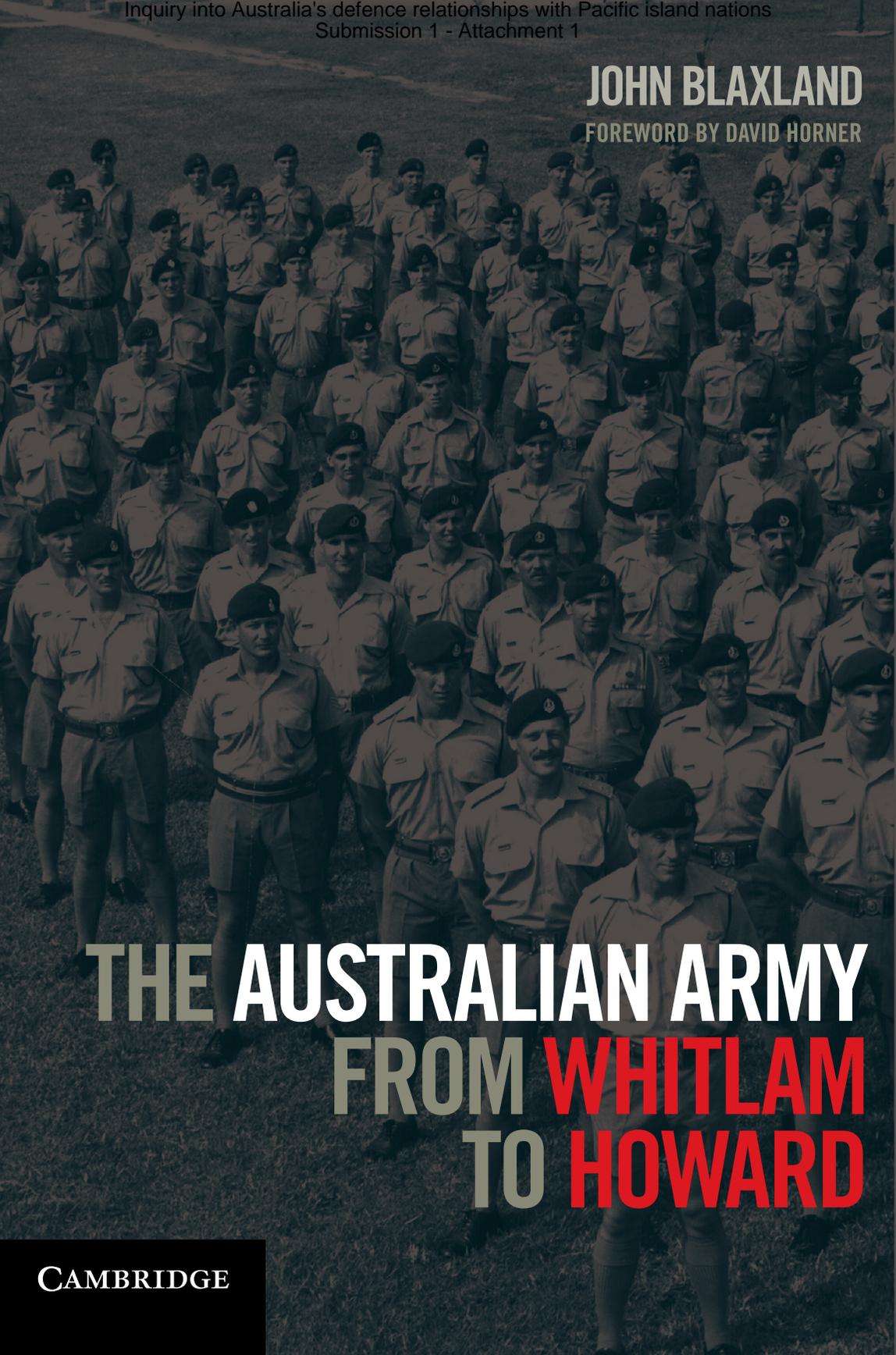


JOHN BLAXLAND

FOREWORD BY DAVID HORNER



**THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY
FROM WHITLAM
TO HOWARD**

CAMBRIDGE

THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY FROM WHITLAM TO HOWARD

The Australian Army from Whitlam to Howard is the first critical examination of Australia's post-Vietnam military operations. Spanning the 35 years between the election of Gough Whitlam and the defeat of John Howard, it shows how the Australian Army recovered and developed after the Vietnam War.

John Blaxland explores the 'casualty cringe' felt by political leaders following the war and how this influenced subsequent operations. He contends that the Australian Army's rehabilitation involved common individual and collective training; reaffirmation of the Army's regimental and corps identities; and the Army's ties with allies, regional partners and Australian society. He shows how the Army regained its confidence to play leading roles in East Timor, Bougainville and the Solomon Islands, and to contribute to combat operations further afield.

At a time when the Australian Army's future strategic role and capabilities are the subject of much debate, and as the 'Asian Century' gathers pace and the commitment in Afghanistan draws to an end, this work is essential reading for anyone interested in understanding the modern context of Australia's military land force.

John Blaxland is a Senior Fellow at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, School of International, Political and Strategic Studies, in the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University. His other publications include: *Organising an Army* (1989), *Signals, Swift and Sure* (1999), *Information-era Manoeuvre* (2002), *Strategic Cousins* (2006) and *Revisiting Counterinsurgency* (2006).

THE AUSTRALIAN
ARMY FROM
WHITLAM TO
HOWARD

JOHN C. BLAXLAND



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FOREWORD

This book about the development and operations of the Australian Army in the period from the election of the Whitlam Government in 1972 to the defeat of the Howard Government in 2007 constitutes a significant contribution to Australian military history. Australia's military history began with the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 and now stretches over a period of more than two and a quarter centuries. This book deals with more than 35 years of that history.

Australia's more recent military operations are perhaps the least understood in the nation's military history, which has always focused heavily on the two world wars. The Australian public's knowledge and appreciation of the sacrifice, suffering and achievements of its servicemen and women grew out of the experience of the First World War. This knowledge was based on memoirs, unit histories and particularly on Charles Bean's ground-breaking 15-volume official history series, published in the two decades after the First World War. Many people still believe that Australia's experience of war began with the landing at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915, completely overlooking the activities of the previous century, and Gallipoli is still the dominating episode – the iconic event – of Australia's military history. The public's appreciation of the experience of the Second World War built on and matched that of the First World War, with more memoirs, unit histories and Gavin Long's 22-volume official history.

In the 1970s, however, the public began to take a broader view. The involvement of Australians (from colonies rather than the

yet-to-be-formed Commonwealth) in nineteenth-century conflicts – New Zealand, Sudan, China and South Africa – came to be seen as the prelude to the First World War. The post–Second World War conflicts – Korea, the Malayan Emergency, Confrontation and Vietnam – became the postlude. The world wars still remained the central focus. There was, however, little appreciation of the fact that as the twentieth century concluded and the twenty-first century began Australia's military history was moving into a new phase.

The task of integrating the new military operations into the broader narrative of Australia's military history was made difficult because they did not fit the mould of earlier operations. The peacekeeping missions, which increased in number and frequency in the late 1980s, received little publicity. They were conducted by Regular soldiers rather than conscripts or civilians who had volunteered for the war; there were no major battles and few casualties. Gradually some of the missions became more 'warlike', with a greater likelihood of casualties, such as during the peace enforcement operations in Somalia in 1993 against bandits, and in East Timor in 1999, where there were minor engagements against anti-independence militia. When Australian special forces soldiers were deployed to Afghanistan in 2001 they became involved in the Army's most intensive combat since the Vietnam War.

Disappointingly, the public remained largely ignorant of what the Army achieved in many of these more recent operations. Journalists were often denied access to the operational areas, while books about the Australian Army in the world wars still dominated the market. When, in 2004, the Howard Government finally approved an official history series covering peacekeeping and post–Cold War operations it specifically excluded East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan. Further, it provided no direct financial support for recording the history.

As John Blaxland has shown, between 1972 and 2007 the Australian Army conducted more than 150 operations. Admittedly most of these were small and took place within Australia; but others, such as in Namibia, Cambodia, Somalia, Rwanda, East Timor, Bougainville, Iraq and Afghanistan, were substantial. Their stories demand to be told.

This book brings together the first comprehensive account of what the Australian Army has been doing since 1972. Without access to government records, which are closed to public researchers, Dr Blaxland has pieced the stories together from the few books that are available, from press reports, media releases and, most importantly, interviews and correspondence with participants. He was also able to draw on his experience

of almost 30 years service in the Australian Army. He has therefore been able to tell the remarkable story of how, after the lean years that followed the withdrawal from Vietnam, the Army developed into a modern, flexible fighting force that the government could deploy at short notice to a multitude of tasks. Until the official histories appear Dr Blaxland's book is likely to remain the most thorough, all-embracing account of the Army's recent activities. It is a story of professionalism, achievement and sacrifice of which all Australians should be proud.

David Horner
Professor of Australian Defence History
Australian National University
February 2013

CONTENTS

Foreword by David Horner	v
Photographs	xi
Acknowledgements	xiv
Abbreviations	xv
Maps	xx
Introduction: The origins of Australia's Army	1
PART 1 FROM VIETNAM TO EAST TIMOR, 1972-99	17
1 The last years of the Cold War, 1972-89	19
2 The post-Cold War experience to the late 1990s	72
PART 2 LAND FORCE OPERATIONS IN EAST TIMOR AND SOLOMON ISLANDS	141
3 East Timor, 1999-2000	143
4 Operations with the UN in East Timor, 2000-04	169
5 Operations in Solomon Islands from 2000	185
6 Operation Astute in Timor-Leste, 2006 and beyond	198
PART 3 THE MIDDLE EAST AREA OF OPERATIONS	209
7 Operations in Afghanistan, 2001-02	213
8 War in Iraq, 2003-07	218
9 Return to Afghanistan, 2005-06	256

PART 4 ASIA-PACIFIC ENGAGEMENT AND ADAPTATION AT HOME	281
10 Aid and other assistance since 2000	283
11 Operations everywhere – the Army in 2006 and 2007	310
12 Adaptation early in the twenty-first century	327
Conclusion: An adaptive army	356
Appendix: Operations, 1972–2007	366
Notes	378
Bibliography	406
Index	418

PHOTOGRAPHS

Captain Chris Wrangle	23
Alpha Company, 3 RAR, August 1987, Butterworth Barracks	46
Stand to, August 1987, Mersing, Malaysia	47
Warrant Officer Class 1 Brian Thomas Boughton, Multinational Force and Observers	57
Members of 3 ASC to UNIIMOG, Tehran, Iran, 12 April 1990	75
Members of 14th Field Troop serving with UNTAG, Oshakati, Northern Namibia, 18 June 1989	77
Australian field engineers serving with UNTAG conduct mine awareness training, Okajandja, Namibia, 18 June 1989	78
Lance Corporal James Pianta	79
Australian soldiers of the 17th Construction Squadron around a Wolf mine-protection vehicle	79
Captain A.J. 'Boomer' Smith and driver during Operation Salaam	82
Captain Marcus Fielding in a Soviet T-54/55 tank	82
Members of the second Australian contingent to UNMCTT – Afghanistan–Pakistan, Pakistan, c. October 1989	83
Captain M. O'Shannessy of the UNMCTT – Afghanistan–Pakistan dressed in local clothing	84
Army and RAAF personnel and politicians greet Army personnel on their return from Gulf War service	89
Corporal Ross Osborne treating refugees, northern Iraq, June 1991	91
Discussing the satellite base station, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, October 1992	97
Lance Corporal Paul Astbury calls in a radio check	99
Headquarters of the Force Communications Unit, UNTAC	99

Logistic support elements where Australian soldiers were based in Bosnia, 2000	102
Major Peter Bishenden being awarded his NATO medal	102
Soldiers from 1 RAR control food distribution, Somalia, January 1993	105
Colonel Mellor enjoys a beer, Somalia	106
Lieutenant Colonel David Hurley	108
Corporal Kim Felmingham beside an ambulance, Somalia	108
Australian barracks, Rwanda	113
Members of A Company, 2nd/4th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, on patrol, Rwanda	113
A Company, 2nd/4th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, helping in triage at Kigali hospital	114
Typical daily scene at Kibeho	115
Kibeho massacre, April 1995	116
Kibeho from the air, late 1995	117
Ntarama, May 1995 – the aftermath	117
Successful surgery, Kigali, May 1995	118
Caring for orphans at Butare, Rwanda, March 1995	119
Brigadier Roger Powell with Sam Kauona and Brigadier Jerry Singirok	131
Brigadier Powell conducting handover discussions with Brigadier Osborn and Colonel Bob Breen	132
Brigadier Mark Evans with unit commanders	153
Xanana Gusmão visiting Headquarters 3rd Brigade staff in Suai	160
Brigadier Mark Evans briefing Xanana Gusmão	160
Senior officials of RAMSI and local people, opening the new police post at Isuna, November 2003	188
Police and military personnel arrive for the official opening of Isuna police post, November 2003	188
Members of RAMSI talk with locals at Rufoki village	192
Brigadier John Hutcheson with locals at ‘Beach Blue’	205
Brigadier John Hutcheson with President José Ramos-Horta	206
Informal group portrait at Presidential Palace North	220

Protestors at Garema Place, Canberra	221
Anzac Day, US headquarters in Baghdad, 2003	222
Robert Hill, Peter Cosgrove and Maurie McNarn at Al Asad	223
An unidentified SAS member at Al Asad	224
Four SAS members at Al Asad	225
Brigadier Gerard Fogarty, Major General Mark Evans and Alexander Downer	226
Robert Hill and Peter Cosgrove at a press conference	226
Destroyed Iraqi weapons at Al Asad	227
Members of the Australian Defence Force attend morning briefing at Australian National Headquarters Baghdad	228
An Australian soldier stops in a Baghdad street	229
An ASLAV on patrol near the Swords of Qadisiyyah	230
An ASLAV and crew members of 2nd Cavalry Regiment arrive at Baghdad International Airport	231
Major General Mark Evans and Major General Jackson	234
Defence Minister Brendan Nelson's visit to Baghdad	239
The visit of Chief of Army Lieutenant General Peter Leahy to CJTF 633, 2007	240
‘The lads’: Iraqi training course graduates	246
Graduates of the AATT's program, Iraq	247
Gunner Daniel Mahoney, Gunner Andrew McKenna and Bombardier Jamie Cornwall operate an RBS-70 Missile Launcher	251
General Peter Cosgrove, Senator Robert Hill and Prime Minister John Howard at Victoria Quay, Fremantle	253
Prime Minister Howard with Lieutenant Colonel Mick Ryan	259
John Howard with 1 RTF at Tarin Kawt	260
Corporal Garth Pregnell, C Squadron, 5th Aviation Regiment, aboard a Chinook	263
Camp Bradman, home to an Australian Army Black Hawk helicopter detachment from 5th Aviation Regiment	300
Camp Bradman, the base of an ADF medical team deployed to Pakistan	301
Camp Bradman, Pakistan, 2005	302

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John Blaxland

ABBREVIATIONS

4 RAR (Cdo)	4th Battalion RAR (Commando; later 2 Commando Regiment [2 Cdo])
51 FNQR	51st Far North Queensland Regiment
AACAP	Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Program
AATTI	Australian Army Training Team – Iraq
ABCA	America Britain Canada Australia Armies Standardisation Program
ACG	Advance Company Group
ACM	Anti-Coalition Militia
ADF	Australian Defence Force
ADFA	Australian Defence Force Academy
ADFWC	Australian Defence Force Warfare Centre
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AFS	Australian Force Somalia
AGPS	Australian Government Publishing Service
AMTG	Al-Muthanna Task Group
ANARE	Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions
ANR	Australian National Representative
ANZAC	Australia New Zealand Army Corps
ANZAC SOF	Anzac Special Operations Force
ANZUK	Australia New Zealand United Kingdom
AO	Area of Operations
APC	Armoured Personnel Carrier
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
APIN	Army Presence in the North
APS	Australian Public Service
ASLAV	Australian Light Armoured Vehicle
AS MSF	Australian Medical Support Force
ASP90	<i>Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s</i>
ASP97	<i>Australia's Strategic Policy 1997</i>
ATSN	<i>Army: The Soldier's Newspaper</i>

AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
AUSBATT	Australian Battalion
AWM	Australian War Memorial
BAOR	British Army on the Rhine
BASB	Brigade Administrative Support Battalion
BPC	Border Protection Command
CABW	Combined Arms Battle Wing
CAL	Centre for Army Lessons
CATA	Combined Arms Training Activity
CATDC	Combined Arms Training and Development Centre
CDF	Chief of Defence Force
CER	Combat Engineer Regiment
CFC-A	Coalition Forces Command – Afghanistan
CGS	Chief of the General Staff
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings
CJIATF	Combined Joint Inter-Agency Task Force
CJSOTF	Coalition Joint Special Operations Task Force
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
CJTF-7	Coalition Joint Task Force – 7
CMAC	Cambodian Mine Action Centre
CMF	1. Citizen Military Forces (Army Reserve antecedent) 2. Commonwealth Monitoring Force (Zimbabwe-Rhodesia)
CO	Commanding Officer
CSSB	Combat Services Support Battalion
CTC	Combat Training Centre
CTEX	Counter-Terrorism Exercise
CTF	Combined Task Force
DCP	Defence Cooperation Program
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DGFLW	Director General of Future Land Warfare
DIGO	Defence Imagery and Geospatial Organisation
DJFHQ	Deployable Joint Force Headquarters
DP	Displaced Persons
DSTO	Defence Science and Technology Organisation
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
ELF	Enhanced Land Force
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Disposal
FALINTIL	National Armed Forces for the Liberation of East Timor

FANC	Forces Armées de la Nouvelle-Calédonie
F-FDTL	East Timor Defence Force
FORCOMD	Forces Command
FPDA	Five Power Defence Arrangements
HMAS	Her Majesty's Australian Ship
HNA	Hardened and Networked Army
HQ JOC	Headquarters Joint Operations Command
HUMINT	Human Intelligence
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IMV/PMV	Infantry Mobility Vehicle/Protected Mobility Vehicle
INTERFET	International Force in East Timor
IRR	Incident Response Regiment
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISF	International Security Forces
ISTAR	Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance
JIRSG	Japanese Iraqi Reconstruction Support Group
JOPC	Joint Offshore Protection Command
JTF	Joint Task Force
KFOR	Kosovo Force
LIS	Live Instrumentation System
LWDC	Land Warfare Development Centre
LWSC	Land Warfare Studies Centre
MEAO	Middle East Area of Operations
MFO	Multinational Force and Observers
MINURSO	United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara
MOLE	Manoeuvre Operations in the Littoral Environment
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRE	Mission Rehearsal Exercise
MUAV	Miniature Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCE	National Command Element
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NORCOM	Northern Command
Norforce	North-West Mobile Force
NZDF	New Zealand Defence Force
OBG(W)	Overwatch Battle Group (West)

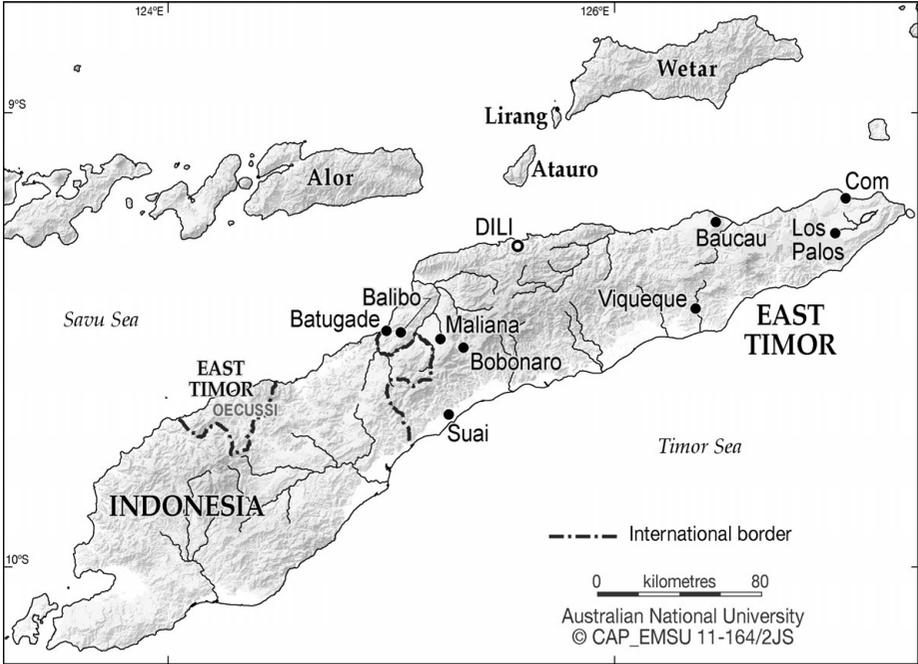
OC	Officer Commanding
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OP	Observation Post
OSS	Operational Support Squadron
PMG	Peace Monitoring Group
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PNGDF	Papua New Guinea Defence Force
PPCLI	Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry
RAA	Royal Australian Artillery
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAEME	Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
RAMSI	Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RAR	Royal Australian Regiment
RCG	Ready Company Group
RFMF	Royal/Republic of Fiji Military Forces
RFSU	Regional Force Surveillance Unit
RMA	Revolution in Military Affairs
RNZIR	Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment
RPA	Rwandan Patriotic Army
RQR	Royal Queensland Regiment
RTA	Restructuring the Army
SASR	Special Air Service Regiment
SEATO	South East Asian Treaty Organisation
SECDET	Security Detachment
SDSC	Strategic and Defence Studies Centre
SF	Special Forces
SFOR	Stabilisation Force
SFTC	Special Forces Training Centre
SIEV	suspected illegal or irregular entry vessel
SOCCE	Special Operations Command and Control Element
SOLS	Special Operations Logistics Squadron
SOTG	Special Operations Task Group
SPPKF	South Pacific Peace Keeping Force
STA	Surveillance and Target Acquisition
TAAIP	The Australian Army In Profile
TCL	Tactical Coordination Line
TFU	Task Force Uruzgan (Oruzgan)

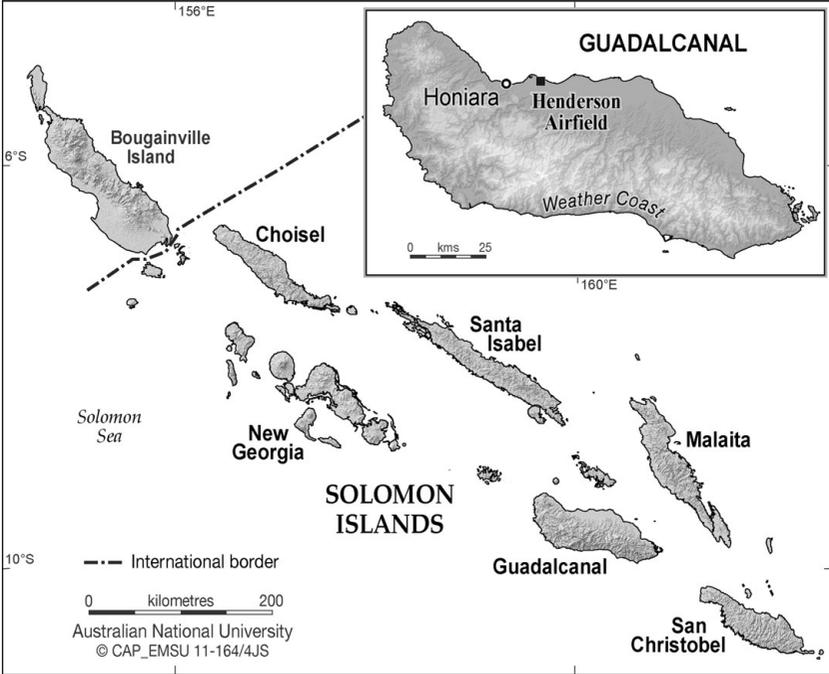
TMG	Truce Monitoring Group
TNI	Tentara Nasional Indonesia
TTP	Tactics, Techniques and Procedures
UAV	Unmanned/Unattended Aerial Vehicle
UNAMET	United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor
UNAMIC	United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia
UNAMIR	United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNGOC	United Nations Good Offices Commission in Indonesia
UNIIMOG	United Nations Iran–Iraq Military Observer Group
UNITAF	Unified Task Force
UNMCTT	United Nations Mine Clearance Training Team
UNMISSET	United Nations Mission in Support of East Timor
UNMO	United Nations Military Observer
UNMOGIP	United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid
UNOSOM	United Nations Office in Somalia
UNPOL	United Nations Police
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority Cambodia
UNTAET	United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor
UNTAG	United Nations Transition Assistance Group
UNTSO	United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation
VBIED	Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device
WHAM	Winning Hearts and Minds

MAPS

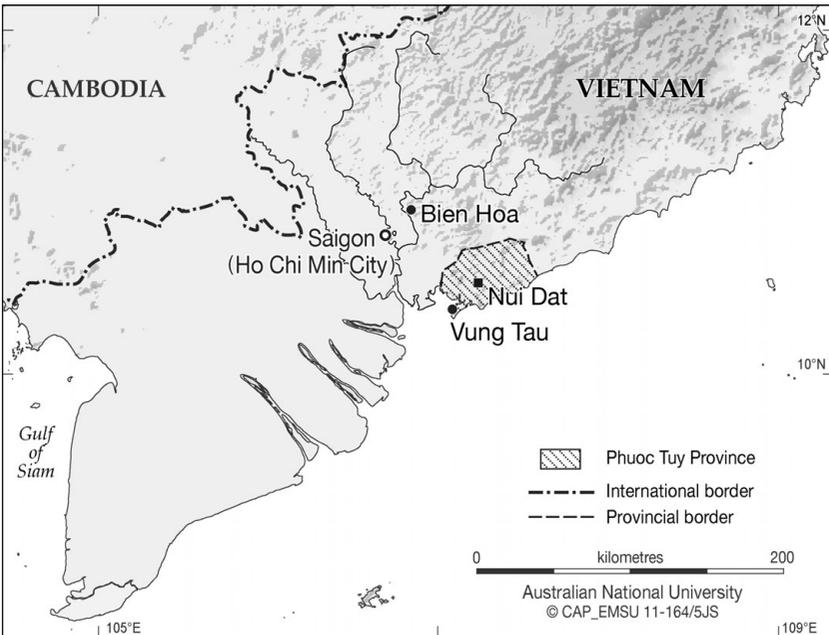


Map I South-East Asia





Map 4 Solomon Islands



Map 5 Vietnam



Map 6 Africa



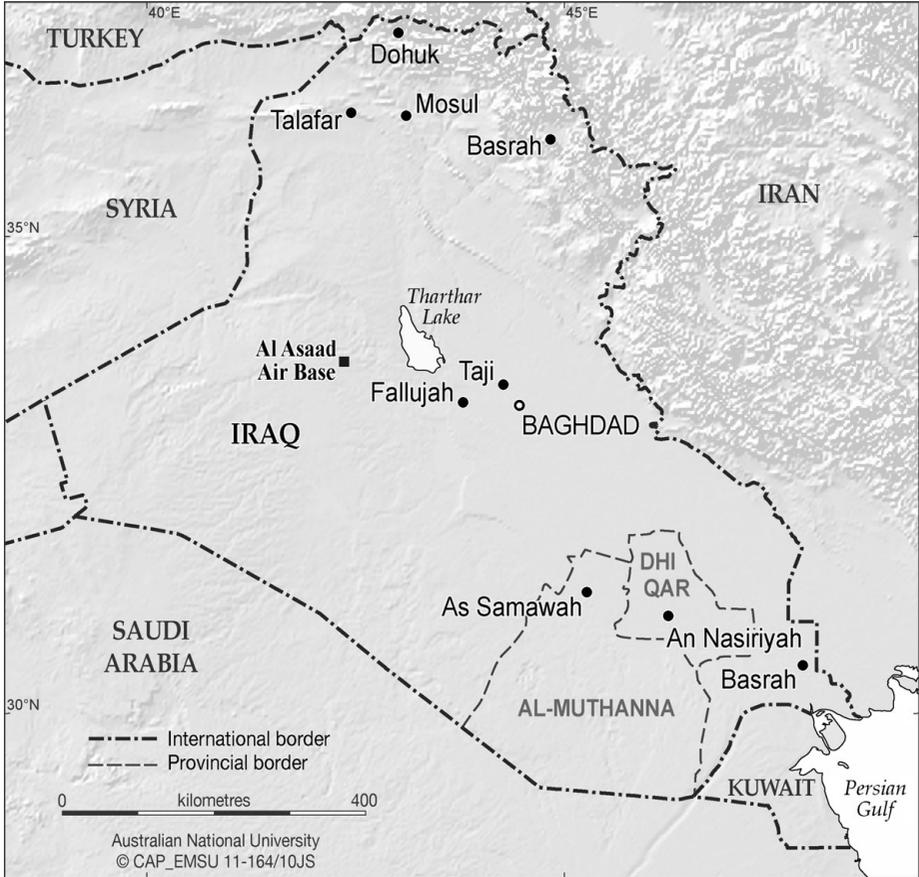
Map 7 Pacific Islands



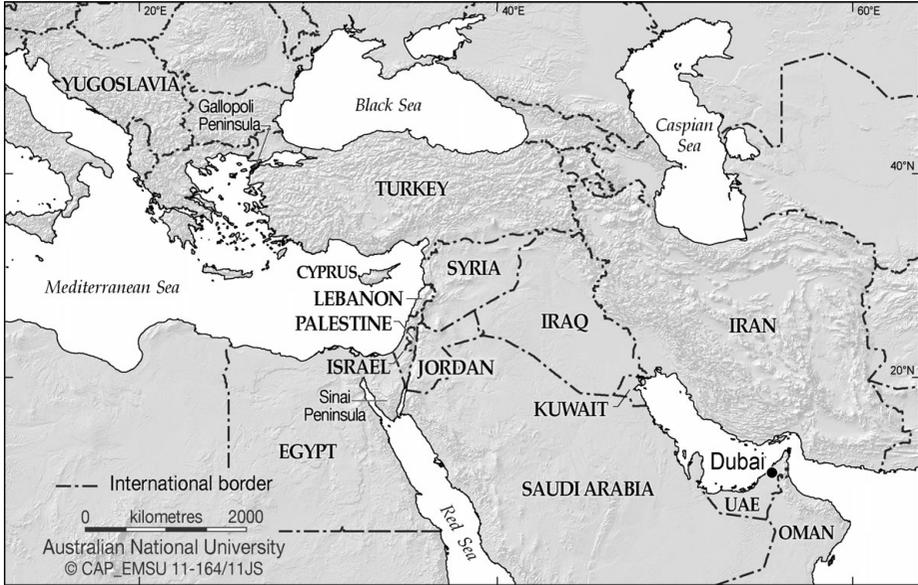
Map 8 Australia



Map 9 Pakistan and Afghanistan



Map 10 Iraq



Map 11 Middle East

INTRODUCTION

THE ORIGINS OF AUSTRALIA'S ARMY

The Aussie diggers of today's Australian Army draw on the inspiration of their predecessors. Australian soldiers have fought at the direction of their government in many places ranging from South Africa from 1899 to 1902 (during the Anglo-Boer War), to Gallipoli in 1915 and Beersheba in 1917 (during the First World War), to Tobruk in 1941 and Kokoda in 1942 (during the Second World War). After the world wars, Australian soldiers also fought at such places as Kapyong in Korea in 1951 and Long Tan in Vietnam in 1966. Increasingly, they also have drawn inspiration from the large number of lesser-known military operations conducted between the time when Gough Whitlam took office and John Howard lost office as Prime Minister of Australia. Yet there is little available to read that encapsulates this more recent experience. Those operations are the primary subject of this book.

