spirit of Savige’s intent was something else entirely. His written orders to 2/6 Battalion belied a commonality of purpose and intent shared with Godfrey. The attack was forbidden by Savige, with ‘a wink and a nudge.’ There was an implied understanding between the two that this ‘demonstration’ would be much more.

Savige and Godfrey were old friends from their days in the Victorian militia and had a close personal relationship. Savige was also intensely interested in Godfrey’s area of operations and visited 2/6 Battalion once or more each day in the lead up to the assault. Before receiving written divisional orders Savige believed, like Godfrey, that the Wadi el Muatered posts ought to be taken, and the two men had already worked out the essential elements of this plan. In his protestations to Mackay late on 1 January, Savige showed his hand. Not only did he contend that 2/6 Battalion should ‘at least be on the north face of the wadi when the battle opens’, but that such a recommendation was based on ‘carefully laid plans and actions so thoroughly carried out by the CO and troops of 2/6 Bn.’\textsuperscript{19} During the final divisional coordinating conference in the afternoon before the battle, Savige talked of the armoured support required to ‘assist the forward company of 2/6 to get through the perimeter.’\textsuperscript{20} He was clearly thinking of much more than a demonstration. Savige and Godfrey were of the same mind. Godfrey wanted to attack and Savige wanted to let him. Contrary orders, especially those originating from Colonel Berryman, a regular officer and no friend of Savige’s, were not going to change their minds, despite the fact that Savige was now forced to be seen to comply with Mackay’s directives. The situation was well summed up by Sergeant H (Jo) Gullett, commanding 17 Platoon, D Company, 2/6 Battalion, who was there at the time. Gullett wrote that Savige and Godfrey ‘looked at each other and they agreed. Someone needed to make a decision and they did not baulk at it.'
A feint attack would not do. While impossible to prove, it seems clear that there was a covert understanding between Savige and Godfrey. Despite written divisional orders, passed on by Savige, both men understood that 2/6 Battalion would attack.

Further evidence of a behind-the-scenes understanding between Godfrey and Savige surfaced after the battle. Godfrey wrote that ‘[Savige] agreed with my deductions, and I feel had this advice not been acted on, and a feint attack only been made [as Savige in fact ordered], the casualties in my Battalion would have been enormous’. Furthermore, Savige never once criticised Godfrey for what appeared to be direct disobedience of his orders. To the contrary, during the battle he wrote to Godfrey noting that ‘all I can say about 2/6 and its work today is “Gallant Gentlemen”’, hardly the sentiments of a brigade commander whose instructions had been ignored. In his after-action report Savige praised Godfrey’s overall conduct as ‘magnificent’. After Bardia, Godfrey was not court-martialled as might be expected. Rather he was decorated and subsequently promoted on Savige’s recommendation, and with Savige’s support. Such inflated praise and continuing support for Godfrey masked, perhaps, a measure of personal culpability. After the war Savige reflected on both his relationship with Godfrey and his own responsibility in encouraging the attack at Wadi el Muatered, noting that his subordinate

would not deliberately disobey my orders … we had a mutual faith and trust in each other … If there were errors in the fight on my southern sector by Godfrey I am bound to accept full measure of blame. I knew … the possible need to capture those posts … I concurred with this and think I recommended this course of action, in this situation, in our discussions.

Godfrey’s attack on Wadi el Muatered disobeyed Mackay’s instructions and the paper orders issued by Savige. At the same time it was perfectly aligned with his brigade commander’s intent. Both Godfrey and Savige share the blame for an attack that should never have been launched and the responsibility for the men who died needlessly as a result.

Putting aside the tangled path that led to the decision, orders were passed for 2/6 Battalion to attack and it is time to examine exactly how Godfrey planned to execute such an ambitious gamble. The attack was planned in two phases. The first, under the cover of darkness on the morning of 3 January, involved an infiltration by three assault companies to positions within 350 metres of the southern bank of the Wadi el Muatered, from which they were to launch three essentially independent
company attacks. On the left Captain Little’s D Company, and in the centre Captain Rowan’s C Company, were both to creep forward using the cover of Wadi Little and Wadi Rowan. To their right, B Company, led by Captain W T Muhlhan, had no such cover and were to move over open ground. Meanwhile, Godfrey’s headquarters and a reserve company were to close up to their rear. All phase one moves were to be completed by 5:15 am. After a short pause, followed by two five-minute artillery concentrations on Posts 7–13, at 5:45 am phase two was scheduled to begin. At this moment all three assaulting companies were to launch themselves at their objectives. Little’s men were to capture Post 11 and a road junction immediately to its west, while Rowan’s company was to take Posts 7 and 9. Captain Muhlhan was to support Rowan’s attack by an advance against Post 5 and, if possible, to extend the line east to Post 3.²⁸

Nervous energy made it unnecessary to wake most of Godfrey’s men in the pre-dawn darkness before the attack. After a quick, cold breakfast soldiers filed past their quartermasters for extra ammunition while company commanders shook hands and issued final tots of rum. Still under the cover of night, the shivering men of 2/6 Battalion moved to their assembly areas. The going was tough over broken, rough and rocky ground, but the forward elements of the battalion successfully moved into Rowan and Little Wadis, and pushed on close to their junction with Wadi el Muatered. Once in position, the men crouched and waited. In D Company, Captain R Kiddle, Little’s second-in-command, visited his platoon commanders to discuss the coming attack over a whiskey flask. At exactly 5:45 am, as the dawn broke, the battalion attack began. Immediately, in response to the short Australian preparatory barrage, the full

![Diagram](image)

The plan for 2/6 Battalion’s ‘demonstration’, which was in reality a full-scale assault on the Italian line at Wadi el Muatered on the morning of 3 January.
The weight of Italian artillery concentrated in the southern Mereiga Sector was brought to bear. An ever increasing storm of shrapnel greeted the Australians as they emerged from their covered positions, and three close company-level battles erupted along the northern bank of Wadi el Muatered.29

After a desperate scramble in the centre of the battalion attack, Captain Rowan’s C Company managed to cross the Wadi el Muatered and carve out a tenuous salient, a mere 250 metres wide by 90 metres deep, on the far bank. During a brief lull in the Italian fire, one of Rowan’s forward platoons managed to close on and then capture Post 9.30 After watching a second platoon attack further to the right against Post 7 falter, three private soldiers from the vicinity of Post 9 took the initiative. They moved along the north bank of Wadi el Muatered and proceeded to make their own small-scale flanking assault. Under covering Bren gun fire the three advanced along the edge of Post 7, throwing grenades into open slits until it surrendered. This remarkable action enabled C Company to occupy Post 7. Testament to the uncommon determination of the defenders in this area, the Australians faced an immediate counter-attack, but successfully repulsed it.31

To the right of Rowan’s attacks, Captain Muhlhan’s B Company met early trouble. Once across the wadi, Muhlhan’s men quickly occupied a 350-metre stretch of the northern bank but, under concerted Italian counterattack for more than an hour, were unable to advance further towards their objectives at Posts 5 and 3. As B Company held its tenuous position under fire from machine-guns on its right flank, another counterattack against Post 9 forced Captain Rowan to reinforce it with men from Post 7. Muhlhan’s company subsequently took over the post, grateful for the cover it provided. By 8:00 am, the situation in the centre and on the right flank of the 2/6 Battalion attack was grim. After a difficult advance, C and B Companies held Posts 9 and 7, and a few hundred metres of wadi bank to the east. Posts 5 and 3 were still in Italian hands and both companies were under considerable pressure from local Italian counterattacks, shelling and small arms fire. Neither would be advancing soon. The situation for Little’s D Company on the left flank however, was even more desperate.32

Captain Little, described as a ‘tall, well built man with a crisp, military cast of features, a clipped moustache, and a voice to go with them’, was ordered by Godfrey to take Post 11 on the left of the battalion assault.33 This was a crucial assignment. Located on a sharp bend on the south-western corner of the Italian perimeter, Post 11 covered both the western edge of Wadi el Muatered and the line of perimeter posts running north towards the main divisional break-in point. Little ordered
16 and 17 Platoons to cross the Wadi el Muatered to the right of Post 11 to attack it from the flank. The former was commanded by Lieutenant John Bowen, a ‘large, kindly, serious country boy’, and the latter by Sergeant Gullett. Meanwhile 18 Platoon, under Sergeant Romney Cole, ‘a giant of a man’, who had just bought a farm and become engaged, was to pressure Post 11 from the front as the flanking attack unfolded. After emerging from Wadi el Muatered, Bowen and Gullett’s advance was to be covered by machine-gun fire from a platoon of Vickers guns and a section of battalion mortars. In a key decision, Little detached all nine of his company’s Bren guns to the Vickers guns location. He thought to increase the weight of fire protecting his flanking platoons and, without the benefit of experience, judged the Brens unsuitable for close-quarters fighting in poor light.

Before H-hour, Little’s men crept north along Little Wadi, keeping pace with Rowan’s C Company on their right. After pausing 350 metres short of Wadi el Muatered, at 5:45 am the company began its attack. In fading darkness the two flanking platoons moved out across the open ground to their right. The air was soon filled with shells, and tracer bullets fizzed over the heads of the attackers. Nonetheless, Bowen and Gullett advanced side by side and, although sure that the Italians could see them as they climbed down into the Wadi el Muatered and cut their way through the wire apron at its base, as yet no casualties had been taken. As the northern bank was being scaled, an Italian heavy machine-gun situated 30 metres back from the lip opened fire. This gun was silenced by a few well aimed grenades, and the advance continued. Once across the wadi the two platoons swung left and approached to within 90 metres of Post 11. At this point the Australian artillery barrage stopped and was replaced by an eerie and frightening silence. Still the defenders in Post 11 did not engage. The Australians inched forward and went to work cutting gaps in the wire surrounding the post. The two platoons inched through a gap cut in the wire, one after the other. The platoon commanders agreed that Bowen would go first. When Gullett was safely through the wire he would shout: ‘I am ready’. Bowen would then give the order to charge. The Australians formed an assault line and paused on one knee waiting the signal.