In the aftermath of the politically contentious Vietnam War, Australian governments looked to be more circumspect in their use of armed force abroad. Rather than going 'all the way' with the United States, successive Australian governments thought more cautiously about the national interest and how a military force might contribute.¹ These were years, therefore, of niche contributions to operations often far afield in support of allies and international organisations including the United States, the British Commonwealth and the United Nations. Such contributions were carefully calibrated to generate the desired effect without exposing Australia to the kind of social division experienced at the height of the Vietnam War. But to understand the Australian Army in the years from

Whitlam to Howard, one must have a sense of how the use of Australian land forces evolved in the twentieth century.

THE WORLD WARS

Before the First World War, Australia relied largely on the Royal Navy for its strategic defence, with a relatively inexpensive militia army as a local backup. During the First World War and beyond, the military force that came to be known as the Australian Army expanded massively, building on the traditions and military procedures it inherited from the British Army to establish its own proud record of success on operations. For such major wars Australia has usually relied on relatively large and primarily infantry-centric forces as the basic component of its contribution to allied war efforts. For most wars, Australian land forces consisted primarily of infantry; albeit with some supporting artillery, and detachments of other components such as armour, logistics, medical, intelligence, engineering and aviation. The ability to muster and deploy such supporting capabilities is required by self-supporting, first-order armed forces.² Australia has struggled to develop and maintain this level of capability, often relying on Britain or the United States to provide it instead.

The fixation on Gallipoli in Australian popular culture has overshadowed Australia's premier wartime field commander, Lieutenant General (later General) Sir John Monash. Under his command, the Australian Corps in France was instrumental, alongside the Canadian Corps of Lieutenant General Sir Arthur Currie, in some of the greatest feats of arms seen in the First World War.³

The Australian approach to conducting military operations also was influenced by the experiences of desert warfare in the Middle East during both world wars, where extensive battlefield manoeuvre was both feasible and more common.⁴ Lieutenant General (later General) Sir Harry Chauvel's exploits with the Desert Mounted Corps in Egypt and Palestine in 1917 and 1918 were influential. In contrast to the experience of trench warfare in Europe, the legacy of this experience was of a fluid and not just positional form of warfare. The same could be said of the exploits of the Australians who fought over similar terrain a generation later.⁵

The social dissension generated over the conscription referendums in 1916 and 1917 is particularly noteworthy. Australians were prepared to send volunteer forces abroad, even in the face of casualties numbering in the tens of thousands. But repeated attempts to introduce compulsory military service overseas foundered on public opinion. The dissension

generated had muted echoes in the Second World War, although these subsided when the threat was closer to Australia, more serious and more imminent. The immediacy of the threat, particularly following the fall of Singapore in 1942, left Australians (in the main) prepared to send conscripts to fight wars offshore – if only in Australia's immediate neighbourhood.

Meanwhile, the Australian experience in the Second World War also featured fighting in the jungles and islands to the north of Australia. There, amphibious operations, light forces, limited availability of artillery (with a concomitant increased reliance on air support) and small-team actions, including assertive patrolling, featured prominently. Tanks also proved to be remarkably effective in this environment when operating dispersed and directly in support of advancing infantry – much as they had been used a generation earlier under General Monash in France. At the war's height, the Australian Army learnt to master combined-arms warfare in the New Guinea campaign from 1943, and conducted division-level amphibious operations in New Guinea in 1943–44 and Borneo in 1945. Arguably, Australia's overly romantic focus on the trials of the battle of Kokoda has masked the significant success in combined-arms and joint warfare as the Second World War progressed.⁶ For much of the time the tactics employed were driven by equipment shortages and limited numbers of adequately trained personnel as much as by the inaccessibility of the battlefields. This combination led to a strong emphasis on battle cunning and initiative based on mastering local conditions.

During the Second World War the Army deployed nearly 400 000 troops overseas with another 350 000 stationed in Australia.⁷ The herculean efforts made to generate these numbers enabled Australia to raise 14 divisions, complemented by a range of highly capable special forces whose exploits have become better known in subsequent years.⁸ But such efforts involved national service, or conscription, for home defence duties at least.

THE 'POST-WAR' EXPERIENCE AND 'LESSONS' OF VIETNAM

Australian military historians David Horner and Michael Evans both observed that ever since the Boer War there was a trend towards offshore warfare and despite periods when Australia looked to home defence, when a crisis came, 'Australia saw that it was in its strategic interests to commit

forces overseas'.⁹ That imperative to deploy forces overseas continued in the post-Vietnam War years.

Yet what is striking is the contrast between Australia's experience in the world wars, when so many troops were mobilised, and the far smaller forces maintained in the post-war years – even during times of regional conflict. A generation after the Second World War, for instance, during the Vietnam War, the Army peaked at just over 44 000 full-time personnel (including 28 000 volunteers) to sustain a reinforced, brigaded-sized, deployed task force.¹⁰ This was a far smaller force than Australia raised during the Second World War when Australians perceived that they faced an existential threat. This smaller force structure was a rational choice made by successive governments from the late 1940s onwards because they reckoned that with American strategic hegemony, Australia faced no direct threat that required mass mobilisation. Nonetheless, there was a perception that Australia had to make a contribution when called upon as an ally and/or as a responsible UN member. It was with this in mind that Australia contributed forces to the war in Korea from 1950 to 1953, to operations in Malaya and later Malaysia in the 1950s and early 1960s, and subsequently to Vietnam.

Despite Australia's relatively small contribution, the Vietnam War experience had a searing effect on the Australian consciousness. Australia's approach to military operations during the Vietnam War stood in stark contrast with the more aggressive tactics of Australia's more casualty-tolerant American allies. As a consequence, in relative and absolute terms, Australia suffered far fewer casualties than the Americans. Australia's approach sought to minimise own casualties using stealthy patrols, an approach influenced by experience alongside British forces in Malaya and Borneo. Indeed, infantry section- and platoon-sized teams had conducted sensitive cross-border 'Claret' patrols in Indonesian Borneo in which they demonstrated versatility and prowess with minimal casualties.¹¹ Even the number of casualties accrued in Vietnam (500 killed and 3129 wounded) was not that much greater than the number suffered during the much shorter Korean War (1500 casualties of whom 340 were killed).¹² And the Korean War transpired with no great controversy on Australia's home front.

What marked the Vietnam War experience from other post-war conflicts was that the scale of the commitment was seen as necessitating compulsory national service by conscription.¹³ Eventually the national consciousness was seared by the dissension over conscription. By the late 1960s Moratorium protests in the capital cities around the country rattled the conservative government that had sent conscripted troops to Vietnam.

Table 1: Army formation nomenclature

<i>Grouping name</i>	<i>Size</i>
Section/squad	8–12 people
Platoon/troop	20–35 people
Company/squadron	80–120 people
Battalion/regiment	400–800 people
Brigade/task force	3000–5000 people
Division	8000–15 000 people
Corps	Two or more divisions
Army	Multiple corps

The dissension echoed the divisive experience in the First World War and left Australian politics polarized for years. As a result, political leaders from Gough Whitlam to John Howard responded to the perceived limits of tolerance for casualties and for compulsory service for operations remote from Australia’s shores. In hindsight, many saw Vietnam as far away and of debatable significance for the direct defence of Australia.¹⁴ The Australian Government under Prime Minister Gough Whitlam quickly abandoned conscription and national service. The Army was tasked instead with developing and maintaining a smaller, purely voluntary force. Thereafter, while Australia was not facing a direct and imminent threat on the scale experienced in 1942, conscription was to be avoided. This meant that in considering any force contribution to operations abroad, every effort had to be made to avoid contributions on a scale that could possibly later demand the reintroduction of conscription.

The Regular Army that emerged as a result after the Vietnam War was a small, professional force with troop numbers hovering near 30 000.¹⁵ With such a small full-time force, the Army focused on maintaining core capabilities. This force consisted of one active-duty division of three combat brigades (one each focused on light, mechanised-and-parachute, and amphibious skills) and two reserve divisions (and, from 1991, only one reserve division) of six combat brigades designed, in part, to form the core of an expansion force if the need arose (see table 1). In addition, there were aviation, logistic and other specialist support elements. The post-Vietnam War Australian Army was a small force, particularly when compared with the United States Army’s 10 active-duty divisions consisting of 40 active-duty combat brigades and 75 support brigades deployed worldwide, notably in West Germany and South Korea.¹⁶ The Australian

Army was small even when compared with neighbouring armies like Indonesia's, which at more than 340 000 troops was more than ten times the size of Australia's, albeit with most of it focused on its nation-building role. But with little evident regional threats against which forces could be structured, and with Australia's principal ally by far the most powerful nation on earth, there were no compelling demands for a larger army.

In effect, as the following chapters attest, the political leadership of Australia experienced what could be described as a post-Vietnam War casualty cringe and a heightened consciousness of the political risk associated with deploying armed forces abroad. As a result, it ensured that the Army focused on the direct defence of Australia and, beyond that, made only carefully calibrated contributions to operations with strong international mandates and limited political risk. Such operations were marked by small-footprint, limited-scope commitments in support of Australia's major ally as well as collective security obligations globally.

Notwithstanding the difficulties over Vietnam, many Australians have been particularly proud of their Army, its heritage and its prominent place in Australian consciousness. But that heritage, for most people, has been understood in terms of a simple approach to soldiering and warfare, even though warfare itself has always been challenging and complex. What is more, traditional Australian military history has tended to focus on the major wars: the world wars and, in recent years, Vietnam and Korea. But as the leading Australian military historian, David Horner, has argued, the experience of the last couple of decades is equally worthy of study.¹⁷ Certainly the heightened operational tempo in the face of a series of 'non-traditional' security challenges that emerged in the late 1990s accentuated the need for adaptation and a broadening of the notion of security. This broader rubric saw not just insurgencies but also natural disasters and humanitarian crises prompt the deployment of forces on operations.

Particularly in the post-Cold War period, after 1989, Australia ventured into more ambitious force contributions to places close by. Thus when the neighbourhood experienced calamity, Australia played the lead-nation role on military operations in Bougainville, East Timor (also known as Timor-Leste)¹⁸ and Solomon Islands. But by then, experience in Namibia, Cambodia, Somalia, Rwanda and elsewhere contributed to rebuilding political leaders' confidence in using the Army without fear of drastic domestic political repercussions. Successive governments adopted this cautious approach of employing an all-volunteer force. Perhaps this limited approach to the size and cost of offshore deployments stemmed from the largely optional nature of the deployments undertaken from

1972 to 2007. By and large, these operations were seen as being in the national interest, although they were not directly or immediately related to defending the Australian continent. Australia therefore had the luxury of being able to decide for itself the size and type of force it would contribute.

THE FIVE REASONS FOR PROWESS

Apart from employing only volunteers, the Army's success at regaining its place as a politically neutral and emblematic national institution had much to do with the success of the many far-flung, post-Vietnam War operations. Underlying this process five key factors were at work that could best be described as the Army's five reasons for prowess. Critics may argue over the exact number and the exact definition of the factors. But they serve as a useful benchmark for a reflection on the Army's journey of rehabilitation since 1972. The five reasons help explain how the Army regained and then maintained its place as an iconic national institution. The experience over the period from Whitlam to Howard demonstrates that the Army was capable of completing assigned tasks without undue controversy, in part because many of the tasks were uncontroversial. The five reasons do not comprehensively define the Army's capabilities, but they help explain how the Army responded to events. Hence they feature throughout as guideposts for reflection on how the Army adapted and sought to overcome the challenges faced in the intervening years.

REASON I: INDIVIDUAL TRAINING

The first reason for the Army's prowess concerns the creation of common individual training and education institutions. These reinforced the understanding of the Army's various components as part of a combined-arms team. In turn, that team was reliant on the capabilities of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) to achieve maximum effectiveness. These training institutions were epitomised by the Royal Military College (RMC) Duntroon, established in 1911 (having later absorbed other officer training institutions, particularly the Officer Cadet School at Portsea, Victoria) and by the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) established in 1986.¹⁹ These institutions are vital for the Army's ability to learn and adapt. While inspired by the prospect of financial savings expected to accrue, ADFA was established

in part on the promise of better inter-service cooperation. Its creation was set against the bitter enmity between service chiefs that reflected the intensity of inter-service rivalry.

It took more than a generation before Duntroon graduates would emerge as senior commanders in the Australian Army in the mid-twentieth century. Since then the influence of that institution on the Army's professionalism has been profound and overwhelmingly positive. Duntroon and the other officer training institutions helped the Army establish an impressive reputation both as a national institution and as a fighting and peace-keeping force. Duntroon provided for a shared military ethos of ethical leadership by example. Graduates went on to become unit commanders, staff officers and, eventually, senior military officers. The ethos was deeply egalitarian, with selection premised on ability, not wealth or connections. A distinctive feature was that respect from soldiers was earned rather than simply demanded. This was the only practical approach to take for such a unique and predominantly egalitarian society as Australia.²⁰

A prominent example was General Peter Cosgrove who, having trained at Duntroon, served in Vietnam and gained experience as a commander and staff officer, then went on to command Australia's most challenging military operation since the Vietnam War in East Timor in 1999.²¹ Apart from Duntroon, a range of military schools were created for the various specialisations required by a modern Army. These schools also generated prowess in individual training. Although the School of Artillery dated back to 1885, other schools were relatively young, because the pre-1939 Army was a militia force with the exception of the Regular force coastal gunners and engineers. Most of the schools were developed under the stewardship of Australia's senior-most military officer, General Sir Thomas Blamey, during the Second World War. Those schools maintained the Army's standard operating procedures and higher-level operational concepts to provide guidance on Australia's way of conducting military operations. There were also some important joint warfare courses that brought the three armed services together. The benefit of this approach was reinforced by through-career education, represented most prominently by the Command and Staff College program for 'middle management' officers at the rank of major.

Beyond staff college, however, there was limited opportunity for further education and training. Some questioned whether the system that generated an officer like Cosgrove, who was able to operate well at the operational and strategic level, was deliberate or an accident. After all, the Army had not focused on training for large-scale military campaigns

incorporating forces above the levels of battalion and brigade. In Korea and Vietnam, for instance, Australians commanded a brigade-sized force at most – whereas they had commanded at levels up to Army during the Second World War. Australia's experience in East Timor pointed to a need for more than a purely theoretical ability to operate at higher than brigade level.²²

The Army sought to maintain a culture of learning, operating in a manner consistent with the concepts Peter Senge described as the 'learning organization'.²³ There still was a difference between education and experience and the Army tended to value experience over education, but it recognised the need to blend education and experience (and initiative) to develop its leaders, as well as a desire to learn from others. The experience on operations was a significant agent for change and adaptation. The more operations the Army was involved in, the more capable it became.

Still, the education and training programs were not enough, and there were several instances in which the Army had to relearn lessons learned by previous generations, as did the Army's political masters. The following chapters attest that lessons had to be experienced repeatedly before they were understood and truly learned. The predisposition to learn was accentuated by the surge in operational tempo, providing a greater source of lessons and a greater imperative to learn and adapt.

The Army's predisposition to learn was confirmed by the results of an inquiry, commissioned by the Chief of the Defence Force (CDF) in 2005, into learning culture in ADF schools and training establishments.²⁴ The inquiry endorsed the concept of the Army being a learning organisation and recognised the positive effects of the mandatory training in occupational health and safety, fraud prevention, ethics, equity and diversity. Indeed, operational experience was forcing the Army to understand more fully the significance of achieving consent, understanding local culture and adopting a values-based approach (cognisant of local customs and norms) to enhancing the prospects of success on operations.²⁵

REASON 2: COLLECTIVE FIELD TRAINING

The second reason for prowess was the emphasis on collective field training exercises and 'battle evaluation'. Collective training brought together individual skills to amount to more than the sum of the parts. The ability to plan and undertake multifaceted combat exercises was a sign of a first-order army that could deploy from the barracks, simulating an operational deployment far from its home base.

Vietnam War-era collective training was epitomised by the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra, Queensland, where battle evaluation was supervised on field exercises by seasoned veterans. Training would culminate in a battalion group exercise, usually at Shoalwater Bay. Veterans' experience fostered some adaptation as enemy tactics and circumstances changed.²⁶ Indeed, many of the lessons learned afterwards echoed those learned during the Vietnam War.²⁷

Collective training reinforced the need to operate as a team with a joint (i.e. inter-service) perspective. The increasingly joint focus of the Army was influenced by joint foundational individual and collective training with inputs from the RAN and RAAF. The following chapters demonstrate how that joint perspective expanded, becoming increasingly an inter-agency perspective, particularly where Australia had a lead role. The inter-agency approach reflected the significance of working on operations alongside other arms of government including police forces, diplomats and aid agencies, notably the Australian Federal Police (AFP), the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). Other civil society organisations would feature as well.

REASON 3: REGIMENTAL OR CORPS IDENTITIES

The first two reasons for prowess, individual and collective training, became known as the Army's 'foundation warfighting training'. The third reason was the Army's various regimental or corps identities. In many ways these echoed the experience of other Commonwealth armies, notably the British, Canadian and New Zealand forces. The identity concerned internal specialisation, whereby relatively tight-knit communities of experts in the component arms and services of the Army (the regiments or corps) developed family-like bonds of trust and friendship. The Army's small size contributed to the degree of familiarity achieved within a corps grouping. In this context, excellence could be fostered, enabling the niche areas to work together. The aggregate came to be known as the 'combined arms team', which built and relied on trust in respective specialisations.

The Australian Army's regimental or corps identities had close links with their British antecedents, although the two countries' systems differed in a number of ways. The Australian Army retained the regimental system despite having dabbled in American organisational concepts via the short-lived Pentropic organisation in the early 1960s modelled on the short-lived US Army pentagonal 'Pentomic' divisional model. In addition,

the reinforcement model revolved around rotation of units rather than individual troops. The Australian Army also considered closely American tactics and operational concepts during the Vietnam War. But the UK-derived organisation that was retained allowed for the various corps to retain internalised standards as well as the necessary mechanisms to validate standards.²⁸

To be sure, there was a tendency for the respective corps to develop strong identities, particularly in barracks, that at times generated inter-corps tensions and rivalries. This tendency was mitigated by emphasis on training and operating as combined-arms battle groups and brigades.

The robustness of this system allowed task groups or 'battle groups' to be constructed with components from the arms and services. These groups were assembled and informed by evaluation of preceding unit deployments, although there were numerous instances when the lessons were not fully learned, as the story below attests.

While official 'doctrine' still emphasised the division, organisationally the focus was on the geographically dispersed brigades and primarily with battalion-level groupings rather than the larger division-level formations common in other armies. Training was focused at brigade level and below because the Army was too small to exercise comprehensively at divisional level and found it too difficult to orchestrate a two-sided test of skills. Interestingly enough, the US Army's shift in the early twenty-first century from divisions to brigade combat teams resembled the approach adopted in Australia decades earlier, although this was not to suggest that Australian thinking was particularly significant for US conceptual developments.²⁹

REASON 4: TIES WITH CLOSE ALLIES AND REGIONAL PARTNERS

The fourth reason for prowess was Australia's historic and enduring connection with great and powerful friends and significant regional partners. The connection with Britain was profound, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, but with an enduring influence beyond the two world wars. The British Army's history, culture, tactics and procedures had a positive and significant influence on the Australian Army. Australia particularly benefited from exposure to the British Army's stealthy and resource-frugal approach to tracking and patrolling, for instance. The connection with the United States, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century and beyond, was also significant, although

with different consequences in terms of how the Australian Army adapted. Australians tended to gravitate to the more frugal British approach rather than the firepower and resource-intensive American approach to warfare. Interestingly, the cross-pollination of American and British experiences and approaches, facilitated by Australian officers being trained in US and UK military schools and sent on exchange postings, helped create a remarkably professional Army, despite the comparatively limited funding expended on the Army in Australia.

The influence of the British and Americans was significant on a number of other armies as well, notably the New Zealand and Canadian armies. Indeed, the similar mix made Australia, in effect, part of a cousinhood of like-minded nations, with similar military cultures and organisations. That relationship is captured, organisationally at least, in the America Britain Canada Australia (ABCA) Armies Standardisation Program, to which New Zealand is a signatory.³⁰ The ABCA Armies usually took turns to host standardisation discussions, which tended to focus on ways to achieve economies wherever possible by combining resources and efforts. Such discussions were scheduled routinely, addressing capability-related issues of mutual concern.

Personnel exchanges and interaction provided critical infusions of experience and innovation. Many notable soldiers served on such exchanges and gained considerable professional benefit, which they brought back to Australia. Major John Cantwell (later Major General), for instance, served with the British Army during the Gulf War in 1990 and 1991 as well as in Iraq and Afghanistan later.³¹ Another was Captain (later Colonel) Marcus Fielding, who served with the US Army on exchange in Haiti and later in Iraq.³² Another was Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier) Mark Brewer on exchange with the Canadian Army in Kandahar in Afghanistan in 2006. On his return Brewer recognised the courage and professionalism of the Canadian forces, which had made a bloody transition to focusing on warfighting, having earlier been dismissed as being no more than peacekeepers.³³ There are many other examples.

In addition to its traditional allies, the Australian Army developed constructive and close working relations with the armies of a number of regional powers. Australia's overall relationship with its greatest neighbour, Indonesia, oscillated significantly from periods of closeness to periods of tension. But the investment by the respective defence forces in people-to-people links, in exercises and in a range of collaborative activities proved beneficial and helped avoid excesses at times of tension.

The Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), with Malaysia and Singapore in addition to Britain and New Zealand, provided an excellent vehicle for additional regional engagement with close regional Commonwealth countries that was beneficial for all the armies involved. FPDA activities helped ensure that the ADF remains recognised as a constructive and significant contributor to regional security.

Australia's relationship with Thailand was of considerable value both to the security of Thailand (notably through the professional interaction with Australian forces) and to Australia's ability to make a significant and useful contribution to regional security. This was most evident when Thailand became the first South-East Asian country to contribute forces in East Timor in 1999. Thailand would have been far more reluctant to commit forces alongside in the absence of a decades-long bilateral military relationship with Australia dating back to the creation of the now-defunct South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in the mid-1950s. Similarly, Australia's longstanding engagement with the Philippines proved its value when that country also contributed forces in 1999.

In the South Pacific, Australia's relationship with Papua New Guinea (PNG) was the most significant. Regular exchanges, shared training and exercises and a range of common interests continued to foster the bilateral relationship with the PNG Defence Force (PNGDF). Although the PNGDF's effectiveness and political reliability were questioned, the strength of the ADF's relationship was particularly useful as a restraining influence on the PNGDF and for facilitating its participation in a number of Pacific-oriented operations discussed below.

REASON 5: LINKS WITH SOCIETY

The fifth and most significant reason for the Army's prowess concerns its links with society and Australian society's links with its Army. As a general rule the effectiveness of an army is closely linked with the support it has on the home front. Admittedly, fewer Australians than ever were serving in the forces, and there were very few ex-military members in federal parliament at the time of writing.³⁴ Yet despite the small numbers who had served, there was a strong sense of Australian national identity linked to the Army, which enabled it to attract high-calibre candidates as recruits, both as officers and as enlisted personnel.

Lieutenant General (Retd) Peter Leahy saw links with society as pivotal: 'To me this is the strength of the Army – the citizen soldiers who bring community values with them, keep them in the Army and then go

back to their communities.’ To Leahy it was important ‘to be careful that we do not grow apart from the Australian community. Merit, egalitarianism and a need to continually prove yourself as a leader are the great hallmarks of the Army and we need to sustain them.’³⁵ For the Australian Army there would be no ‘warrior caste’ separate from society.³⁶

In addition, the Army’s recruiting system selected only those with physical prowess, agility and mental acumen. Soldiers who deployed to Somalia in 1993, for instance, enthusiastically participated in Lieutenant Colonel (later General and Chief of the Defence Force) David Hurley’s attempts to rebuild some of the fabric of society in war-torn Baidoa (as discussed in [chapter 2](#)). Their efforts earned them the monikers of soldier, teacher, ambassador and peacekeeper. The Australian Army also was well practised at assisting during times of bushfires, floods, cyclones, earthquakes and tsunamis.

The Army’s links with society were reinforced by its sense of identity and values that reflected Australian culture. These values stressed promotion on merit as the principal consideration. Indeed, some argued that the ‘cultural piece’ was the ‘glue’ between the areas of military expertise and that it was this glue that made the Australian Army excellent.³⁷ Still, more needed to be done to recruit from diverse ethnic backgrounds, although a major obstacle tended to be perceptions of the Army in some ethnic communities rather than an Army reluctance to diversify its recruiting.³⁸

The Army’s links with society also constrained the government’s freedom of action: with an eye to the electoral ramifications arising from decisions on force deployments, the government remained wary of commitments likely to generate significant controversy or casualties. The following chapters attest that decisions concerning operational commitments were measured against the political consequences on the government’s domestic political standing. The ghosts of conscription and high casualties associated with Vietnam reverberated in the minds of political leaders for decades. The casualty figures admittedly paled in comparison with the casualty figures of the world wars, but these transpired generations earlier in the pre-television era and in what appeared to be wars of national survival – notably also at a time when Australian nationhood, at least for many Australians of British descent, remained closely connected with the British Empire and Commonwealth.

The Army’s links with society also helped drive the employment of the Army in response to crises and disasters, often under a United Nations or other multinational mandate. A number of operational commitments reflected concerns that Australia should be seen to be doing something

to help those in need, often remote from Australia's shores. Australia's commitments to Rwanda and Somalia in the mid-1990s are examples. Admittedly the preference was for these operations to take place where the costs and risks were low.

This book demonstrates that the five reasons for prowess helped create what, in a limited sphere at least, became a world-class military force with a distinctive culture and values. These factors were responsible for the Australian Army's international reputation and regional edge. This book posits that the Army demonstrated its capabilities for stability operations (such as counter-insurgency, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief) as part of a joint capability; that is, supported by air force, navy, intelligence, logistics and command and control enabling components (admittedly often provided by allies). That joint capability enabled the Army to operate more effectively as part of a wider inter-agency team, drawing on diplomatic, police and aid agency resources from across the arms of government. The development of this inter-agency approach was demonstrated on operations in Bougainville, East Timor, Solomon Islands and elsewhere.

OPERATIONS FAR AND WIDE

The focus hereafter is on the more than 150 specifically identified operations conducted abroad and in Australia. Developments in the wider Army are examined as they enabled the deployment of self-supporting and appropriately equipped forces. It is the combined effect of the various components of the Army – the 'special' and 'conventional', as well as combat,³⁹ combat support⁴⁰ and combat services support⁴¹ elements, with vital support from the other services – that made it possible.

CONCEPTUAL METHODOLOGY

This book relies to a large extent on secondary sources supplemented with correspondence and interviews with participants. Selected references were validated by extensive peer review, much of it drawn from colleagues' own experiences. In addition to a number of Australian military historians, more than 32 highly experienced and capable Army officers and warrant officers read drafts of this manuscript, validating and critiquing certain aspects. Their contributions are noted throughout. In addition, while this work is an explicitly unclassified account of events, the author's own

experience and earlier access to classified information enabled considerable insight and discretion in the selection of unclassified references from open-source material.

Nevertheless, this work does not pretend to provide a comprehensive coverage of every operation. That would be going beyond the level of detail necessary for this kind of overview. What follows is a review that focuses primarily on the Army's performance on domestic and offshore operations from 1972 to 2007.

PART |

FROM VIETNAM TO EAST TIMOR, 1972-99

The ‘lean years’ for the Army, from 1972 to 1999, were in one sense an aberration for an army that had forces deployed on operations for most of the time since the onset of the Korean War in 1950. These years following the withdrawal from Vietnam were to witness considerable shrinkage in the size of the force as well as major reorganisations and considerable consolidation. Much of the Army’s efforts were focused on keeping the force relevant during a period when there was little apparent threat and when the Navy and the Air Force seemed to many to be the more sensible components on which the Australian Government should focus its limited defence resources. It is also a story of a period in the Army’s history that is little understood.

The strategic focus during this period moved away from the notion of ‘forward defence’ to a strategy that emphasised defence of the continent itself, yet the Army was involved in a surprising amount of other activity that went largely unnoticed outside the Army. While the Army sought

to adjust to changed strategic and budgetary circumstances, a range of opportunities presented themselves to continue to maintain an operational footing. In the last years of the Cold War, from 1972 to 1989, such opportunities were relatively few and far between. But as the Cold War came to an end, from 1989 onwards, many of the restraints on conflicts and international responses melted away. As a result, the Army's operational tempo surged considerably with a range of deployments abroad throughout the 1990s. The chapters of part 1 attempt to shed some light on that story.

CHAPTER |

THE LAST YEARS OF THE COLD WAR, 1972–89

For much of the twentieth century, including during the Cold War, Australia faced little imperative to work towards integrating its armed services. Such efforts were constrained after the Second World War by commitments alongside the United States and Britain in Korea, Britain in Borneo and Malaya (later Malaysia), and the United States in Vietnam. In each case, the Army faced a stronger imperative to work with the United States Army and Marines or the British Army than with its sister services. This was because in large-scale coalition wars the RAN and RAAF were best employed as part of the allied naval or air force effort.