When all were in position, only 35 metres from the post, Bowen bellowed ‘Up! D Company! Up! Up!’ Men sprang to their feet and raced forward. The Australian charge was short-lived. After covering half the distance to their objective the attackers were met by a wall of Italian small arms fire and a volley of grenades thrown from a trench/sangar complex surrounding the post. Unbeknown to D Company, the Italians had improved, fortified, and decided to fight from the concrete communications.
trenches running between the post’s main firing points. This gave the position a measure of all-round defence which foiled Little’s plan to flank it. It was now also apparent that the success of the two attacking platoons thus far had been no more than a consequence of strict Italian fire discipline. As one, the defenders released a hail of lead from point-blank range. In a few moments the Australians were on their stomachs and caught in open ground. With few places to go, the non-commissioned officers called their men forward and the crawling advance to the Italian position continued, with casualties mounting.37

Unlike some of their counterparts on the western face of the perimeter, the defenders within Post 11 had no intention of surrendering. The now disjointed, uncoordinated and desperate Australian assault had two basic axes. Gullett’s platoon pressed in on the post from the right and rear, while Bowen’s men inched forward further left. Bowen and some of his men managed to reach the outer Italian trenches and took cover behind a low stone wall. Here, Bowen tossed grenades into various Italian positions until he was fatally wounded. With his last breaths the young officer called his men further forward and crawled to within a few metres of Post 11. Back at the stone wall Sergeant P Millar, Bowen’s second-in-command, was shot by a treacherous Italian prisoner after hastily arranging an unsuccessful bayonet charge at some nearby sangars and a machine-gun post. One by one as they struggled forward towards Post 11, most of those left of Bowen’s platoon were killed by bullet and grenade. Only eight survived, by seeking shelter in a captured Italian sangar. Two hours later they were taken prisoner.38

To Bowen’s left, a section of Gullett’s platoon also managed to reach the first line of Italian trenches and sangars. There, in a scene reminiscent of the attack on Lone Pine in August 1915, the Australians set about pulling timber covers off trenches and shooting down into the defenders below. This small group, led by Corporal B A F Latham, cleared a number of trenches in this fashion but were soon isolated and taking fire from machine-guns positioned closer to the post. Forced to stay within the covered Italian trench, Latham’s men fought their way along its length until stumbling into a large bay filled with Italians. There the two parties killed each other.39

Meanwhile, the remainder of Gullett’s platoon had closed up behind Latham’s thrust and moved into the outer Italian trench not far from the anti-tank ditch surrounding the post. There they paused to toss grenades. In response, the defenders brought down a curtain of fire. Eight men were killed in an instant and the rest pinned by the same Italian machine-gunners who had forced Latham
Underground. Gullett and a small party of six—Sergeant J B Scott, Corporal V N Maloney, Privates J Stewart and J Berley, and two brothers from Queensland, Claude and Bernie Damm—leapt out of their trench to take the gun. As the group scrambled forward, Stewart and Scott were shot dead. The Damms and Maloney pressed on and Gullett, although stunned by a nearby explosion, soon rejoined them. Surprised at the unlikely action, the Italian machine-gun crew surrendered. With no capacity for prisoners the Australians overturned the gun and sent the Italians away. The same small band then launched successful raids on two more nearby machine-gun nests. By now, however, it was clear to Gullett that Post 11 could not be taken. He struggled back to the outer trench and found, in addition to a number of other wounded Australians taking shelter there, only one additional uninjured man: Private H F Brockley, a driver from Battalion Headquarters, who had abandoned his post to join the attack. A veil of eerie silence descended. Perhaps stunned by the ferocity of the assault, or convinced no attackers could still be alive, for the first time the Italians seemed uncertain of what to do. With dawn breaking and no further sounds coming from Bowen’s flank, Gullett ordered all those who were able to leave him where he was and withdraw. 40

Private Brockley refused Gullett’s command and instead began carrying him away from the Italian position. This began an epic withdrawal by Gullett, Brockley, the now wounded Maloney and the two Damm brothers. By this time Bernie was carrying his injured brother Claude on his back. The party crossed the first trench without problems, but from then on were forced to fight their way out. Gullett was further wounded in the right leg by shrapnel as grenades began to rain down. One exploded by Gullett’s right hand, lacerating his arm and face. By now the sun was rising and Italians began emerging from cover to rush the group. On each occasion they were repulsed by accurate rifle fire from the Damms, Brockley and Maloney. The Australians retreated further by leapfrogging backwards in groups of two, covering each other’s movement. After withdrawing in this fashion for around 250 metres, the group was ambushed by six Italians who rushed them from a section of unseen trench. The Damms shot and killed them to a man. Just as the Australian party approached the lip of Wadi el Muatered, however, the wounded Claude Damm (still on his brother’s shoulder), was hit again in the chest. He remarked to his brother, ‘Remember me to the parents, Bernie,’ and died without saying goodbye. 41

As the group disappeared below the lip of the Wadi el Muatered, Italian mortar bombs began to fall among them. An Italian soldier appeared in front of the dazed and wounded Gullett. Pressured by the moment, the Italian shot but missed.
With no weapon to respond, Gullett threw a damaged pistol and walked towards his attacker. The Italian fired and missed a second time, and as he was lining up a third attempt he was shot by Bernie Damm, moving along the edge of the Wadi el Muatered. Bernie held more Italians at bay while Gullett crossed the wadi. Unable to find a gap in the wire at the base of the wadi, Gullett forced his way under it. His leather jerkin protected him from Australian mortar fire, which had begun to suppress the northern bank. Still not safe, as Gullett clambered up the southern bank an Italian machine-gunner spotted and engaged him, shooting him through the left forearm. Eventually Gullett made it up the bank and took refuge behind a low stone wall. There he found Maloney, busily sniping at the offending Italian machine-gunner. The pair was soon joined by Bernie Damm and Brockley, with bullets flying all around them. Of the original forty-eight attackers in 16 and 17 Platoons, only these four had made it back to the Australian lines. 42 Major Rowan met up with Gullett at the stone wall and asked where D Company was positioned. Maloney replied: ‘We are here’. 43 Gullett drew on a cigarette, amusing his small party as the inhaled smoke curled out of a hole in his cheek. 44

Gullett drew on a cigarette, amusing his small party as the inhaled smoke curled out of a hole in his cheek.

Meanwhile, the situation back in Little Wadi was desperate. Little’s original plan to use Sergeant Cole’s platoon to pressure the frontal approach to Post 11, thereby distracting the defenders from the flanking attack, was a complete failure. This was no real surprise given that Cole advanced down the line of a tributary wadi against a post sited for the specific purpose of destroying any attack seeking to use this covered approach. Cole’s men walked into a pre-planned killing zone, exactly as those who designed Post 11 had hoped. The platoon was soon pinned by a considerable weight of machine-gun and anti-tank gun fire from Post 11, still 45 metres short of the wire in the base of Wadi el Muatered. Cole was forced to retire and seek shelter in abandoned Italian sangars located on the southern lip of the wadi, facing Post 11. With desperate energy his men built existing sangar walls higher and dug in for the remainder of the morning, taking casualties, and returning fire whenever possible. 45

At this point, the appalling state of affairs for D Company went from bad to worse. In an amazing stroke of bad luck, at 8:00 am Little and Kiddle, conferring back in Little Wadi, fell victim to a stray Italian mortar bomb that landed squarely between them. Little was badly injured by shrapnel and Kiddle, mortally wounded, died en route to the battalion’s aid post. In tragic irony, Brigadier Savige had previously designated Kiddle as his liaison officer to 16 Brigade, but changed his mind and thus sealed Kiddle’s fate, when Godfrey pleaded to leave him in 2/6 Battalion.
What was left of D Company was now led by its senior survivor, Warrant Officer Jock Cowrie, the Company Sergeant Major. Cowrie inherited a dire situation. Two platoons were essentially destroyed, and the third was pinned and suffering badly on the southern bank of Wadi el Muatered opposite Post 11. Even the attached Vickers platoon had been all but wiped out, with only one gun still in action. Meanwhile, Italian machine-gunners firing on fixed lines poured thousands of rounds into the vicinity of the D Company position. According to Chester Wilmot, ‘the valley sang with the whine of ricocheting bullets’.

With some idea that something had gone very wrong but without a clear picture of events, Godfrey sent forward a reserve platoon to support a further advance by Cole’s men. The best it could do was to help hold the positions in front of Post 11 and to keep digging. With D Company now bereft of officers, the survivors were told to hold on as best as they could until relieved.

By lunchtime the situation across the front of 2/6 Battalion was stable if insecure. Both B and C Companies still held a small salient north of the wadi, including Posts 7 and 9, and around 250 metres of bank either side of them. What remained of D Company covered the left flank on forward slopes of Little Wadi. In the early afternoon the overall situation deteriorated further. At around 3:00 pm, Captain Rowan’s men in the vicinity of Post 9 came under another concerted counterattack. Although the Italian wave was repulsed, casualties mounted and ammunition ran low. Meanwhile, Captain Muhlhan’s company in and around Post 7 was attacked twice. The second time a party of Italian machine-gunners managed to infiltrate to the south side of the wadi and opened fire on the company from its rear right, driving the Australians in the area into Post 7 itself. Muhlhan’s men held on, but only just.