The experience of integrated operations alongside British and New Zealand forces helped hone warfighting capabilities and reinforce commonalities in tactics and procedures between Commonwealth forces.¹ The experience of working with US forces in Vietnam, however, proved a marked contrast.²

THE ARMY'S 1960s LEGACY

Underlying Australia's military commitment in Vietnam was ongoing concern over Australia's strategic vulnerability. Australia's sense of isolation was confirmed by the Japanese advances of 1942 and reinforced by post-war perceptions of a communist southern thrust. Concern was accentuated when the United States acceded to Indonesian pressure for territorial expansion, allowing Indonesia to take over Dutch-controlled West New Guinea in 1963. Australia's lack of influence in Washington perturbed

those in government. Hence, in addition to contributing troops alongside British forces in Malaya and Borneo, Australia wanted to bolster ties with the United States. The most obvious way to do so was to contribute forces alongside Americans. This it did by providing training advisers in Vietnam in 1962. But the scale of Australia's commitment altered dramatically when it committed combat troops to Vietnam in 1965. These moves and the ending of Confrontation with Indonesia in 1966, eased Australia's sense of strategic insecurity, and a majority of Australians supported the government's commitment to Vietnam throughout the 1960s and beyond.³

With the Army focused on Vietnam, counter-insurgency operations were emphasised for the following decade. Initially, in 1965, Australia committed an infantry battalion to fight as part of the US 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate) in Bien Hoa province, north-east of Saigon. But Australians found US Army tactics inappropriate for them. Working closely with US forces at the tactical level disturbed Australian commanders. The American approach relied on drawing out the enemy, then retaliating with superior firepower, but this was costly in terms of own casualties. Australian commanders sought to minimise casualties and to operate separately to implement more effectively British-influenced Australian tactics of stealthy jungle patrols, frugal use of force and carefully targeted ambushing. The Australian Government felt the best way to bolster further alliance credentials while enabling its troops to operate according to their own procedures was to increase the force size and take responsibility for a discrete area. By 1966, therefore, Australia increased its land force commitment in Vietnam to a combined-arms (light infantry-based) brigade-sized force called the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF). 1ATF was tasked with operating principally in its own province, Phuoc Tuy, south-east of Saigon. In addition, separate air and naval contributions were made alongside American counterparts, largely on a single-service basis.⁴

Australian tanks would eventually be deployed as well, leading to a drastic reduction in Australian casualties – much as they had been reduced when tanks were belatedly introduced against Japanese troops in the jungles of New Guinea in the Second World War.⁵ From then on, Australian forces continued to work with British units (in Malaysia and Singapore) and American units (in Vietnam), with limited inter-service collaboration with the RAN and RAAF. The experiences fostered robust and seasoned light infantry combat forces, which included, in Australia's case, a well-honed special forces capability expert in small-team patrolling.⁶

Notwithstanding the early moves away from what were considered by Australian commanders as inappropriate American practices in Bien Hoa, Australians were awestruck by the demonstration of US military power in Vietnam. As the years of war passed, the constant interaction with US forces drew Australians from the more methodical and stealthy tactics derived from their experiences in Malaya and Borneo towards the US Army's more firepower-oriented 'search and destroy' approach, with its heavy reliance on air power.

A more methodical approach would have been consistent with the experience of the Australian Army, originating from the patrolling techniques used against the Japanese in the Second World War and influenced by British Commonwealth experiences in Malaya and Borneo. Such an approach also might have resulted in the Australian forces taking greater responsibility for civil affairs in Phuoc Tuy province, rather than relying on US officers to perform the functions of administrative liaison and local influence. Indeed, seeing the commitment as too great, the Australian Army declined the opportunity to manage the conduct of the war in Phuoc Tuy province holistically, preferring to focus on the conduct of combat operations. As a result, the Australians largely paid lip service to a range of functions considered necessary for a successful counter-insurgency campaign, functions that were provided to a certain extent by allies. These functions included human intelligence, civil affairs, police, public health, foreign language instruction, foreign force training, and psychological warfare.

It is not surprising that Australia avoided committing to some of these activities, considering the additional skills and manpower requirements they would have required. In practice, the Australian Army in Vietnam often left allies to perform many of the specialist support roles, although the Army did deploy a civil affairs unit commanded by Peter Gratton, who would later become Chief of the Defence Force. The end result for the Army was that the collective Australian experience in Vietnam left an unbalanced legacy in terms of force structure and philosophical outlook. Little emphasis was placed in the years that followed on such functions as civil affairs, psychological operations and human intelligence.⁷

The Australian Army, small as it was, had only a limited number of specialists in certain fields. The Australian Government had constrained the force size and mandate. As a result, the Army saw itself as justified in being circumspect about committing to operations that generated large numbers of casualties and, in turn, political risk. Conversely, Australia was unwilling to maintain task groups comprehensively structured for

counter-insurgency operations. This left the Army with a cultural legacy that stressed infantry warfighting at the expense of some of the other components of a balanced force. The Army was also affected by an over-emphasis on tactical-level excellence and not the operational art or the strategic-level dynamics.

Notwithstanding the limitations experienced, the practice of dealing with US tactics and equipment forced the Australian Army to reconsider its British-derived approach to warfighting. As one writer observed, the developments in tactics and doctrine of the Vietnam War period marked a substantial step in the process of developing Australian Army doctrine.⁸ In the end, more than fifty thousand Australians served on operations in Vietnam, and the experience left a lasting legacy on the Army.

That legacy was most searingly felt as a consequence of the five hundred Australians who died and the three thousand who were wounded. The introduction of conscription left Australian society deeply divided, with concerns over the efficacy of compulsory military service and of fighting a war that critics claimed was a 'war of national liberation'. Many draft resisters, conscientious objectors and protesters were fined or jailed. A common view held in 1972 was that the electoral victory of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) led by Gough Whitlam could be at least in part attributed to a turning away from the war and from those most associated with Australia's involvement in the war, the Liberal-Country Party coalition government.⁹

EARLY UN OBSERVER MISSIONS

In the meantime, two other minor operational commitments were maintained throughout these years.

Australia had been one of the first participants in one of the earliest peacekeeping missions, known as the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), established in January 1949. The mission was still going in 1979 when seven Australians participated as military observers in the thirtieth anniversary of the ceasefire, with Lieutenant Colonel Rod Ross as chief operations officer. The ceasefire had been breached in 1965 and 1971, but UNMOGIP helped restore the ceasefire, then supervised the withdrawal of troops.¹⁰ The last Australian, Captain (later Lieutenant Colonel) Jack Zaharias, left UNMOGIP in December 1985.¹¹

Australia also participated in the United Nations' earliest such mission: the United Nations Good Offices Commission (UNGOC) to Indonesia,



Captain Chris Wrangle RAEME on duty at OP 58 (located on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights Area of Separation) in May 1987. From the Syrian side it was possible to see the operation posts located on the Israeli side. Apart from handover days when operation post teams changed over, dress was quite casual because no one could see you. Most UN Military Observers put their uniforms on when guests were expected. (Chris Wrangle)

from 1947 to 1949. Australia's activist and idealist Minister for External Affairs, Dr Herbert Vere 'Doc' Evatt, was instrumental in pushing Australia into the limelight over this issue. Evatt was an internationalist and strong believer in the United Nations. But with the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 (after Evatt and Chifley left office and the more conservative Robert Menzies was prime minister) relatively little further attention was given to such observer missions. After the Korean War and before the Vietnam War, the Army deployed unarmed UN Military Observers (UNMOs) with the UN Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) in the Middle East. Initially, from 1956 onwards, the officers selected primarily were from the Army's part-time forces, the Citizen Military Forces (CMF).¹²

Particularly from late 1971 onwards, with Australia's commitment to the Vietnam War winding down, the opportunity to deploy with UNTSO, and some years later with the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in the Sinai, became coveted opportunities for a handful each year. The

officers involved in UNTSO were selected from the Regular Army, not from the part-time CMF (renamed the Army Reserve), to gain operational experience. They deployed in Israel, the Golan Heights, Jordan, Lebanon and Gaza. Australians were also often selected for key staff appointments at UNTSO Headquarters in Jerusalem. Australia commanded UNTSO forces on several occasions, including Major Generals Tim Ford (1998-2000) and Ian Gordon (2006-09). Deployments with UNTSO and the MFO gave participants the chance to rub shoulders with experienced military officers from many nations. Being at the site of numerous contemporary and historical wars and battles provided a stimulating context for those selected to reflect on the nature and practice of war as experienced in the Middle East. In the absence of other deployment opportunities, for many a deployment with UNMOGIP, UNTSO and the MFO was as good as it would get.¹³ For others it would be a useful precursor to operational experience elsewhere. In the meantime, for the majority of the Army, there was little opportunity to be involved in international commitments for a number of years, particularly as the strategic priority shifted towards issues closer to home.

REFOCUSING ON DEFENCE OF AUSTRALIA

The post-Vietnam War operational hiatus continued virtually until the end of the Cold War. This intervening period was marked by a renewed emphasis on a continentalist defence strategy. A major review of how best to defend Australia was initiated. In 1969 President Richard Nixon had issued a statement in Guam, which called for greater self-reliance from America's allies in the Asia-Pacific region. The 'Guam doctrine', as it came to be known, effectively discredited the Cold War 'domino theory' premised on a belief that successive South-East Asian countries were vulnerable and would 'fall to Communism'.¹⁴ In 1972, the notion of defence self-reliance began to take hold, reflecting a move away from forward defence terminology.¹⁵ The 1973 classified paper *Strategic Basis* highlighted the importance of an expansion capability to meet future threats but also noted that the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) had showed progress in nation-building and an acute hostility towards communism, thus eliminating any likelihood of a direct threat to Australia. Importantly, Indonesia was now interested in a stable region and saw Australia as an ally rather than an enemy.¹⁶ Subsequent strategic assessments consolidated the focus on the defence of Australia.

MILLAR REPORT ON CITIZEN MILITARY FORCES

The cessation of compulsory part-time military service (an alternative to conscription for service abroad, which was terminated along with conscription in December 1972), led to a drastic reduction from 28 000 to just over 23 000 Citizen Military Forces (CMF) personnel by mid-1973. Seeing the effect of the government's changes, in April 1973, the Minister for Defence, Lance Barnard, announced an independent review of the CMF under Dr Tom Millar, a former Army officer, Director of the Australian Institute of International Affairs and founder of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University.¹⁷ The committee's report, tabled in parliament in April 1974, recommended that the name of the CMF be changed to Army Reserve and that it be more closely integrated with the Regular Army.¹⁸ During the Vietnam War the CMF was marginalised due to the commitment to deploy only Regular Army forces, including conscripts. Millar's report marked a turning point as the two components sought to chart a future of greater collaboration and interdependence. More reform within the Defence portfolio was to come, although it would be decades before the Army Reserve forces received the attention they deserved.

ARMY'S FUNCTIONAL COMMANDS

With an emphasis on the defence of Australia, the Whitlam Government endorsed a reorganised command and control structure for the Army that was prepared by the Chief Defence Scientist, John Farrands, and the Vice Chief of the General Staff (and soon to be Chief of the General Staff), Major General Frank Hassett.¹⁹ The Chief of the General Staff (CGS), Lieutenant General Sir Mervyn Brogan, declared the new structure to be better suited to the government's policy on total defence. The new system was based on three functional commands and supporting regionally based military districts, which replaced the geographic command system based on peacetime structures. It was intended as a 'sound basis for expansion'. Brogan considered this to be the Army's most significant peacetime organisational change since colonial times. Field Force Command (later Land Command), based at Victoria Barracks in Sydney, would be responsible for exercising command over field force (deployable) units and their collective training. Logistics Command based in Melbourne would be responsible for base logistic support (including

repair and maintenance, supply and transport), and Training Command based in Sydney would be responsible for the individual training of soldiers in Army schools.²⁰ This arrangement was a precursor to joint functional reorganisations in later years.

The principal deployable components of Field Force Command resided in the Brisbane-based 1st Division, with Regular Army task forces (later renamed brigades) each with two infantry battalions and associated supporting elements in Brisbane, Townsville and Sydney (the Sydney-based formation later moved to Darwin). But the divisional headquarters would remain skeletal for several years with sufficient staff for routine tasks only and not deployable without significant supplementation. For Exercise Kangaroo 2 in 1976, for instance, the headquarters acted as a static, higher control headquarters.²¹

WITHDRAWAL FROM ANZUK BRIGADE SINGAPORE

The withdrawal of forces from Vietnam initiated by the outgoing Liberal-Country Party government was coupled with the benign assessment in *Strategic Basis*. Prime Minister Gough Whitlam reinforced the trend, withdrawing the Australian battalion and supporting units stationed in Singapore, including 121 Signals Squadron – the secretive eavesdropping unit that operated behind the cover of Australia's forces stationed in Singapore and which was exposed by Whitlam in February 1973. With the withdrawal of Australian combat forces from the British Commonwealth Far Eastern Strategic Reserve in early 1974, the Singapore-based 28th ANZUK Brigade was disbanded on 3 January 1974.²² The residual ANZUK force was subsequently disbanded on 1 January 1975.²³ Most of the remaining elements, as part of the Australian Defence Liaison Group Singapore, including military police, medical staff, movements staff and postal clerks, disbanded four months later.²⁴ However, a small number remained in Singapore as part of the Australia New Zealand Military Intelligence Staff throughout the 1970s.²⁵

PEACEKEEPING OFFERS FOR EGYPT, CYPRUS AND KASHMIR

In the meantime, interest in deploying forces to the Middle East was not necessarily something the Whitlam Government shied away from.

In 1974, for instance, Whitlam sought to burnish his credentials as a middle-power supporter of the United Nations. This helped to differentiate Australia from the United States without unduly distancing itself and in a manner that would actually lend a helping hand, albeit indirectly, to US interests. Whitlam announced that he wished for Australia 'to be always among the first nations from which the United Nations would ask for peacekeeping forces: we shall be among the first to respond'.²⁶

Under Whitlam, the Australian Government offered to contribute an infantry company to the UN Emergency Force II (UNEF II) established after the 1973 Yom Kippur War. But the offer was blocked by the Soviet Union and a number of so-called non-aligned states, which saw Australia as too firmly in the Western camp. Eventually, in 1976, four RAAF Iroquois helicopters with supporting ground crew would be accepted to deploy to the Sinai Peninsula as part of UNEF II, working alongside a New Zealand contingent with two RNZAF helicopters. A couple of Australian Army personnel worked on the headquarters staff with the RAAF team.

Australia also offered to send an infantry company to Cyprus in 1974. But the Australian Government knew that the United Nations preferred to take infantry forces from Third World countries, with First World contributions sought to fill specialist supporting roles. Not surprisingly, the offer was not accepted. In 1975 an RAAF Caribou aircraft would be accepted for deployment to Kashmir.²⁷ There would be a hiatus in the deployment of Army elements on operations offshore (other than UNMOGIP and UNTSO) for a few years.

DEFENCE AMALGAMATION UNDER TANGE

In the meantime, the establishment of an integrated Department of Defence in mid-1974 under the departmental Secretary, Sir Arthur Tange, was wholeheartedly supported by some military officers who saw his reforms as putting in place a workable framework that was necessary and driven by the change in external circumstances.²⁸ But to others it raised suspicions of the move being used to increase the power of the public service. Such suspicions seemed ill-informed. After all, much of Tange's reforms had been prefigured in the report prepared by the senior Second World War commander, Lieutenant General Sir Leslie Morshead, in 1957. In that report, Morshead recommended the amalgamation of the Defence-related departments along with the creation of a joint command structure. With most of his recommendations rejected at the time, his

main achievement then was the creation of the position of Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee.²⁹

In 1974 Tange wrote to allay concerns and said that the new single department would have senior military and civilian officers working on all stages of major proposals. The new arrangement would see the Navy, Army and Air Force Service Boards abolished, and eventually all senior military officers available to the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (who would, in time, become the Chief of Defence Force Staff) 'for information and advice'. The use of the compendious title 'Australian Defence Force' would also come into common usage.³⁰ Scepticism would only slowly abate, and tensions between competing groups within the department continued in the 1970s and beyond.³¹ Tange observed what he called a 'remarkable lack of understanding... in each Service about the needs and the problems of the others'.³² Reform sceptics claimed that career public servants were happy to see inter-service rivalry stifle collaboration that might challenge their positions. Some also conflated civil control of the military, which was a constitutionally mandated ministerial and political function, with civilian control of the Defence bureaucracy, with civilian officials exercising responsibility rather than uniformed counterparts.³³ Nonetheless, the amalgamation of the departments marked the start of a journey towards greater integration and inter-service cooperation and collaboration – something that would come to be known as 'jointery'.