Despite the precarious state of his battalion, in the late afternoon Godfrey conducted a reconnaissance for a night operation against Post 11, during which he was personally engaged by machine-gun fire. This, and the earlier fate of D Company it seemed, was still insufficient to encourage a reconsideration of his original plan. Post 11 must fall; Godfrey could countenance no other outcome. Only a message sent from Brigadier Savige not to attack any further, prevented another all-out assault on the post. As night descended, but for the odd exploding shell or burst of machine-gun fire, the tempo of the day died down. The Australians on the northern bank of Wadi el Muatered still sought shelter below its lip or in captured posts, with Italian bullets zipping overhead. Each Australian soldier across the line had an hour’s sentry duty before waking the man next to him. All stood to in the morning expecting further Italian counterattacks.
The next day Godfrey resumed his increasingly personal struggle with Post 11. In an example of overt stubbornness, pride and tactical ineptitude, he refused an obvious opportunity to flank the position during the afternoon, despite one of his platoons well to the east reporting that it had a clear route to do so. The platoon belonged to Lieutenant Sherlock who, in a desperate attempt to ensure he did not miss out on the action, had earlier all but abandoned his task of protecting an artillery observation group on the battalion’s right flank in favour of entering the Italian perimeter. Sherlock’s men had penetrated the perimeter between Posts 1 and 2 near the coast and were now on the northern bank of the mouth of Wadi el Muatered. The young officer sought instructions from Godfrey and then from Savige. In response, Savige suggested Godfrey might withdraw his battalion that night, leaving only enough men to ensure the Italians stayed in their posts, then to march east to Sherlock’s location and attack Post 11 from the rear. Godfrey rejected the suggestion out of hand. He told his acting second-in-command, Major G Smith, that he had no intention of giving away what he had thus far gained, and would never be seen to be withdrawing in the face of the enemy.\footnote{51}

Such sentiments were inexcusable, especially given the small amount of territory thus far captured by Godfrey. Smith was told to relay to brigade headquarters that such a plan was impractical as the forward companies could not be extricated. This was not true. If such a move was too dangerous in the daylight hours, it could have been done easily at night. Instead, Godfrey spent the afternoon planning more frontal assaults on Post 11 despite the fact that each mortar, machine-gun, or anti-tank artillery attack drew nothing but an increased volume of fire from an undiminished post.\footnote{52} Despite the lack of impact of such bombardments, the fact surprise was long lost, and in the face of the demonstrated resilience of the post, in the late afternoon Godfrey discussed the possibility of a night-time grenade attack. Only a lack of supporting artillery convinced him to wait until morning. Godfrey’s proposed dawn assault was cancelled, not on account of a long overdue acknowledgment of the tactical reality of the situation, but in reluctant deference to an order to temporarily cease all further attacks. This order was passed in preparation for a 19 Brigade advance south from Bardia village (which had fallen that afternoon) into the southern sector of the Italian defensive system scheduled for the following morning.\footnote{53}

True to form, once the ban on further offensive action was lifted, Godfrey ensured his men spent the morning hours of 5 January attacking. After all, if two days of failed attempts had not convinced him that Post 11 could stand against
To attract attention away from their silent advance, Godfrey ordered his carrier platoon to attack Post 13 …
collected two field guns, six anti-tank guns, a number of mortars, 325 rifles, and 12 medium and 27 light machine-guns. Evidence of the resolve of the defenders was clear. One of Rowan’s men, Private F J Gorman, bore witness to ‘dead dagos in numbers minus hands and legs. Others terribly badly mutilated … lying around on the ground amongst the dead enemy are holy pictures scattered in profusion as well as prayer books. It [was] not much of a pleasant sight.’56 Two wounded members of Captain Little’s original assault of 3 January were also found in the position. Both had been well treated. Godfrey personally sought out the Italian commander, who wore a British Military Cross from the First World War, to acknowledge the most resolute defence of any Italian position anywhere on the perimeter at any time in the battle. An overly romantic Brigadier Savige later thought it ‘a worthy ending when two very gallant leaders stood on that rocky point and shook hands before their own troops.’57 More to the point, as British headquarters noted, it was fortunate for 6 Division that the remainder of the Bardia garrison was not of this calibre.58

A few days after the battle, Private H Dunkley wrote home claiming that his battalion ‘got the thick end of the stick in attacking a hell of a cliff topped by concrete fortresses … hell let loose and some of my best friends in the show killed.’59 He was right about the difficulty of the fighting but wrong regarding the ‘thick end of the stick’—that had been handed to him quite deliberately by Lieutenant Colonel Godfrey and Brigadier Savige. Subsequent authors have often represented the 2/6 Battalion attack at Wadi el Muatered, and particularly at Post 11, as a tragedy of necessary self-sacrifice. It was more accurately a tragedy of poor leadership and wasted life. Sixty-four Australians lay dead and wounded for 500 metres of tactically insignificant wadi bank. The first day of the attack was the single most costly 24 hours for 2/6 Battalion of the entire war.60 Godfrey’s men may well have helped ensure, as Gavin Long would have it, that ‘no help could be sent from the southern sector against the battalions which had been allotted the job of making the breakthrough on the western side.’61 However, they could just have easily done this by demonstration rather than by futile assault. Less than three weeks later and in the first battle for Tobruk, two battalions from 17 Brigade managed to successfully demonstrate by fire against the Italian right flank to draw attention from main point of entry—without launching a full-scale attack. Many of Godfrey’s men need not have given their lives in such a futile enterprise.

Garth Pratten’s recent study of Australian unit command in the Second World War quite rightly described Godfrey’s actions around Wadi el Muatered as ‘pure
folly’, ‘muddle-headed’ and a ‘dangerous example of a CO trying to make his mark’. His overblown soldierly pride mixed with Savige’s tacit acquiescence was a recipe for disaster. Nor does the criticism of Godfrey deserve to end here. Leaving aside the overall decision to attack, his clear lack of tactical acumen is damning. For example, most of D Company was destroyed while testing a flank over open ground in daylight. Godfrey should have known better. So too, much of his lack of control during the day was a consequence of situating his headquarters too far forward, where it was subjected to too much effective indirect fire to function properly. Godfrey only ever expected and planned for success. Failure to take their initial objectives therefore left his battalion stranded astride a wadi swept with fire. It had no depth and not enough artillery support available to remedy the situation. Men suffered as a result. Gullett, as much a victim of Godfrey’s incompetence as anyone who lived through the day, later reflected: ‘Tactically it was not a very well planned or carried out operation but I am sure that Brigadier Savige and Colonel Godfrey were right when they decided that in our first assault we should teach a lesson they would not forget, regardless of the cost to the individual companies concerned.’ Gullett’s assessment is far too forgiving. They were wrong and the lives spent bought little.

True to the Anzac tradition, the ill-fated attack on Post 11 was quickly transformed from a low point of command and tactical failure to representing a high point of Australian fighting spirit. De-emphasising the unsavoury aspects of his own involvement, less than a week after the attack Savige began the celebratory tradition. He wrote: ‘Post No. 11 may be handed down in history connected with this battle. It was a second Mouquet Farm … the troops endured shelling almost as intense as the Somme without flinching.’ Godfrey went further claiming the position ‘could defy capture if manned by Australian troops’. The more brazen the courage, tragic glory and loss, it seems, the less important the reasons for the setbacks encountered. An official 17 Brigade report colourfully described how ‘The 6th [2/6 Battalion] added undying lustre to the already illustrious record of that regiment by its action … which was of the greatest importance to the general operation’. As its first engagement the ‘lustrous’ reputation of the 2/6 Battalion was yet to be forged, and the attack was at best marginally significant to the ‘general operation’. Accuracy, however, was not necessarily the point. It would simply not have done to call Post 11 what it was—a needless, poorly envisaged and badly executed assault that achieved nothing of substance—sentiments that effectively sum up 2/6 Battalion’s operations in the vicinity of Wadi el Muatered during the Battle of Bardia, despite the personal bravery of its members.
ENDNOTES


3 Extract of a private diary (unidentified) in ‘Summary of the Battle of Bardia’ compiled by AIF Historical Records Section, 3 April 1941, AWM 54, 521/1/15; Chester Wilmot, ‘Talk with Brigadier General Savige’, Transcript of ABC broadcast, AWM 27, 113/1; 17 Australian Infantry Brigade Intelligence Summary No. 5, 1 January 1941, 2/2 Field Regiment War Diary, AWM 52, 4/2/2; Long Papers, AWM PR88/72, [6]; S Savige, ‘Battle of Bardia: Report of Action by 17 Australian Infantry Brigade’, AWM 52, 8/2/17.

4 17 Australian Infantry Brigade Intelligence Summary No. 6, 3 January 1941, AWM 52, 8/2/17.

5 17 Infantry Brigade Operation Order No. 2, 1 January 1941, 6 Australian Division ‘GS’ Branch War Diary, AWM 52, 1/5/12.


7 2/6 Australian Infantry Battalion Operation Order No. 1, 2 January 1941. AWM 54, 521/1/13.