According to one of the leading exponents of Australian inter-service cooperation (or 'jointery') and Chief of the Defence Force from 1992 to 1995, General John Baker, the one weakness of Tange's reforms was that it left the ADF leaderless: 'We had the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee and a bunch of Single Service Chiefs who were not going to be beholden to a chairman... There was an attitude at one stage that the Chiefs of Staff Committee was a voting committee and everyone had a vote and the majority view won... It was not Tange's fault that the military did not take the opportunity that was there for them. And that started a very poor period in relations with the department and disagreements about the interpretation of the "Defence of Australia" policy.'³⁴

To Baker, the service chiefs were resisting the nature of the changes that were coming. Tange's reorganisation removed a lot of their independence and power, and they reacted poorly to it. This gave rise to an anti-Tange attitude that went with the disdain some of the old soldiers felt towards their civilian counterparts – something Baker saw as being a hangover from the Second World War.³⁵ It would not be long before an

opportunity presented itself for the three services to work closely together in the national interest, this time in response to a natural disaster in Darwin.

CYCLONE TRACY DISASTER RELIEF, DARWIN, 1974

One of the most significant occasions when all three services became engaged in disaster assistance occurred following the devastating tropical weather depression, Cyclone Tracy, which struck on Christmas Eve, 1974. The cyclone passed over Darwin overnight, with torrential rainfall and 217-kilometre winds. The majority of houses and buildings were destroyed or severely damaged, 65 people were killed (including 16 lost at sea), many were injured, and all public services were cut, including communications, power, water and sewerage.

Only a comparatively few soldiers were in Darwin: 185 Army personnel (Regular and Reserve) with an additional 314 family members.³⁶ Yet the Army, along with Navy and RAAF elements, played a major role in cleaning up the city and suburbs, despite the fact that the 97 married quarters housing the Defence families were extensively damaged and uninhabitable, many simply being flattened.³⁷ Within hours of the cyclone having devastated Darwin, Townsville-based 103 Signal Squadron had established voice communication with 125 Signal Squadron in Darwin. Throughout the next two days the radio channel was heavily used, being the only link after the cyclone struck. Fortunately the two signal squadrons had practised similar procedures during a cyclone threat several weeks before Cyclone Tracy struck. The post office telex and telephone communication was restored on 27 December.³⁸

As soon as the magnitude of the disaster was known in Canberra, units were alerted and various supply depots manned. In the following days vast quantities of stores were issued and consigned to Darwin. By mid-January 1975 there were about 700 soldiers in Darwin on Operation Clean-up, many of them specialists, including engineers from the Sydney-based 1st Field Engineer Regiment.³⁹

Major General Alan Stretton, the Australian Army officer assigned as Director-General of the recently formed Natural Disasters Organisation, was placed in charge of the initial rescue efforts. By 'force of personality' Stretton overcame much of the inertia associated with senior bureaucrats and ministers dispersed on summer vacations.⁴⁰ Emergency committees

were established to deal with accommodation, clean-up, clothing, communications, evacuation, food, law and order, sanitation and health and social welfare. With essential services severed, and with food and shelter at a premium, many residents were evacuated with RAAF assistance. In the week that followed, Darwin's population reduced to little more than ten thousand. Thousands of evacuees were assisted by the Army at airports, and hundreds of families were accommodated in Army barracks throughout Australia.⁴¹ For the next six months access to Darwin was regulated by means of a permit system.

The aircraft carrier HMAS *Melbourne* also deployed with stores and helicopters on board that proved invaluable in assisting the early phases of reconstruction.⁴² The destroyer tender HMAS *Stalwart* also deployed, providing what was in effect a floating workshop. RAAF support with C-130 Hercules transport aircraft also provided an important service, but the clean-up required able-bodied manpower that could be managed and controlled despite the collapsed infrastructure.

The organisation best placed for the clean-up was the Army, with its communications capabilities, and ability to generate and supply rations, water and engineering support. Yet, according to Stretton, the small Larrakeyah Army Barracks in Darwin was initially slow to respond to the crisis. Stretton claimed that they 'had taken practically no initiative to help a community in distress outside the assistance given to their own families'. Not everyone agreed with Stretton's assessment. In fact a considerable degree of local-level initiative was displayed with those involved moving quickly and efficiently once the extent of the disaster was known.⁴³

The Darwin Reconstruction Commission was established on 28 February 1975 to plan, coordinate and undertake the longer-term rebuilding of Darwin. Between 1975 and 1978 the commission coordinated many construction projects, including the building or repair of more than 2500 homes. A 650-strong Army contingent from Sydney-based 1st Task Force worked on the clean-up from early January, and they were relieved in mid-March by a Brisbane-based contingent from 6th Task Force.⁴⁴ The contingent withdrew in May 1975, after two thousand soldiers, technicians, signallers, engineers, carpenters, bricklayers, electricians, plumbers, refrigeration mechanics, and health and hygiene specialists had worked towards the restoration of Darwin. Together, they had cleared debris from 6100 homes and 26 schools and reroofed or reconstructed 136 houses.⁴⁵

The role of a senior Army figure in the Darwin emergency and the role of the Army echoed the logistics support work undertaken 33 years later

with the Federal Government's Intervention in the Northern Territory. The role also demonstrated the clear utility of flexible, self-sustainable armed forces and provided a clear example of the utility of a large, helicopter-capable ship, like the carrier HMAS *Melbourne*, able to travel great distances and deliver large quantities of aid, despite the limitations of local infrastructure.

EAST TIMOR MEDICAL AND EVACUATION SUPPORT

A few months later, and not far north of Darwin, ADF personnel were involved in humanitarian work during the days leading up to the Indonesian invasion and annexation of East Timor. A small contingent of ADF personnel was engaged in humanitarian work during the civil war that erupted there. The first official RAAF involvement took place at the end of August 1975 when two Hercules aircraft evacuated 180 refugees and an RAAF Dakota aircraft took an International Red Cross representative, together with some relief supplies, to Dili. Subsequently, a member of the Australian Red Cross Society flew briefly to Baucau. On his return the Australian Red Cross appealed for medical support. After some protracted negotiations with Foreign Affairs and Defence the decision was made to provide some ADF medical assistance. An ADF medical team flew in on an RAAF Caribou to Dili on 17 September and commenced work alongside an Australian civilian team established at Dili Hospital. Eventually conditions became too dangerous, particularly after the house the medical team was staying in came under artillery fire. The ADF team was evacuated to Australia on 30 October 1975, shortly before the Indonesian annexation was completed. This little-known contribution to East Timor would be largely forgotten by the ADF. But it would precede Australia's biggest post-Vietnam operational deployment some 24 years later in September 1999.⁴⁶

KANGAROO EXERCISES

Apart from relief operations like in Darwin and briefly in East Timor, the peacetime Army of the mid-1970s worked on staging substantial military exercises. The exercise scenarios of the mid- to late 1970s avoided counter-insurgency and expeditionary scenarios. The most significant ones were the Kangaroo series of exercises held in 1974, 1976, 1979, 1981, 1983, 1986, 1989, 1992 and 1995. These exercises tested evolving joint

(inter-service) and combined (international) command arrangements focused on the defence of Australia.

The first Exercise Kangaroo in 1974, for instance, involved 15 000 troops and 40 ships. It was designed to be a major test for Australian forces of joint service procedures and doctrines and included an amphibious lodgement. The United States supplied an amphibious task group, Britain supplied Royal Marines and eight ships, and New Zealand contributed contingents from the three services.⁴⁷ One thing the first Exercise Kangaroo made clear was that, as the then Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, Admiral Sir Victor Smith, made clear: 'There can be very few single Service operations today – that is, operations must involve two or three Services.'⁴⁸

RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES

The Kangaroo exercises were predicated on the direct defence of continental Australia. But much of the conceptual work behind the successive strategic basis papers also was predicated on what General John Baker saw as the three driving forces behind Australia's relations with the USA. First, intelligence was the foundation of the relationship. Australia was one of the few countries that had the degree of access to the region and could make a contribution that the Americans really needed, he argued. This was partly because of Australia's geography as much as anything else, but it was the basis on which the strong defence relationship really developed. Pine Gap was a large part of that access for Australia at the very top in Washington. Senior visitors would be surprised to see how closely integrated Australians were in running the actual intelligence collection operation. They were used to the European system where it was all run by the Americans. This was complemented by the American respect for what Australia's forces could do, even though they were small. Second, Australia's reliance on the United States for nuclear protection allowed Australia to be a non-nuclear power. Australians never say much about the nuclear issue, Baker observed, but the only thing that allowed Australia to stay non-nuclear was the American nuclear capability and that had to underline Australia's whole relationship with the United States. Third was Australia's respect for American military power and what it could do if Australia were to face a real emergency.⁴⁹ This context enabled Australia to contain its defence expenditure, keep its Army small, and focus on low-level contingencies.

Reflecting the strong imperatives for collaboration, the Australian Army would conduct a wide range of exercises and exchanges with the US Army and Marine Corps throughout the period 1972 to 2007. The first exchange exercise in continental USA involved 165 Australians from armoured and infantry units undergoing 'intensive familiarisation training' at Fort Bliss, Texas.⁵⁰

One of the more popular exercises was the company group reciprocal exercises with the US Army's 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii. Commenced in the aftermath of Vietnam, these exercises helped maintain an important bond between the Australian Army and the US Army in the Pacific. Under the agreement, troops from the 25th Infantry Division participated in reciprocal visits to Australia.⁵¹ The first Exercise Kangaroo coincided with the tail end of Exercise Pacific Bond in 1974: an exchange five and a half weeks long between company-sized elements of the 25th Infantry Division and elements of Townsville-based 2/4 RAR.⁵² This was an increase from the exercise in 1973, which involved platoon-level exchanges.⁵³

In 1977, 160 soldiers from 5/7 RAR under Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Murray Blake flew to Fort Carson, Colorado, for five weeks training with the 1/22nd Infantry (Mechanised) Battalion of the 4th Infantry Division (Mechanised). The exercise provided an excellent opportunity to get abreast of the latest American mechanised infantry concepts.⁵⁴

In 1978 Exercise Pacific Bond featured 160 soldiers from Townsville deploying to Hawaii to develop an appreciation for US Army procedures and to gain experience in the field under varying terrain and conditions.⁵⁵

Similar exchanges were occurring for the SAS Regiment as well. In one instance, an SAS troop was sent to train with the US Navy SEALs in California. The SAS troop examined special forces selection and training techniques practised by the SEALs.⁵⁶

KANGAROO 2 AND 3

Exercises Kangaroo 2 (in 1976) and 3 (in 1979) were held in the Coral Sea and the Shoalwater Bay Training Area. Kangaroo 3 was under the direction of the General Officer Commanding Field Force Command, Major General John Williamson. The exercise lasted for three weeks with 17 000 troops from the United States, New Zealand and Australia, along with 27 ships and 120 aircraft. The Army task force included a New Zealand battalion and a US Army battalion together with

Commando and SAS elements.⁵⁷ Notwithstanding the reduced emphasis on offshore operations, such exercises inherently exercised capabilities for expeditionary operations, with amphibious lodgements being prominent. In Exercise Kangaroo 1981, for instance, the newly acquired Australian amphibious ship, HMAS *Tobruk*, was employed for the first time.⁵⁸

EXERCISES WITH THE BRITISH ARMY

Another popular activity was Exercise Long Look, which provided an opportunity for soldiers to exchange places with counterparts in the British Army in the United Kingdom and West Germany. This was initiated in 1976 as a three-month personnel exchange rather than an exercise *per se*. It enabled 60 to 90 soldiers each year to broaden their knowledge of and experience with the British Army. The arrangement provided participating soldiers with a wider understanding and enhanced cooperation between the two armies.⁵⁹ It also provided excellent exposure to the challenges faced in preparing for a major power threat as NATO faced in northern Europe, which was impossible to replicate in Australia. New Zealand also participated in this exchange with the British Army. Long Look exchanges were significant opportunities for motivated junior officers and soldiers to compare, contrast and learn.

Another important bilateral engagement opportunity with Britain was through Exercise North Star. In May 1976, 120 soldiers from Brisbane-based 6 RAR and the 2nd Field Engineer Regiment deployed to Britain while their exchange company from the Royal Welsh Fusiliers deployed on the reciprocal Exercise Southern Cross to train with 5/7 RAR in central western New South Wales.⁶⁰ Again in 1982, B Company 5/7 RAR deployed to Germany alongside the 1st Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers. The week-long training included live firing, Puma helicopter flights and a series of combat team assaults using British tanks and armoured personnel carriers. Australian soldiers participating in these exercises found the experience professionally rewarding.⁶¹

British troops sometimes participated in another trilateral exercise alongside Australia and New Zealand as well. In Exercise Southern Safari in 1980, for instance, British 6th Ghurkha Rifles normally based in Hong Kong (until 1997) participated in an exercise designed to prepare soldiers from the Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment before it deployed a 250-man contingent to Singapore.⁶²

CANADIAN EXCHANGES

The Australian Army also exercised on occasion with Canadian troops. In October 1974, for instance, a platoon went to Canada for a month while Canadian troops reciprocated and underwent training at the Army's Jungle Training Centre at Canungra. A platoon from 5/7 RAR practised peacekeeping techniques with the 3rd Battalion, the Royal Canadian Regiment (3 RCR) at the Canadian Forces Base at Petawawa in Ontario. In addition a small team went to study Canadian aspects of training, planning, mounting and supporting a United Nations peacekeeping force.⁶³ Such skills would come in handy in the years ahead as the tempo of operational deployments on UN and related missions increased.

This exchange arrangement with Canada became known as Exercise AusCan Bond and was conducted annually until the mid-1980s. The exchange in 1975 involved an exercise with about 150 troops from Australia from 1 RAR on exchange with troops from the 1st Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI) and the Canadian Airborne Regiment.⁶⁴ In 1977 soldiers from 3 RAR were based at Victoria on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, where they were hosted by 3 PPCLI. The training included river crossings and a deployment to the Arctic.⁶⁵ In 1978 the exchange involved troopers from the 2nd Cavalry Regiment and sappers from the 1st Field Engineer Regiment exchanging with Lord Strathcona's Horse – Royal Canadians from Calgary, Alberta, and the 1st Combat Engineer Regiment from Chilliwack, British Columbia.⁶⁶ The exercise provided an excellent opportunity to compare and contrast the methods and practices of these two highly comparable armies.

Being from like-minded countries with similar predispositions to support UN-backed and other coalition operations, Australians and Canadians frequently would come across each other far from their respective homes. The experience of exchanges and the interoperability fostered through the ABCA arrangements meant that such encounters between these two 'strategic cousins' would invariably result in effective collaboration.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA DEFENCE FORCE ESTABLISHED

Shortly after the establishment of the Darwin Reconstruction Commission, and before Exercise Kangaroo 2, another construction effort reached conclusion with the handing over of defence powers to the authorities in

Papua New Guinea (PNG) on 6 March 1975. On that day, PNG servicemen were discharged from the Australian forces and re-enlisted in the PNG Defence Force. More than five hundred Australian servicemen remained to work alongside the PNGDF, albeit in decreasing numbers after independence on 16 September 1975.⁶⁷

The decision to proceed with independence for PNG at an accelerated rate was made by the Whitlam Government at a time when European powers had divested themselves of most of their colonies and remaining ones in the South Pacific were on the way as well. Fiji, for instance, was granted independence from Britain on 10 October 1970. Australia's UN mandate over PNG looked decidedly anachronistic. The trouble was that insufficient work had preceded the decision to ensure that the transition was smooth and that the PNGDF was adequately prepared.

Australia's formal handover reflected a desire to distance itself from hands-on management of security matters not directly concerned with the defence of Australia. Nevertheless, a close working relationship between the PNGDF and the Australian forces, notably the Australian Army, would be an enduring feature of the period from Whitlam to Howard.