8 Gullett, Not as a Duty Only, p. 14.


10 Attachment to Letter, Brock to Mackay, 11 January 1941, AWM 3DRL6850, [100].


12 Charlton, The Thirty-Niners, p. xviii.

13 Savige, ‘Comments of Draft Chapter VII of Official History “Before Bardia”’.

14 Ibid.

15 Charlton, The Thirty-Niners, p. x.

16 Ibid.


19 Letter, Savige to Berryman, 1 January 1941, 6 Australian Division ‘GS’ Branch War Diary, AWM 52, 1/5/12.
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20 ‘Notes of Final Conference held at Headquarters 6 Australian Division at 1430hrs, 2 January 1941’, 6 Australian Division ‘GS’ Branch War Diary, AWM 52, 1/5/12.
23 Attachment to Letter, Brock to Mackay, 11 January 1941, AWM 3DRL6850, [100].
24 S Savige, ‘Summary of Battle of Bardia’, AWM 3DRL2529, [21].
25 Ibid.
26 Charlton, The Thirty-Niners, p. xviii.
27 Savige, ‘Comments of Draft Chapter VII of Official History “Before Bardia”’.
28 Extract of 2/6 Battalion War Diary in ‘Summary of the Battle of Bardia’ compiled by AIF Historical Records Section, 3 April 1941, AWM 54, 521/1/15; 2/6 Battalion War Diary, AWM 52, 8/3/6; 2/6 Australian Infantry Battalion Operation Order No.1, 2 January 1941, AWM 54, 521/1/13; Griffiths, ‘17 Brigade at Bardia’.
29 Note written by Brigadier S Savige, 6 January 1941, AWM 54, 521/2/8; Griffiths, ‘17 Brigade at Bardia’; 2/6 Battalion War Diary, AWM 52, 8/3/6; Savige, ‘Battle of Bardia: Report of Action by 17 Australian Infantry Brigade’; Gullett, Not as a Duty Only, pp. 16–17.
31 Long, To Benghazi, p. 187.
32 Long Papers, AWM PR88/72, [6].
33 Gullett, Not as a Duty Only, pp. 2–5.
34 Gullett’s background was unlike most other 6 Division NCOs. Born Henry Baynton Somer Gullett, he was a junior reporter with The Melbourne Herald before the war. Gullett went to school at Geelong Grammar and later studied at Oriel College, Oxford. He had also studied for a year at the Sorbonne in France. He had also been a cadet at Geelong, and a member of the Officer Training Squadron at Oxford. Charlton, The Thirty-Niners, p. 24; Gullett, Not as a Duty Only, pp. 2–5.
35 Gullett, Not as a Duty Only, pp. 2–5.
36 Ibid., pp. 15–18.
37 Long, To Benghazi, p. 185.
40 Gullett, Not as a Duty Only, pp. 19–21.
42 2/6 Battalion War Diary, AWM 52, 8/3/6; Long, *To Benghazi*, p. 186.
47 Wilmot, 'The Fight for Post 11'.
49 'Report of B Company (2/6 Battalion): Participation in the Battle of Bardia', AWM 52, 8/3/6; Savige, 'Battle of Bardia: Report of Action 17 Australian Infantry Brigade'; Griffiths, '17 Brigade at Bardia'; 6 Australian Division 'GS' Branch War Diary, AWM 52, 1/5/12; Long, *To Benghazi*, p. 188.
52 Extract of 2/6 Battalion War Diary in 'Summary of the Battle of Bardia' compiled by AIF Historical Records Section, 3 April 1941, AWM 54, 521/1/15; Savige, S., '“Battle of Bardia”, Report of Action by 17 Australian Infantry Brigade, AWM 52, 8/2/17; 2/6 Battalion War Diary, AWM 52, 8/3/6; Hay, *Nothing Over Us*, p. 98.
56 F J Gorman, 'Diary entry for 7 January 1941', AWM PR85/250.
57 Savige, 'Summary of Battle of Bardia', AWM 3DRL2529, [21]
59 Letter, H Dunkley to L Dunkley, 8 January 1941, AWM PR84/035.
DEADLY PRIDE AND THE INFAMOUS CASE OF ‘POST 11’

60 Long, To Benghazi, p. 188; Hay, Nothing Over Us, p. 91.
63 Ibid., p. 150.
64 Letter, Gullett to Chapman, 10 May 1968, AWM 3DRL6433, [1].
67 Savige, ‘Report of the Battle of Bardia, 8 January 1941’.

THE AUTHOR

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TACTICS

ENHANCING PLATOON GROUPS
ADAPTATION, DIFFUSION AND EMPOWERMENT IN LAND WARFARE

CAPTAIN BENJAMIN WATSON

ABSTRACT

This article identifies the unique ability a platoon group has to achieve success in the complex battlespace. The author takes his experiences as a platoon group commander in Afghanistan and shows that doctrine and combined arms theory have a place in the modern complex battlespace. The article explains that the fundamental infantry platoon cannot be effective in Afghanistan without key enablers from all corps. It further details the importance of fostering relationships between corps to improve combat power and battlefield effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

The concepts of mission command and the empowerment of junior commanders are not new. This article will illustrate how these two concepts, combined with the employment of an adaptive and flexible platoon group model, facilitated success for Combat Team Spear as part of the Third Reconstruction Task Force (RTF-3) which operated in a complex and unforgiving battlespace. The complex nature of the human and physical terrain in southern Afghanistan,
combined with the complexity of conflict, provides challenging and unique problems for students studying manoeuvre warfare. For the duration of their deployments, the RTF-3 combat elements benefitted by adapting to and embracing combined arms theory and practice. Despite environmental exposure and facing an evolving enemy, they were able to survive the first shot, orientate and achieve decisive action.

BACKGROUND

The examples for this paper are derived from the experiences of Charlie Company 2RAR and, more directly, from 7 Platoon Group—the 'Unforgiven'. The major operations in which this platoon participated were Operation SPIN GHAR, a multinational clearance operation of Taliban elements within a complex valley system north of Tarin Kowt; Operation TOSHAK, a six-week platoon group deployment to secure a tactical area of responsibility (TOAR) in the Chora Valley; and Operation SHARMAKAZ, a combat team task to secure and facilitate the building of coalition and Afghanistan National Army forward operating bases in the Dorafshan region. RTF-3 was divided into two combat teams: one engineer-heavy and one infantry-heavy. Each combat team had at least one platoon group, which would be augmented and task orientated for each mission.

The Chora Valley in 2006, and particularly in July 2007, was the scene of some significant Taliban actions involving Dutch and Australian Special Forces. The valley system is divided by a 300-metre wide green, fertile zone with numerous complex Quala systems providing housing for the district centre and two factional tribes. Much like the Chora Valley, the majority of the population in the Dorafshan region lives in close proximity to the river system, which flows through from the Chora Valley. The Dorafshan has neither a district centre, nor an identifiable leader, and includes both a large poppy concentration and more than five factional tribes. As a consequence this complex demographic has proven impossible for Western militaries to control.

PLATOON GROUPS

So a military force has no constant formation, water has no constant shape: the ability to gain victory by changing and adapting according to the opponent is called genius.

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War.*

For the purposes of this article, the platoon group is defined as any organisation which is led by a platoon headquarters and comprises more than one element of a battlespace operating system. The term 'platoon group' is interchangeable with 'mini combat team.'
Previously, Australian doctrine did not encourage task organising below the company level. However, direction detailed in LWD 3-0-2 Battlegroup Tactics Developing Doctrine suggests grouping at platoon level. The developing doctrine further states that a company second-in-command (2IC) should be appointed in command of the platoon group. This would cause inherent control issues for the combat team as it would detract from the 2IC’s role to manage and control the combat team. Without a combat team 2IC, the commander’s flexibility would be restricted and the ability to properly command would be reduced. It would be counterproductive to attempt to improve combat power and flexibility by removing a commander’s own flexibility and control mechanisms. Within RTF-3, the combat team commander established a tactical headquarters to improve his ability to command, and better understand the battlespace. This tactical headquarters encompassed all the additional assets it was allocated. For example, it included a combat engineer captain, an early warning signaller, intelligence/engagement team officers and a combat team tactical headquarters. This resembled a traditional battalion tactical headquarters. The company 2IC was preoccupied with acting as the company operations officer for the two or three platoon groups his headquarters would command in the field. The combat elements of RTF-3, based on Charlie Company from 2RAR, organised into mini combat teams or platoon groups.

The following examples illustrate how using current Adaptive Army initiatives and doctrine as a guide for combat operations works, and why a platoon group or mini combat team, based on a regular infantry platoon headquarters, is a tried and tested option for future land warfare.

Throughout history, Afghani insurgents have recognised combat power and strength. Subsequently, through their insurgent attempts, they have been able to identify alternate tactics or move on, for the fear of defeat. Defeating insurgents through sheer combat power and size is often the preferred method, but it is difficult to achieve and is not always feasible. Having a force capable of surviving the first contact and responding with immediate lethality would assist in winning the hearts and minds of the local population. The conflict in Afghanistan is described as being the ‘platoon leader’s war’, and the RTF-3
experience further reiterates this: Afghanistan is a ‘Platoon Group Commander’s’ war. The platoon group is not directly mentioned in Adaptive Campaigning; however, the principles and foundations of the platoon leader’s group resonate throughout Adaptive Campaigning and Complex Warfighting. On a modern battlefield land forces fight for, rather than with information, and the lowest unit of action sustainable in contact is a platoon group. The doctrinal infantry platoon in a complex battlespace is not sustainable and cannot fight in isolation.

THE PLATOON GROUP – ADAPTIVE AND COMBAT EFFECTIVE

Land forces have recently approached warfighting with recon-fight complexes characterised by pre-engineered connectivity between joint fires. This has meant that the platoon rarely fights alone. This hypothesis is in line with Adaptive Campaigning and the Adaptive Army cycle. In the present battlespace there is a need for land forces to be able to gain and retain the initiative through constant and rapid adaptation to an emerging situation in a complex battlespace. This was proven by RTF-3 and its platoon groups, and can continue to be achieved by using platoon groups and empowering junior commanders through mission command. Platoon groups achieve a decisive response to action through their improved lethality. For example, during one contact, a platoon’s Mortar Fire Controller executed danger close missions, while their Joint Terminal Air Controller coordinated the airspace and planned close air support. The platoon group headquarters disseminated the fire controllers in line with the platoon’s main effort. The result was improved lethality and defeat of the enemy through a coordination of fires to defeat an insurgent attack. The Adaptive Campaigning paper refers to this concept as Joint Land Combat and recon-fire complexes, ‘which are ad-hoc joint combined arms teams in which joint fires become a temporary but essential component of the team…’ A joint fires control capability is crucial within a platoon group and, where possible, having numerous controllers to allocate throughout the platoon group is preferred.

Current doctrine coupled with the Adaptive Army concept will set the foundation for future warfare and further reiterate the requirement for platoon groups. Trends and analyses from the United States indicate that the platoon group is now the suggested unit of action for combat missions. The United States now ensures that every platoon has access to joint fires. These include constructs such as the universal forward observer, which reinforces the impetus of the platoon team in the complex fight. Other doctrinal papers suggest the need for infantry forces to operate in smaller, semi-autonomous teams with mobility, firepower, protection and improved situational awareness. Platoon groups achieved adaptive action in contact and had the force strength to deter enemy contact in Afghanistan. The combat team
headquarters employed mission command, which allowed the effectiveness and lethality of the platoon group to be confirmed in the battlespace.

**PLATOON GROUP IDENTITY**

The platoon group’s flexibility and robust combat power was maximised through integrating small teams from all corps: combat, combat support and combat service support. The amalgamation of different corps into mini combat teams or platoon groups provides a difficult task for commanders. The complexities of assimilation are often compounded when platoon groups are immediately placed into situations where success relies on the leverage/combat power that each element provides. A key to operating a successful platoon group is ensuring corps rivalry is nullified, and that faith and trust is fostered as the keystone of the group. The different experiences and training of each soldier are vital considerations for commanders when establishing a platoon group. The trust and identity of the platoon group was the key enabler in giving this mini combat team the flexibility and the quick reaction time required to employ mission command and achieve decisive action.

Platoon group cohesion was initially achieved through harnessing the different characteristic strengths of the variety of corps within the platoon group. Lead up training and nursery patrols provide the enabler for commanders to foster this cohesion. The cohesion of the team and the strength of 7 Platoon Group was demonstrated in Afghanistan through the conduct of a live fire exercise while securing the Chora Valley. All elements of the platoon group demonstrated what they would bring to the fight, and in turn this gave everyone an immediate confidence in the others’ abilities. Subsequently, when the platoon group was in its first contact everyone had confidence in knowing how the other corps would react, and this allowed a swift and smooth reaction to contact.

A bond of trust and mutual understanding was created between superiors and subordinates, both at combat team level and within the platoon group. This was for more than just control; commanders must establish a command climate of trust and mutual understanding that encourages subordinates to exercise self-adaptation and battlefield cunning. A harmonious environment and understanding of the team results in mission success when coupled with improved lethality and mission command; all were paramount to the success of RTF-3.
OPERATION TOSHAK – SECURING TOAR CHEROKEE

During Operation TOSHAK, a mission to build an Afghan Army patrol base, 7 Platoon Group was tasked with securing a TAOR in the Chora Valley for six weeks. This is an area rife with warring tribal factions and Taliban extremists, and jagged mountains frozen in the middle of an Afghan winter. The flexibility that the platoon headquarters had—from access to five protected mobility vehicles, an Australian Light Armoured Vehicle (ASLAV) patrol, an engineer section, forward observers, a sniper pair and mortar section—allowed all emerging situations to be prosecuted with severe lethality and achieve all desired outcomes. This platoon group was able to react to Taliban attacks on indigenous security forces, and deter direct enemy action for the duration of this mission. The deterrence tactic was effective as a result of the platoon group’s persistence and pervasive presence combined with appropriate combat power, capable of dealing with any arising enemy action. The recon-fire complex was adapted and the platoon attached fire controllers had access to coalition air; Dutch 155m indirect; and Australian/Dutch 81mm mortar fire support. The self-sufficient nature of the platoon group enabled a reduced reaction time and a capability to provide aero-medical evacuation and assistance to coalition and indigenous security elements.

The flexibility and mission command afforded to the platoon team, combat team and task force headquarters allowed a variety of operations to be conducted. These included screening operations that utilised an array of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance—such as ASLAV screens, dismounted infantry observation positions and sniper pairs—to interdict enemy elements transiting weapons and reinforcements through the TAOR. On ten separate occasions during Operation TOSHAK, the platoon group would task organise into small combat elements, giving junior non-commissioned officers (JNCOs) more flexibility, and concurrently would provide a larger footprint in the battlespace. The section-based teams conducted satellite and night reconnaissance patrols, and established observation positions and satellite vehicle check points. This shaped the enemy decision cycle and meant that simultaneous objectives could be prosecuted. Moreover, the enemy was reluctant to initiate contact with its limited ability to track multiple coalition elements in the battlespace. *Adaptive Campaigning* explains this as the future direction that land forces will take to defeat adversaries …
Enhancing Platoon Groups

‘adaptive action’ and ‘mission command’. 7 Platoon Group’s experience illustrates that this can be done at the platoon and section level.

Traditional combat teams, being further broken into mini combat teams/platoon groups, were able to formulate successful approaches for dealing with arising situations that were unknown to other teams and coalition partners. Ideas, situational awareness and successful tactics were laterally transferred. This limited any time-lag by platoon headquarters speaking directly to other platoon headquarters, and any delay in the conduct of a formal after action review upon return to the main base in Tarin Kowt. The information disseminated between teams improved the overall effectiveness of the force and further contributed to overwhelming the enemy. The lessons that were learnt by each platoon group were quickly passed onto other groups who were not in the battlespace, through a deliberate combat team after action review. These two methods are adaptive and are spurred by a need to survive and thrive in a complex threat environment. The ability to communicate was further enhanced by the communication capabilities of the armoured and artillery elements within the group. The improved communications enhanced the platoon group’s freedom of movement. It was common practice for the Bushmaster section commander to be the communications hub for the platoon group. This Armoured Corps sergeant assisted with command and control by relaying intent to subordinate teams and concurrently communicating with the combat team headquarters. The extra radios from both armoured and artillery units assisted greatly in situational awareness and control of the platoon group.

Operation SHARMARAKAZ – Decisive Action

The success of the platoon group is dependent on its ability to react and carry out an action at a key point to achieve its mission against regular and irregular forces. One particular example that reflects the flexibility, robustness and effectiveness of the mini combat team was a 36-hour period during Operation SHARMARAKAZ in the Dorafshan region. 7 Platoon Group overcame a vehicle breakdown, a roadside improvised explosive device, and a dismounted Taliban ambush to support the Special Operations Task Group. This was not an unusual day for any of the platoon groups during this operation; however, it illustrates their robustness and flexibility. The conventional infantry platoon would have been unable to enter the battlespace because it did not have the inherent logistical support required to execute recovery/management of a vehicle breakdown. Conventional infantry platoons and companies, in past and present conflicts, have attempted to stabilise the Dorafshan and other similar regions in Uruzghan and Afghanistan with little success.13 There is no doubt the success of the Australian mission hinged on the ability to reduce reaction time and improve lethality because of the elusive and refined nature of
Tactics. The commander’s flexibility enabled quick reaction, planning, and decision execution with minimal assistance from higher headquarters, resultant in decisive action.

The reason the Australian elements had success in this region is because of the planning and coordination of the platoon groups at the company level. Combat team headquarters built the platoon groups around varying assets, and employed mission command to allow each platoon headquarters to synchronise its effects inline with the combat team plan. Synchronicity was achieved through control by combat team headquarters or platoon group headquarters coordinating manoeuvre over the combat team radio net. Platoon group headquarters could liaise and achieve simultaneity with an effective plan and mission command from the combat team headquarters. In turn, this meant an effective reaction to all enemy actions was achieved when the platoon group was operating independently or as part of the combat team.

**PLATOON GROUPS AND THE COALITION**

While deployed on Operation TOSHAK, 7 Platoon Group worked daily with the Dutch Observer Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLT) to assist and mentor the Afghan National Army (ANA) platoon, which was permanently operating in the Chora Valley. The Dutch OMLT was able to develop a strong relationship with the platoon headquarters due to the similar rank structure and training. This relationship between the OMLT and the Australians enhanced the ability to conduct and coordinate joint operations with the ANA every second day of the six-week mission. It was not unusual to see a force of up to 100 Australian, Dutch and Afghani soldiers on the ground, commanded by an Australian Infantry platoon headquarters. The footprint of this force in the battlespace dominated two or three grid squares, with an ability to concentrate or disperse as required. The ability to laterally disseminate information meant that dominating and controlling the battlespace was a relatively simple task.

The JNCOs within the platoon group were able to break down barriers which led to better relations with the indigenous security force. The improvement in the ANA’s knowledge and skills that resulted from the interaction with the Australian soldiers was significant. Being able to trust and rely on indigenous security forces meant that joint missions were achievable and could increase in complexity. The platoon group and ANA conducted an interdiction mission over an area of six square kilometres.