Following independence, the PNGDF was the principal body with which the Australian Army collaborated, maintaining an active engagement program with the PNGDF over the years. Australia continued training PNGDF personnel and provided people in key unit posts including commanding officers and platoon commanders. Notable among them were Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General and Governor of Western Australia and Governor General of Australia) Mike Jeffrey as CO 2 RPIR; Lieutenant (later Major General) Jim Molan and Lieutenant (later Major General) Ian Flawith. All of these officers reflect fondly on the training and leadership experience this post provided them, and old PNGDF officers miss this link with the ADF.⁶⁸

One of the benefits of this approach was the close working relationship engendered, which facilitated close cooperation on a number of missions in the Pacific, notably in Solomon Islands. Still, there were significant challenges in the relationship. Australia provided several hundred million dollars annually to support the development and maintenance of the PNGDF. Australia also provided advisers, but they could be and were at times ignored, leaving Australia with limited leverage to insist on certain standards and accountability mechanisms.⁶⁹ One way of continuing to shape the standards of the PNGDF, while also providing excellent training opportunities for the Australians involved, was through regular bilateral exercises.

LOW-LEVEL CONTINGENCIES

Meanwhile, the 1975 paper *Strategic Basis* recognised that the main responsibility globally for countering the Soviet presence lay with the United States and stressed that there was no requirement for the maintenance of forces for conflict in South-East Asia. Instead the paper introduced the need to prepare for 'low-level contingencies'.⁷⁰ The conclusions reached in 1975 were publically formalised in a series of Defence white papers, commencing with the 1976 White Paper. From then on, throughout the Cold War years the *Strategic Basis* papers would stress the need for being capable of responding effectively to low-level pressures or military attacks and of timely expansion for responses to a more substantial threat.⁷¹ This meant that readily deployable land forces would remain only for relatively minor contingencies. For several years this approach appeared justified, at least until circumstances exposed the Army's capability limitations, which would leave government with quite constrained policy response options over developments in Fiji in 1987.

FLOODS, FIRES, PLAGUES AND RESCUES

In the meantime, back at home the Army was frequently called upon to assist following a range of natural disasters, and these operations helped not only to reinforce links with the community but also to raise the Army's profile and foster a greater appreciation for the worth of the Defence Force to the community. Army units had long assumed responsibility for providing such support in their local area. Units in Puckapunyal in central Victoria, for instance, were expected to lend support to flood and fire relief operations in their neighbourhood. What follows is a snapshot of some of the floods, fires, plagues and rescues in which the Army was involved.

When the Brisbane River flooded the city of Brisbane in January 1974, for instance, the Army became heavily involved. Army helicopters recorded the flood scene, flying from dawn until dusk while Army trucks delivered sandbags and tarpaulins as well as hot meals to stranded elderly people.⁷² Shortly afterwards, in February, troops again were called to assist with flood relief and the clean-up operations following three cyclones on the east coast of Australia that left 13 700 homes inundated and more than three thousand people homeless. Fifteen hundred soldiers from Brisbane went to work with equipment ranging from brooms to bulldozers.⁷³

In April 1974 the Army assisted in containing a plague of locusts in central Queensland. A hundred and forty men from the 6th Task Force deployed as spray teams in a 'locust war' to kill locusts spread over 19 000 acres. They worked mostly early in the morning while the locusts' wings were still wet from dew, making them unable to fly.⁷⁴ A detachment of 140 soldiers from 6 RAR set up in the town of Mansfield under Major George Mansford. The area of operations stretched for a 160-kilometre radius from Emerald. With locusts not able to fly early in the morning, the soldiers deployed at night in position for the first light 'attacks'. An Army Pilatus Porter aircraft was used for spotting. Soldiers mounted misting machines on Land Rovers to spray locust-covered crops and pastures, working closely with local authorities.⁷⁵

With record flooding in northern Victoria in May 1974, 60 soldiers from the Puckapunyal-based 1st Armoured Regiment and 20 from the Royal Australian Corps of Transport Centre joined police and civilian teams to rescue stranded families. Assault boats from 21st Construction Regiment also ferried flood-bound citizens to safety.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, the Maribyrnong River on the western outskirts of Melbourne also burst its banks. Army troops from 2nd Commando Company and 1st Armoured Regiment deployed to assist with sandbagging and mopping up afterwards. The commandos rescued a hundred people by using their boating skills in the fast-flowing swollen river. The Premier, Rupert Hamer, personally thanked the soldiers involved for their assistance.⁷⁷ While the efficacy of these deployments is hard to measure, the goodwill generated from the local community was significant.

In mid-1974 a combined Australian Army and PNGDF team undertook Operation Tropic Angel, a malarial survey for the PNG Department of Public Health. The Australians, from the 1st and 2nd Field Hygiene Companies, worked with the PNGDF's Preventive Medicine Platoon, taking up to 15 000 blood samples from highland villagers.⁷⁸ This operation was one example of numerous surveys undertaken across the Pacific with the support of Australian Army medical teams. These teams generated greater knowledge about the situation in the Pacific and were instrumental in fostering goodwill.

A few months later a major portion of the Tasman Bridge crossing the Derwent River in Hobart, Tasmania, collapsed when a ship collided with it on 5 January 1975. Within an hour an Army salvage-and-rescue team was activated using amphibious landing craft. The operation, headed by Major D. Reid, involved Army Reserve terminal handlers and engineers working with RAN clearance divers and the local police.⁷⁹

In December 1976, in the wake of Cyclone Ted, which struck in Queensland's Gulf country, elements of 162nd Reconnaissance Squadron under Captain Terry Wesley-Smith assisted the State Emergency Services in conducting evacuations and checking on the owners of several properties struck by the cyclone. The Sydney-based 21st Supply Battalion also prepared tons of stores for despatch by RAAF C-130 Hercules and CC-08 Caribou aircraft.⁸⁰

In December 1977, three hundred soldiers from the Holsworthy-based 1st Task Force participated in bushfire-fighting operations in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. The first group of troops, commanded by Major Terry Nolan from 5/7 RAR, deployed shortly after the alert. A second group, under Major Peter Thorpe from the 1st Engineer Regiment, joined in two days later and relieved the soldiers under Nolan. The soldiers formed part of a 2500-strong force alongside local bushfire brigades and the New South Wales Fire Brigade. Major Twining of 104th Signal Squadron reported that the best tribute to the troops was that 'not one house was lost in the area where they fought the fires'.⁸¹

At one point Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser complained that the Army was slow in responding to fires in the 1978-79 flood and fire season. In fact troops were on standby but had been waiting for the government's authorisation. This process required state authorities to make a formal request to the Federal Government for assistance. Subsequently, improved procedures were implemented to prevent a recurrence of such bureaucratic missteps.⁸²

In the aftermath of Cyclone Peter in January 1979, once again Townsville-based soldiers from 162nd Reconnaissance Squadron, this time under Major Mick Reynolds, were called out for rescue and resupply missions between Ingham (north of Townsville) and Cooktown (north of Cairns). Working in conjunction with RAAF Iroquois helicopters, they rescued stranded people and conducted numerous medical evacuations and resupply runs.⁸³

In December 1979 more than two hundred soldiers spent most of the month fighting bushfires in the Sydney and Blue Mountains areas of New South Wales. In an effort to contain the flames, soldiers provided medical, communications, heavy lifting and administrative support. Bulldozers made fire breaks and helicopters provided a spotting service, while soldiers, sailors and airmen worked with the New South Wales Fire Brigade to contain 'the worst fire in the mountains in decades'.⁸⁴

In early October 1980 about eight hundred soldiers from Puckapunyal and Watsonia in Victoria were mobilised in response to a call by Victoria

Police for assistance in fighting about 70 fires. At first they deployed to Gippsland, east of Melbourne. Soldiers helped fight the numerous blazes around the clock, working 12-hour shifts for three days. Afterwards they were relocated to Genoa, 100 kilometres away, for a further four days of fire-fighting. Thanks from the Victorian Police and the Victorian Forestry Commission were effusive.⁸⁵

A couple of months later, in December 1980, 120 members of an emergency standby force in Brisbane deployed to help with immediate temporary repairs to more than 900 storm-damaged Brisbane homes. Meanwhile in Sydney, a 110-man team from Holsworthy spent three days fighting bushfires north-west of Gosford equipped with bulldozers and their own communications equipment, relieving two hundred exhausted civilian fire-fighters.⁸⁶

In mid-1981, 3 RAR, based at Woodside, near Adelaide, deployed a company of soldiers in response to calls by flood victims in Balhannah following 'the worst rains in the area for about 100 years'. The Army's efforts there enabled the State Emergency Service to focus its efforts in other areas.⁸⁷

In February 1982 bushfires in Tasmania led to a request for support from the Tasmanian Government. A contingent of 159 soldiers led by the commanding officer (CO) of 5/7 RAR, Lieutenant Colonel Peter Arnison (later Major General and Governor of Queensland) were flown down in RAAF Hercules aircraft to assist fight the fires.⁸⁸

In September 1982 Australian soldiers helped rescue three plane crash survivors in the PNG highlands. Major Terry Boyce and Sergeants Ian Leach and Mike Dilger were involved in a helicopter search for a Cessna that had crashed in mountains north of Mendi with six people on board. The soldiers rappelled from a helicopter and managed to clear a landing site in the forest with chain saws before the survivors could be lifted out. The whole operation was complete in 25 hours.⁸⁹

In another instance, in September 1983 Lieutenant Marc Coughlan and an observer, Corporal Dave Watkins, responded to a request for assistance from the Rescue Coordination Centre at Townsville's 162nd Reconnaissance Squadron. After a six-hour search they found a family of three and plucked them from a reef adjacent to their sunken sailboat off Mackay in north Queensland.⁹⁰

These incidents are not a complete account. But they are symptomatic of the Army's approach to such opportunities to engage with and support the local community. While extensive bushfire-fighting services and fire brigades and natural disaster organisations retained primary responsibility for these operations, the Army's contributions were always

welcomed, even if they were not always critical to the operations' outcomes. When aggregated, these contributions pointed to the Army's versatility and adaptability. Still, soldiers were not always trained for bushfires so care had to be exercised to ensure that undue risks were avoided.

ANTARCTIC SUPPORT

The greatest contrast from the tropics of north Queensland and PNG was to be found in the Antarctic. Australia had a vested strategic interest in maintaining a presence as it claims a significant portion of the continent and maintains scientific research bases on the Antarctic coast directly south of Australia. The Army maintained capabilities of direct utility to these projects, and so it became involved in Antarctic missions in 1948. At first, the Army supplied two 'DUKW' six-wheeled-drive amphibious trucks for an expedition to Macquarie Island.⁹¹ Captain Laurie Stooke and Warrant Officer Jack Cunningham were aboard with the two DUKW amphibians. The Australian Army maintained a long association with the Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions (ANARE), establishing a volunteer ANARE Detachment to provide crews and amphibious craft for Antarctic relief voyages between 1948 and 1994.⁹²

Soldiers posted to the Antarctic were seconded to the Department of Science where they served tours of duty of between 12 and 16 months duration.⁹³ The Royal Australian Corps of Transport (previously from the Royal Australian Army Service Corps until it was disbanded in 1973) provided drivers and detachment commanders, while the Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers provided technicians for maintenance and repair.⁹⁴

The Army's DUKWs became an integral part of Antarctic expeditions and were used until 1970 when replaced by the Lighter Amphibious Resupply Cargo 5-ton (LARC-V) vehicles, essentially a boat with wheels. The LARCs were not designed to operate in such harsh conditions, but they performed well, making ship-to-shore transfers safer and more efficient.⁹⁵ The experience helped to maintain an important aspect of the Army's amphibious capabilities and gave participants a challenging adventure.

SURVEY OPERATIONS IN THE PACIFIC AND INDONESIA

In addition to supporting scientific programs like ANARE the Army was active in the region assisting with mapping uncharted territory under the

auspices of the Defence Cooperation Program. This program drew on the extensive mapping skills used in the mapping of Australia. The DCP involved bilateral and multilateral engagement with foreign militaries in Australia's region, including individual exchanges and training opportunities as well as a range of field exercises and other development-related activities. This program was an important aspect of the ADF's efforts at bolstering goodwill while making a contribution to regional security. Australia's two closest northern neighbours, Indonesia and PNG, were the principal DCP partners.

From 1971 to 1980 the Royal Australian Survey Corps undertook a mapping project that provided complete coverage of PNG and encompassing 280 map sheets. A 30-man team was established as 8th Field Survey Squadron operating from Moem Barracks, Wewak, on PNG's north coast in 1971. In 1973 about 60 personnel, along with PNGDF personnel, Army Pilatus aircraft and RAAF Iroquois helicopters surveyed Rabaul and New Britain. On completion of the project, the PNG Prime Minister, Sir Julius Chan, said the program had made PNG one of the best mapped developing countries in the world.⁹⁶

From 1970 to 1984 a series of survey operations also were conducted across Indonesia and in the South Pacific.⁹⁷ Army surveyors began work in Indonesia following a formal Indonesian request for remapping of Sumatra in 1970. Initially known as Operation Manau, the survey operations in Indonesia proceeded with detachments from the Australian Army, the RAAF and the Indonesian Army working together repeatedly. The detachments worked over the islands east and west of Sumatra and west of Kalimantan. Five field parties, each consisting of one Indonesian Army surveyor and two Australians, operated survey positioning equipment supported by Indonesian helicopters and aerial photography equipment provided by Australian Nomad aircraft from 173rd General Support Squadron based at Oakey in Queensland.⁹⁸

Survey operations in 1973 in support of Indonesia's map-marking project covered about 24 000 square miles of Sumatra. Army surveyors set up headquarters in Medan, Sumatra, with about 80 soldiers involved. The process was repeated the next year, for Operation Gading Four, with surveyors from Perth-based 5th Field Survey Squadron, supported by Caribou aircraft and crew from the RAAF's No 38 Squadron, deploying in May 1974. At one stage Staff Sergeant Van Malenstein and his team were winched onto a mountain top about 2800 metres above sea level. They camped on a ridge line ten metres wide that happened to be a popular path for elephants, and soon found they had

to relocate to avoid the elephants' trek from water to their grazing area.⁹⁹

Operation Cenderawasih (Bird of Paradise) covered geodetic work incorporating aerial photography of Irian Jaya from 1976 to 1981. In July 1977 two UH-1 ('Huey') Iroquois helicopters of No 9 Squadron, RAAF, were conveying an Army survey team across the mountains from Wamena. Heavy cloud caused the aircraft to turn back when one Huey went missing with five people on board. The lost aircraft was located early the next day. Two soldiers were winched 60 metres through the jungle canopy to the wreck below and found that, apart from the pilot, all on board had survived, although three were seriously injured. An SAS patrol team from Darwin was inserted to protect the wreck while recovery operations were carried out over the next week.¹⁰⁰ Notwithstanding the tragic loss, these exercises were significant 'bridge-building' activities with regional neighbours.

In 1979 the survey and mapping project was extended to the Moluccas (Maluku), a project the Indonesians named Pattimura. For three years project personnel worked alongside Indonesian Army Topographical Corps personnel. The last of three tasks, Pattimura 81, lasted from 29 April to 10 June 1981.¹⁰¹

Similar work covered topographical surveys undertaken in PNG (Operation Kumul); Solomon Islands and Vanuatu (Operation Belama); Tonga, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Cook Islands and Nauru (Operation Anon); and Fiji (Operation Spearline). In 1981, for instance, a ten-man team, led by Captain John Gregs, deployed to Fiji and then Tonga, supported by local defence force and government survey authorities. These surveys were to enable each country to accurately define their exclusive economic zones.¹⁰²

These operations provided participating countries with accurate, up-to-date mapping. They also provided an excellent opportunity for Australia to demonstrate goodwill to its neighbours while learning much in return. In particular, these operations provided unbeatable opportunities for enhancing cross-cultural awareness and understanding.