There is no doubt the success of the Australian mission hinged on the ability to reduce reaction time and improve lethality …
on known Taliban infiltration routes, with the ANA patrolling and conducting snap vehicle inspections. Indigenous security forces could be relied upon to carry out a synchronised task with the coalition combat force with minimal coalition support (OMLT present). This allowed greater manoeuvrability in the battlespace and also gave the local population confidence that progress was being made with their security forces.

CONCLUSION

Platoon grouping tests the bond of trust and mutual understanding between superiors and subordinates. It is Mission Command, Complex Warfighting and Adaptive Campaigning combined to create a more effective, flexible and decisive combat element. The RTF-3 model of platoon grouping empowered junior commanders and enabled success in a complex threat environment. The strength gained from the platoon group coupled with coordination of assets and coalition partners gave a preview of the potential success Adaptive Campaigning can have in the future. Platoon groups revitalise the regular infantry platoon, improving flexibility and lethality. Furthermore, platoon groups can achieve a broader spectrum of tasks compared to a conventional infantry platoon. RTF-3 conducted the full spectrum of warfare, with new techniques reinforced by doctrine, and achieved success. A force that does not adapt, evolve or reduce its reaction time will not be successful in complex warfighting.

ENDNOTES


The improvement in the ANA’s knowledge and skills that resulted from the interaction with the Australian soldiers was significant.
THE AUTHOR

Captain Benjamin Watson graduated from the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) in 2003 and the Royal Military College, Duntroon in 2004. He completed his honours degree in Geography at ADFA in 2005. Captain Watson, on posting to 2RAR, deployed to Afghanistan in 2007–08 as a platoon commander with the Third Reconstruction Task Force. While at 2RAR he was employed as a platoon commander and battalion operations captain. He is currently a staff officer posted to Headquarters Forces Command.
BOOK REVIEW


Reviewed by Peter Mansoor

The War on Terrorism since 11 September 2001 has defied precise analysis, in large measure because it is not clear who or what we are fighting and because our vocabulary concerning war is limited in its scope to largely state-based conflict. In The Accidental Guerrilla, David Kilcullen succeeds in explaining the diverse phenomenon that constitute the wars of the early twenty-first century, and why at present the West is having such difficulty in dealing with them.

Civilian and military policy-makers disagree that we are even in a war—or if we are, what kind of war we are in. Some view the current struggle as a global insurgency or an Islamic civil war, others as a reaction to globalisation. Still others view the conflict functionally, as a shift from the state-on-state violence of the Westphalian era to an asymmetric struggle involving non-state actors and transnational terrorists. Regardless of the categorisation of the conflict, al-Qaeda clearly seeks to avoid Western conventional military capabilities by engaging the United States and its allies on its terms.

Al-Qaeda’s strategy aims to exhaust the West in a continual series of protracted interventions around the world. Kilcullen’s premise is that military responses to terrorist provocations have created ‘accidental guerrillas’, local forces that are pulled into the transnational struggle by al-Qaeda and its affiliates, but which fight for the most part merely to repel foreigners invading their space. The invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, which early on focused too heavily on killing and capturing terrorist and insurgent operatives, have created tens of thousands of accidental guerrillas, and have thereby given al-Qaeda immense political capital and credibility within the Islamic world that it does not deserve.

Kilcullen uses a medical metaphor to describe the accidental guerrilla syndrome— infection, contagion, intervention and rejection. In a typical conflict such as Afghanistan, transnational terrorists infect a society and then spread their network to control it. Their presence at some point may trigger military intervention by
outside forces, which then causes the local population to come together to reject the foreign presence in their territory, thereby further increasing al-Qaeda’s power. These accidental guerrillas provide the bulk of the foot soldiers al-Qaeda needs to battle the West, and it is these combatants that the author believes we need to avoid fighting if at all possible in the future.

The vast majority of accidental guerrillas are not motivated by ideology or religious dogma. Indeed, Kilcullen usefully explains that in many insurgencies today, religion plays a role as a nationalist identity marker more so than as a deeply felt belief. One of the primary means to further the growth of a pan-Islamic consciousness is to treat all local conflicts as part of a broader al-Qaeda plot to rule the Islamic world. Such attitudes—and the policies that derive from them—play right into al-Qaeda’s hands.

Through his examination of case studies including Afghanistan, Iraq, East Timor, Thailand and Pakistan, Kilcullen argues that the West needs to be much more subtle in its strategic approach to prevent the creation of accidental guerrillas. Indeed, Kilcullen has not only observed many of these conflicts first-hand, he has helped to design some of the methods used to prosecute them. The book includes a thorough discussion of the best practices in counterinsurgency warfare—particularly the over-riding importance of an effective political strategy to build the legitimacy of the local governing authority, the synchronisation of civilian and military efforts, the criticality of organising and training local security forces, and the need to protect the population to insulate the people from insurgent intimidation and violence.

Despite Kilcullen’s expertise in counterinsurgency warfare, he argues that the West would be ill-advised to engage in direct military interventions across the Islamic world. Rather, he believes that the United States needs to rethink the Powell Doctrine, with its preference for short, high-tech wars with clear end states and exit strategies. He posits an alternative doctrine for dealing with the messy wars of the early twenty-first century, one that would work to achieve national security objectives largely through indirect means, via partnerships with local governments and security forces, and which would emphasise low-profile engagement with a whole-of-government approach rather than exhausting resources through large-scale, conventional military interventions.

*The Accidental Guerrilla* is solidly grounded in social science and anthropological theory, which can make the book heavy going at times. But it is worth wading through the theory to understand the dynamics at play in the world today. Kilcullen’s call at the end of the book for a new grand strategy for the twenty-first century is timely and on the mark. The defeat of al-Qaeda and its affiliates will be a multi-generational struggle, but it is crucial to get the strategy correct up front—much like the creation of the ‘Germany first’ policy after Pearl Harbor, or the containment doctrine early in the Cold War. The United States stumbled out of the gate after 11 September 2001, but there is no time like the present to rethink the basis for the struggle and set coalition strategy on a sounder footing. *The Accidental Guerrilla* provides an excellent start to the discussion.

Reviewed by Ross Mallett

Democratic triumphalism—a term coined by Michael Desch in this book—is defined as a belief that ‘not only does the spread of democracy make the world more benign by reducing the likelihood of wars among liberal states, but democracies enjoy certain advantages in their relations with nondemocratic states, particularly when they are at war with them’. Historian Victor Davis Hanson put it this way in *The Soul of Battle*:

Democracy, and its twin of market capitalism, alone can instantaneously create lethal armies out of civilians, equip them with horrific engines of war, imbue them with a near-messianic zeal within a set time and place to exterminate what they understand as evil, have them follow to their deaths the most ruthless of men, and then melt anonymously back into the culture that produced them. It is democracies, which in the right circumstances, can be imbued with the soul of battle, and thus turn the horror of killing to a higher purpose of saving lives and freeing the enslaved.  

If true, democratic states have a powerful advantage in wartime. The question remains whether it is true. The debate about whether democracy is a liability or an asset in war goes back a long way—indeed, all the way back to the Ancient Greek historian Thucydides, who, in his classic *History of the Peloponnesian War*, blamed Athenian democracy for that conflict, which was mismanaged by and ultimately disastrous for Athens. Since then conventional wisdom has been that democracies are at a disadvantage when fighting other states. Until very recently that is, when democratic triumphalism began to take hold, assuming more than academic importance when it became accepted at the highest levels of government in the United States, and probably elsewhere as well.
As real and important as this debate might be, it still seems suspiciously made of straw in the light of the botched and all but lost wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the more recent economic crisis that has dealt a body blow to the reputation of market capitalism. The similarities between ancient Athens and the United States of the present day have been discussed and debated by many historians, including Hanson in *A War Like No Other*, and Desch in the conclusion of this book.

Desch attempts to be objective about the matter. The first problem is to define how democratic a country is. This is no easy matter, but there are some published indexes that provide numerical values for democracy, such as the POLITY IV index that Desch uses.

The empirical analysis of military power is not new either. Back in 1920, in his *Australian Victories in France*, John Monash provided a series of metrics that showed the Australian divisions in France in 1918 were between 2.24 and 2.47 times as effective as the average of their British counterparts. In 1963, the Correlates of War project was begun at the University of Michigan as a systemic study with the stated objective of coming up with an integrated theory of war. In the 1980s, Trevor N Dupuy created a numerical theory of combat in *Understanding War: History and Theory of Combat*. This has been taken further by other historians, notably Stephen Biddle in *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle*. Potentially, such models could be extremely useful tools for the military planner, for example, to predict casualty rates. This after all is how we estimate fuel and ammunition consumption, and various other logistical factors. At the moment though, they do not work well enough.

I had a go at this myself once. Applying the Dupuy model to the Western Front upheld Monash’s metrics. Though when applied to Gallipoli, the surprising result indicated that the relative effectiveness of the Australian and Turkish armies was about the same as in 1918, implying that over the course of the war both armies improved at a similar rate. This is a feature of models, in that the answers they produce tend to fall into one of three categories: the obvious, the interesting, and the downright bizarre. My result fell into the second category, which is what we are usually looking for.

Desch plugs POLITY democracy scores as variables into the Correlates of War model, looking for correlation. As it turns out, there is one, but is very weak. What does correlate strongly? Well, showing up with a much larger army for one thing, which I categorise under ‘the obvious’.

Desch then examines a few cases in detail, including the Russo-Polish War (1919–1920); the Arab–Israel Wars of 1956, 1967, 1973 and 1982; and the Falklands War (1982). In each of these conflicts, the nature of both sides is examined with reference to the arguments put forward both for and against democratic triumphalism.
At times he gets confused over the nature of democracy, which in its modern form probably owes less to the Greeks than the Romans, who employed representative democracy and bicameralism. This is not normally made much of because Roman democracy ultimately failed under the social pressures created by Rome’s expansion from a city state into an empire. Representative democracy in its modern form places decision-making in the hands of a few elected representatives. In a democracy at war such as Israel in 1973, Britain in 1982 or Australia in the Second World War, decisions are often taken by an even smaller than usual war cabinet. This is not undemocratic, but part and parcel of democracy as we know it. Similarly, just because Israel has a multiparty proportional representational system does not make it a ‘dysfunctional democracy’ (p. 99)—just one in a form less familiar to American eyes. Indeed the American system might look less democratic to Israelis or Australians than their own—and with good reason.

In the end, the book is one long polemic demolishing an idea that few readers are likely to entertain for long in the first place.

ENDNOTES

2 Victor Davis Hanson, A War Like No Other: How the Athenians and Spartans Fought the Peloponnesian War, Random House, New York, 2005.
The light horseman is perhaps the most romanticised figure in Australian military history. Embodying the bushman–soldier ideal, they are used to depict the quintessential Australian soldier in all sorts of ways; from the unlikely circumstance of accompanying the mostly infantry general Sir John Monash on the $100 note, to the more obvious one of army recruiting advertisements. But at the same time the Sinai–Palestine Campaign of 1916–18 is usually ignored in the seemingly irreducible effort to understand Gallipoli or the Western Front; such is the lot of 'sideshows'.

One of the few relatively recent books on the campaign and the light horse from an Australian perspective has been Ian Jones’ *The Australian Light Horse*, which was produced as part of a series, aimed mostly at school aged readers, in 1987. Jones’ book left its mark, which is testimony both to the work that he did and the fact that there was little in the way of alternatives. Jones has now revised his book and republished it as *A Thousand Miles of Battles*.

Produced to the highest publishing standards with an excellent range of photos, drawings (usually from the troop newspaper *The Kia-Ora Cooee*), maps and artwork, *A Thousand Miles of Battles* shares with its predecessor an admirable unpinning of solid research, but is frustrating in the way that it continues to mythologise the light horse and the Palestine Campaign.

The book is a galloping read and Jones’ ability as a storyteller is manifest, getting through the salient aspects of the Australian campaign and the major battles in under 200 pages. In considering the fighting, Jones is generally even handed and judicious, deftly outlining the actions and giving credit to either side when it is due. His obvious admiration for the light horsemen is tempered by a realisation they were not all angels. Still, there is much romance in these pages and descriptions,
such as one about light horsemen being ‘men and horses bonded as a living and fighting entity,’ will have students of the campaign rolling their eyes.

Annoying as these sorts of things are, they are bearable, but less tolerable are the slides into myth or cliché which distorts history. Jones’ conception of the ‘British cavalry tradition’ as being stuck at Balaclava is remarkably out of date and certainly does not reflect the realities of force which had undergone a vigorous process of reform since the 1880s. By trying to place the light horse outside that tradition he also fails to recognise its imperial origins. The presentation of Beersheba as the last ‘great charge’ is highly debateable. Similarly, Jones is entitled to think the ‘Beersheba charge photo’ is genuine, but his evidence is flimsy, few agree with him, and he would have been better off making his assertion within a more balanced assessment of the evidence. The revelations about Richard Meinertzhagen’s fraudulence perhaps became apparent when this book was in press, but the story of his role in the Beersheba ‘knapsack ruse’ now needs to be treated with extreme caution.

This book, like its predecessor, is a decent primer for those new to the light horse or the Palestine Campaign. The succinct and often useful sketches of battles and the participants are to be admired, as are the excellent selection of photos and artwork. Subalterns facing a looming deadline for a commanding officer’s essay will find it a very useful source for some swotting, but will need to be wary of its flaws. For those looking for something meatier, the slowly growing international literature on British Empire mounted troops, the Ottoman Empire and Army, and the Palestine Campaign will offer more interest.

Reviewed by Colonel Terry McCullagh

*Between Victor and Vanquished* is Arthur Page’s own story of his remarkable wartime career. Arthur arrived in Australia at the age of 19, a refugee from a Japan gone mad with nationalistic fervour and rabid militarism. Arthur’s parents had escaped to Japan in 1920 from Russia, so this was the second country they had seen dissolve into chaos. On being accepted by Australia as a refugee, Arthur and his father tried to join the AIF but were refused because they were not British subjects. Following Pearl Harbor, they found themselves conscripted into the AMF and eventually someone discovered that they both spoke Japanese fluently and could play a useful part in Australia’s furious battle with the Japanese. Both Arthur and his father joined the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section, GHQ, SWPA, based at that time in Indooroopilly, Brisbane. Arthur was attached to US I Corps for the final campaigns in north-west New Guinea—Hollandia, Aitape, Biak and Morotai, among others.

From New Guinea, US I Corps joined the assault on the Philippines, and Arthur took part in the amphibious landings at Lingayen Gulf and the tortuous push against the Japanese forces on Luzon Island. He was summarily withdrawn with the parting of the ways as US forces continued the push towards Manila and on to the Japanese homeland, while the Australians headed towards the Japanese strongholds in the former Dutch East Indies, including Borneo. Arthur was attached to Advanced Land Headquarters on Morotai Island in the last few months of the war and played a pivotal part in the surrender of Japanese forces in southern Borneo. He played a crucial (and largely unsung) role in the surrender ceremony at the city of Bandjermasin (southern Borneo) where a stalemate between an Australian commander and a Japanese general threatened to turn to bloodshed. Arthur’s final days in the AMF were spent in the traumatic ordeal of investigating war crimes committed by the Japanese. This was a
particularly distressing time as Arthur had grown up among the Japanese and knew and loved Japan, her culture and people.

The book is also the tale of the development of the combat linguist who became the eyes and ears of the front-line commander in his bid to win the intelligence war. Arthur describes the characteristics of the Japanese soldier and why he became such a fearsome foe. He details the methods of collecting enemy documents, cleaning them, restoring them and then carefully translating them, often in the mud and mire of combat conditions. He describes the art of interrogating different Japanese prisoners of war and unravels the mysteries often associated with the Japanese concepts of the kamikaze, ritual suicide and the banzai charge. This is a book that explains a great deal about the Second World War Japanese adversary in clear, layman’s terms.

This book makes a significant contribution to the history of Australian combat linguists, is superbly readable, and comes thoroughly recommended.

Reviewed by Wing Commander Terence O’Connor

Against the background of the ongoing Guantánamo Bay controversy, the time is right for a book that presents a balanced analysis of the history and current utility of Military Tribunals and Military Commissions. *Extraordinary Justice: Military Tribunals in Historical and International Context* by Peter Judson Richards is not that book. Regrettably, *Extraordinary Justice* is nothing more than a deeply flawed attempt to justify the continued use of the Military Tribunals and Commissions in the face of twenty-first century jurisprudence.

The author’s fundamental thesis is that in times of war and civil emergency, the normal civilian courts of justice are either inadequate or incompetent to deal with the transgressions of so-called unlawful combatants, sundry conspirators and traitors, and other civilians who allegedly breach the rules of war. In short, in such times of emergency, the ordinary civilian courts cannot be trusted and the Executive (often in the guise of military commanders) should retain exclusive control of the adjudication of these complex legal issues by means of the establishment of ad-hoc military commissions. The author asserts that ‘the nature of the wartime adjudicative enterprise, as a matter of international political and military import, requires a different set of skills and expertise than are available to most lawyers’. This is an untenable proposition.

The author argues that in times of great civil calamity, for instance the American Civil War, the ordinary civilian courts (as opposed to extraordinary military courts) were overwhelmed and could not cope. This historical hypothesis is less than compelling. Indeed, it was the United States Supreme Court itself in the Post-Civil War Reconstruction period that handed down the landmark Milligan decision in which it said:
[T]he Constitution of the United States is a law for rulers and people, equally in war and peace, and covers with the shield of its protection all classes of men, at all times, and under all circumstances. No doctrine, involving more pernicious consequences, was ever invented by the wit of man than that any of its provisions can be suspended during any of the great exigencies of government.

In contradistinction to the Supreme Court, the author advances the proposition that all power during such times of emergency should reside in the Executive whom, on the basis of military necessity (whatever that means) will suspend *habeas corpus* and other fundamental instruments of civil liberty it deems fit; and that dissenters will be dealt with by ‘extraordinary’ courts set up by the Executive, which will administer justice expeditiously and perhaps imperfectly but in ways that enhance the security of the nation. It is the perennial ‘desperate times call for desperate measures’ argument predicated upon the belief that the ordinary organs of government that operate so effectively in peacetime are deemed inappropriate in wartime.

The author also demonstrates an incomplete appreciation of the concept of the rule of law especially when he says ‘the institutions and safeguards represented under the rubric, the rule of law, are not self-sustaining or impervious to the destructive forces of war’. The rule of law is much more than simply a set of institutions and safeguards; it is the concept that the law applies equally to everyone, including the Executive, during times of war and civil emergency, and the corollary of that proposition is the doctrine of the separation of powers that is the cornerstone of the United States Constitution as well as the Constitution of Australia. Under this doctrine it is indeed the judiciary—that is, the ordinary civilian courts, that are the guardians of the rule of law, a role recently demonstrated by the US Supreme Court in the Hamden case which declared illegal the military commissions created by the Bush administration for dealing with the detainees at Guantánamo Bay.

The author by implication rejects the possibility of a third option. The condemnation of the Bush military commissions not only by the US Supreme Court but by many jurists worldwide was not because they were military in nature or *ad-hoc* in form, but that they failed to reach the benchmark of what in the twenty-first century is regarded as guaranteeing a fair trial—the provisions of the United Nations Charter on Civil and Political Rights. That is why it is nonsense for the author to suggest that in the twenty-first century any Tribunal endowed with legal coercive powers and functions but falling short of those standards can claim legitimacy.

Reviewed by Major Murray Stewart

Considering the Australian frontier war raged from 1788 into the 1920s across Australia with the expanding settlement, and about 2000 white and 20,000 Aboriginals were killed as a direct result of armed clashes, it is surprising that it is only now starting to loom in Australian military consciousness. This is even more surprising considering that the European death toll alone was almost four times the number of Australian killed in action in the Vietnam War and seven times that of the Korean War. The Aboriginal death toll was ten times the Maori losses in the New Zealand wars. Around 800 of these white deaths and 5000 to 10,000 Aboriginal deaths probably occurred in Queensland alone. Undeniably the group that was the biggest killer of Aboriginals in Queensland was the Queensland Native Police.

The Queensland Native Police was a police force only in name. It was a para-military organisation of the Queensland Government. It operated like an army unit actively engaged with the enemy—a unit whose mission was the immediate and brutal suppression of any indigenous resistance. Separate to the ordinary police, it was made up of Aboriginal Troopers led by white officers who conducted section level patrols, and retaliatory and punitive raids on horseback against Aboriginal warriors, women and children. It never operated against white law breakers and rarely if ever concerned itself with evidence, arrests and trials. Combining white weaponry, the mobility of horses and telegraph communications with Aboriginal field craft, it was a devastating weapon against the Aboriginal resistance. Active from the 1840s to the 1900s it comprised of about 200 all ranks at any one time.

Since the 1970s there has been a growing body of work exploding the myth of a uniquely peaceful settlement of Australia and examining the reality of the Australian frontier war. For a general overview of the conflict in which the Queensland Native Police played a part, the ‘Aboriginal Armed Resistance to White Invasion’ entry in
the Oxford Companion to Australian Military History is an excellent starting point as is ‘The struggle for Australia: Aboriginal-European warfare, 1770-1930’ chapter in McKernan’s Australia Two Centuries of War & Peace. For the Aboriginal view, Henry Reynolds’ The Other Side of the Frontier is definitive. For a ground breaking account of the British Army’s actions against the Aboriginal resistance see John Connors’ The Australian Frontier Wars 1788 -1838. Connors’ book is excellent for the military historian as it examines in detail the tactics, weapons, major campaigns and clashes of this earlier part of the conflict in the context of the British Army’s actions in other colonial theatres. What is lacking is a similar book of military history on the actions of the settlers and paramilitary forces like the Queensland Native Police in the later part of the conflict. I had hoped The Secret War would fill this gap for the Queensland Native Police.

The Secret War is an excellent book, but it is more of a social than a military history. This is disappointing given its title. The fact that killing Aborigines was technically illegal did little to suppress the actions of these representatives of the law, it just inspired attempts to cover it up. Indeed there is some evidence that the records detailing Native Police actions have been deliberately destroyed. This cover up, both at the time and later on, inspired the title The Secret War. Nevertheless, enough remains to allow the author to detail the activities of this unit. The book is very readable and excels in detailing the social aspects of the force. Chapters outlining both the Aboriginal and European service and an Annex listing every white member of the force with a brief service record are the book’s strength. It is at its best when it puts the Queensland Native Police in context of general settler racism, levels of colonial violence, and the use of native police in other British colonies such as New South Wales, South Africa and Ceylon.

Readers may be disturbed at the level of racial hatred found in the quotes and actions of our ancestors. A ‘war of extermination’ was being fought said many, ‘A sheep or bullock was killed … had to be avenged in the blood of the nearest black’. Aboriginals are ‘vermin to be exterminated without mercy’. That a unit routinely killed any Aboriginals they found in the vicinity of an attack, raped, ‘flogs gins’, ‘nigger hunted’ and abducted children while in the service of the forerunners of current state governments illustrates what a brutal place early Australia could be. Jonathan Richards should be applauded for trying to end the secrecy surrounding the actions of the Queensland Native Police.

However, I was disappointed by its lack of detail on the actual armed clashes between the Aboriginal warriors and the Queensland Native Police. For example, there is a table detailing Aboriginal Troopers shot dead by their own officers, a list of the mass desertions of the Troopers, and a list showing the dismissals of white members from the force with date and reasons, but no such list detailing the armed clashes with Aboriginal warriors or massacres of civilians with date, location and
casualties. Such a list combined with sources and commentary would have done much to improve the book for the general reader as well as the military historian. The Secret War is the definitive account of the nature of the Queensland Native Police—how it was recruited; what service was like; who was in it; and police actions under the conditions, context and law under which it operated—but it is let down by a lack of detail about its actual actions. However, its strengths overcome its weaknesses and I would recommend it to all those who seek a fuller understanding of Australia’s military history.

Reviewed by Lieutenant Colonel Jason Thomas

The referees for the author of this book are many and varied. Phares is, according to the book sleeve, a world renowned expert on Islamic based terrorism and the Middle-East, with many television and governmental interviews. It is obvious upon reading the text that his knowledge of the subject is indeed impressive. Additionally, he makes heavy use throughout of his own experiences and the work of others. Many, but not all of his contentions are provided with supporting references.

Phares’ main thesis is that we are currently experiencing a global conflict of ideals, that of fundamental Islam versus democracy based on Western ideals. Phares is passionate about the necessity of the West to win. He sums up this concept as *The War of Ideas*; the book leads us to this through a brief historical introduction and an outlining of fundamentalist doctrines. The last chapters of the book sum up Phares’ ‘War of Ideas’ and offers future strategies to counter this.

For a military reader, this book does offer a very good introduction to Salafist agendas and aims. It provides a summary of this rise of fundamentalism and acknowledges some of the causes. But also for the military mind, it will offer some points to assess. All soldiers are taught that a threat equals a capability plus an intent. Phares claims that this is a war of minds being waged against the West—whether such a war can actually mobilise the resources necessary for a decisive outcome is not discussed.

He does however fall victim to generalisation and oversimplification—one example is his treatment of Hezbollah. He places them as having an immutable and constant agenda, which in some cases he aligns with Salafists. This is an oversimplification, to say the least, and this undermines his broader thesis. He is also too dismissive of the importance of economic and welfare reform in combating any fundamentalist threat.
This book is worth reading, not for what it achieves, but for what it tried to achieve. To this reader, it fails, it is overly ambitious in scope, and the author’s rigorous academic qualifications cannot unfortunately justify compressing his views into 240-odd rather iconoclastic pages. It is a good introduction to fundamentalist agendas, and makes the reader ponder how to operate in a world where it exists and when necessary must be contained. It should not, however, be read in isolation nor solely with similar texts cluttering the shelves of bookshops. These and *The War of Ideas* tend to oversimplify, through the mantra of globalism, what are truly complex issues with deep historical roots.
Listed below is a selection from the review copies that have arrived at the Australian Army Journal. Reviews for many of these books can be found online in the relevant edition of the Australian Army Journal at: http://www.defence.gov.au/army/lwsc/Australian_Army_Journal.asp

- **North Korea on the Brink**, Glyn Ford with Soyoung Kwon, Pluto Press, ISBN 9780745325989, 249 pp. (Distributed in Australia by Palgrave Macmillan)
TITLES TO NOTE


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NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

The editors of the Australian Army Journal welcome submissions from any source. Two prime criteria for publication are an article’s standard of written English expression and its relevance to the Australian profession of arms. The journal will accept letters, feature articles, review essays, e-mails and contributions to the Point Blank and Insights sections. As a general guide on length, letters should not exceed 500 words; articles and review essays should be between 3000 and 6000 words; and contributions to the Insights section should be no more than 1500 words. The Insights section provides authors with the opportunity to write brief, specific essays relating to their own experiences of service. Readers should note that articles written in service essay format are discouraged, since they are not generally suitable for publication.

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GENERAL STYLE

All sources cited as evidence should be fully and accurately referenced in endnotes (not footnotes). Books cited should contain the author’s name, the title, the publisher, the place of publication, the year and the page reference. This issue of the journal contains examples of the appropriate style for referencing.

When using quotations, the punctuation, capitalisation and spelling of the source document should be followed. Single quotation marks should be used, with double quotation marks only for quotations within quotations. Quotations of thirty words or more should be indented as a separate block of text without quotation marks. Quotations should be cited in support of an argument, not as authoritative statements.
NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Numbers should be spelt out up to ninety-nine, except in the case of percentages, where arabic numerals should be used (and per cent should always be spelt out). All manuscripts should be paginated, and the use of abbreviations, acronyms and jargon kept to a minimum.

BIOGRAPHIES

Authors submitting articles for inclusion in the journal should also attach a current biography. This should be a brief, concise paragraph, whose length should not exceed eight lines. The biography is to include the contributor’s full name and title, a brief summary of current or previous service history (if applicable) and details of educational qualifications. Contributors outside the services should identify the institution they represent. Any other information considered relevant—for example, source documentation for those articles reprinted from another publication—should also be included.