EXERCISES WITH INDONESIA

Australia's relationship with Indonesia was recognised as one of its most important.¹⁰³ Reflecting the improving relations with Indonesia, five Indonesian officers were invited to observe Exercise Kangaroo 81 in October 1981.¹⁰⁴ This engagement was offset by briefings and visits

intended to allay concerns about the Kangaroo exercises and the depiction of the mythical exercise enemy, Kamaria, which was poignantly like Indonesia in some respects.¹⁰⁵

Special forces exercises with Indonesian troops featured throughout the 1980s and 1990s as a way of building a trusted and familiar relationship with key interlocutors in Australia's most important neighbour. The bilateral engagement effort culminated in the Indonesians providing a battalion to participate in a Kangaroo exercise. They had an air drop and afterwards, seeing the troops sitting around smoking and resting, the Indonesian Chief of the Defence Force paraded his battalion and dressed them down about why they weren't more like the Australians. His message was: 'You ought to watch these Australians: they're professionals; they don't lie around smoking and chatting; they get on with the job.'¹⁰⁶ In the meantime, the survey and mapping operations across the Indonesian archipelago would remain the most visible symbol of Australian Army engagement with its Indonesian counterparts. With the Lombok Treaty signed in November 2006, the prospects were good for improved bilateral military relations, although some expressed concerns that the treaty would itself generate further rub points.¹⁰⁷

FIVE POWER DEFENCE ARRANGEMENTS

Apart from Indonesia, Australia remained engaged with South-East Asia particularly through the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) signed in late 1971.¹⁰⁸ Australia's extensive engagement with South-East Asia and the Pacific resulted in a range of bilateral and multilateral land, sea and air exercises, particularly with Malaysia and Singapore, through the FPDA, alongside Britain and New Zealand. Over the years, the FPDA became the 'quiet achiever', being an important component among the plethora of multilateral security mechanisms that comprised South-East Asia's security architecture.¹⁰⁹ For Australia, the FPDA provided a strategic foothold in a region recognised as vital.¹¹⁰ The FPDA provided the legal basis for the entry of Australian forces into Malaysia and Singapore while also helping to build confidence between these two countries and contributing to regional security by developing a credible deterrent. Exercises in Malaysia and Singapore (as well as Thailand) provided excellent opportunities to polish jungle-fighting skills and infantry minor tactics while enhancing military-to-military relations. In effect, the FPDA provided an enduring vehicle for practical cooperation and a demonstration of Australia's long-term commitment to regional security.¹¹¹

Exercise Suman Warrior, an FPDA 'command-post exercise' (i.e. a simulated exercise of forces by a commander and his staff in a headquarters), named after the five participating countries (Singapore, United Kingdom, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand) provided a regular opportunity to exercise and test procedures alongside partner nations' armies.¹¹² A complementary command-post exercise, Exercise Suman Protector, also featured, although the nature and name of the exercise changed over time.

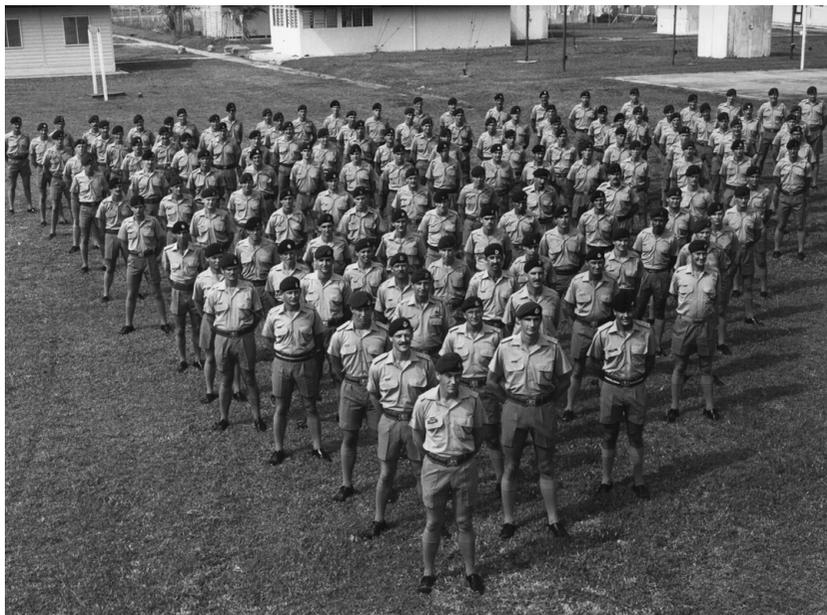
Exercise Platypus was another FPDA activity with five company-size elements combining in a composite battalion group focused on infantry-*armour* cooperation, artillery fire control, air mobile operations and a field firing exercise. In 1981 the exercise was held in Shoalwater Bay, and in 1983 it was held in Brisbane (without field firing).

In between, in 1982, infantry company groups from the five nations exercised in the Lake Tekapo area of New Zealand's South Island as part of Exercise Southern Safari. The declared aim was to develop FPDA capabilities to operate together in a land environment.¹¹³ In 1983 officers from the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia were invited to attend as observers as well.¹¹⁴

In the meantime, the Singaporean Defence Force capitalised on Australia's generosity, conducting frequent exercises in the Shoalwater Bay Training Area. But beyond the FPDA-related exercises, the Singaporeans tended to keep to themselves, conducting their own exercises largely without Australian involvement. The Singaporeans maintained a certain reserve reflecting their own sense of identity and national interest, which left a number of Australians feeling that Singapore was self-serving.¹¹⁵

RIFLE COMPANY BUTTERWORTH

In the meantime, the rotations of companies deployed as 'Rifle Company Butterworth' in Malaysia remained an important and popular activity. From the mid-1970s to the 1990s a Butterworth airbase deployment was a career highlight for the Regular Army infantry companies. Participants exercised in jungle terrain and alongside Malaysian, Singaporean and Thai troops, which provided unique opportunities unavailable in Australia. Rotations often involved assisting with base security, live firing on a variety of ranges, jungle training at the Malaysian Army's Combat Training School and participating on exercises in various parts of the peninsula, including in Singapore and Thailand.¹¹⁶



Alpha Company, 3 RAR, August 1987, Butterworth Barracks. Front row: Major Brown; row 2: Lieutenant Angus Campbell; row 3: Mark Xavier, Bob Hunter and Brad Saw. 'A typical tour with Rifle Company Butterworth lasted three months, with the Rifle Company responsible for providing close protection to the RAAF resources. In 1987 the RAAF's full-time presence was winding down. RAAF Base Butterworth Radio was still on air, and 75 Squadron still had a full-time presence with the famous Mirage fighters. You were allowed to run around the airfield for PT! And yes, it was hot, very hot.' (Brad Saw)

EXERCISES WITH MALAYSIA'S ARMY

Australia also conducted bilateral exercises with Malaysia apart from the multilateral exercises organised under the FPDA. One such ten-day activity in 1977, Exercise Scorpion, involved 'A' Company 3 RAR and a battalion from the Royal Malay Regiment at Mersing, near the southern tip of Peninsula Malaysia. 'A' Company spent a period at the Malaysian Army's Jungle Warfare School, having spent several weeks preparing at the Land Warfare Centre at Canungra before leaving Australia. Reflecting the close bonds between the Malaysians and the Australians, Brigadier General Yusof Bin Din declared: 'Australian troops are no strangers to Malaysia or to Malaysian troops. They served in Malaya during World War Two, and again in the Emergency following independence, then again during Confrontation in Sarawak and Sabah. In all these areas, Australian



Stand to, August 1987, Mersing, Malaysia. 'Part of the enemy camp we set up for the three-week exercise. To clear an area like this would literally take two people hours to cut through the jungle. Note the old SLR [self-loading rifle] and blank firing attachment.' (Brad Saw)

and Malaysian troops served together with distinction.'¹¹⁷ His comments spoke to the enduring utility of remaining engaged on such exercises to maintain professional bonds, to improve cultural awareness and to hone military skills.

ENGINEER SUPPORT IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Cross-cultural awareness was also an important component of the job at the District Engineer's Office in remote Mendi in the PNG province of Southern Highlands. This commitment of Army engineers reflected Australia's colonial legacy with PNG and provided important contributions to infrastructure and development in this remote province. It also provided excellent training and development opportunities for the engineers, enabling them to hone field and combat engineering skills. In one instance, in 1976, the team designed and built a 42.6-metre Bailey bridge across the Erave River in Southern Highlands province and shortly afterwards were involved in setting the explosives and successfully destroying a semi-collapsed bridge.¹¹⁸

OPERATION JUBILEE SALUTE, 1977

Back in Australia, with Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee celebrated in 1977, the Army was called upon to play a prominent role. The Silver Jubilee Parade was held during her visit to Australia in March in front of Parliament House. The colourful line-up included all 64 of the Army's Queen's and Regimental colours as well as the RAAF's three Queen's Colours and No 17 Squadron Standards. The Queen's Colour of the Royal Australian Navy remained, by tradition, with the RAN contingent in the body of the parade. Behind the colours were 1500 men and women and a hundred-member, tri-service band. The parade included a flypast of aircraft from the three services.¹¹⁹

The Silver Jubilee celebrations culminated in December 1977 with 35 000 servicemen and women taking part in parades and open days around Australia in capital cities and major regional centres.¹²⁰ The effort put in reflected both the remaining popular enthusiasm for the Queen and the fact that the Army was not conducting significant operations elsewhere at the time. The distraction also helped to reinvigorate the Army's reputation and place in Australian society in a national event occurring only a few years after the withdrawal from Vietnam. The hostility directed at times personally at soldiers during that war had abated, and the Jubilee Salute provided an opportunity to gain some positive PR.

This was a benign time for the Army. Strategic assessments spoke of ten-year lead times for any major conflict, which left the Army hard pressed to be motivated and focused on maintaining capabilities. Significant resource constraints exacerbated the difficulties. But events in the following year would demonstrate the need for continued vigilance, not just for commitments abroad but at home as well.

COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT REGIONAL MEETING, BOWRAL, 1978

In the years immediately after the Vietnam War, the Australian Army rarely played a prominent role in operations, beyond those described, with one prominent exception. On 13 February 1978, a bomb was detonated at the Sydney Hilton Hotel during the inaugural Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meeting (CHOGRM). NSW Police requested Army explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) assistance, and an EOD team arrived on the scene at 2.30am.¹²¹ The next day the Federal

Government called out the Army to secure the route travelled by CHOGRM delegates between Sydney and Bowral, NSW. The reason for the call-out was 'to safeguard the national and international interests of Australia'. The Commander 1st Task Force based at Holsworthy in Sydney's south-west, Brigadier David Butler, was put in charge of the force of 1840 soldiers. Colonel (later Lieutenant General and CGS) John Coates was appointed as the Defence Force representative at the Hilton Hotel.¹²² The force included 300 men and 50 armoured personnel carriers from the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, 500 men from 1st Field (Artillery) Regiment, 300 men from 5/7 RAR (mechanised infantry battalion), 104th Signals Squadron as well as supply and transport squadrons (with 40 five-tonne trucks), an intelligence unit and some engineers. In addition, 58 Air Force personnel provided Chinook helicopter support, transporting VIPs.¹²³

Troops were briefed and allocated search-and-guard duties along the rail and road routes between Sydney and Bowral. Operations rooms were set up at Army Headquarters (known as 'Army Office') in Canberra as well as Field Force Command at Victoria Barracks in Paddington, Sydney, and at the nearby Headquarters 2nd Military District, which was given control, coordination, planning and communications roles.¹²⁴

The operation involved working closely with the NSW Police. A key objective for the Army was to have the NSW Police acting as the interface with the community, for the Army to maintain as low a profile as possible, and for NSW Police, rather than troops, to carry out surveillance in built-up areas. As it turned out, however, troops were stationed in the streets of Bowral because of the lack of police resources and the fact that Bowral was both the touchdown point for the airlift of heads of government and the centre of their activities out of Sydney. With the mission completed uneventfully, the Order-In Requisition, which made the Call-Out Order inoperative, was signed on the afternoon of 16 February.¹²⁵

The action taken after the Hilton bombing was only the second peacetime use of armed members of the Defence Force in Aid to the Civil Power in Australia, the first being in response to a police strike in Victoria in 1923. The troops who deployed did so without any experience in the control of riotous or similar violent civilian incidents in Australia.¹²⁶ Working alongside the police was the only way for soldiers to circumvent legal constraints on the use of force. Without recourse to archaic British Army precedents, the Attorney General had little to offer as legal guidance for troops in case they were called upon to use force.¹²⁷ The bombing generated work for the Attorney General's Department to articulate clearly the legal authority for the use of force by any soldiers

deployed in such circumstances. It also led to a reconsideration of how to posture back-up forces for domestic security challenges.

RAISING THE TACTICAL ASSAULT GROUP

In the aftermath, the government of Malcolm Fraser felt compelled to be more prepared for the future. It therefore decided, in May 1979, to accelerate the formation of a military counter-terrorist force called a Tactical Assault Group to assist police with specialist assaults on terrorist strongholds. The group was to be incorporated into the SAS Regiment as Australia's principal national counter-terrorist asset.¹²⁸ This new group would set out to develop and refine its capabilities over a number of years.

The Fraser Government, fearing that terrorists could destroy, damage or capture Bass Strait oil rigs that provided four-fifths of Australia's petroleum at the time, also authorised the creation of an Offshore Installations Assault Team in July 1980. Under pressure to raise the capability quickly and with limited training and resources, three servicemen died in training over the following 19 months. One SAS trooper and two sailors were killed in separate training accidents in 1982 and 1983. The SAS trooper who died was inexperienced and had only recently completed his water operations course.¹²⁹

In the coming years, the Tactical Assault Group would emerge as a mature organisation able to carry out specific tasks beyond capabilities existing in the state police services. This was particularly the case by the time of the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000, although the Commonwealth Games in 1982 in Brisbane provided an opportunity to refine procedures. But before the Commonwealth Games, the Army faced another deployment: this time to Zimbabwe-Rhodesia (later just Zimbabwe).

OPERATION DAMON, ZIMBABWE-RHODESIA

The Army's largest deployment abroad between the end of the Vietnam War and the deployment to Namibia in 1989 occurred with the Commonwealth Monitoring Force, which deployed to Zimbabwe-Rhodesia in late 1979 as part of Operation Damon. The British Government brokered the Lancaster House Agreement between the government of Southern Rhodesia, led by Bishop Abel Muzorewa, and the two Marxist guerrilla organisations, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), that made up the 22 000-strong guerrilla force of the 'Patriotic Front'.

Australia had close connections with Rhodesia, and when Britain asked Australia to provide about 110 troops to a force of 350, the Australian Government agreed.¹³⁰ This fitted in neatly with Prime Minister Fraser's interest in southern Africa, as he had strongly supported majority rule in South Africa and Rhodesia.¹³¹ Fraser was an advocate of reform in Africa, so it was natural that he would back the commitment with troops.

While a tri-service force was called for, the Navy and Air Force were not enthusiastic. Australia therefore contributed a 151-strong Army contingent as part of what became a 1500-strong Commonwealth Monitoring Force under British Major General J.H.B Acland. Acland commanded a force consisting of 1200 British troops along with Kenyans, Fijians, New Zealanders and Australians, with Winston Churchill's son-in-law, Lord Soames, appointed as Britain's civilian pro-consul. New Zealand contributed a force of 75 personnel. The day-to-day conduct of the operation was delegated to Acland's deputy, Brigadier John Learmont.

The Australian contingent was commanded by Colonel Kevin Cole, an infantry officer with experience in Vietnam. The contingent drew on personnel from the infantry, artillery, armoured and engineer corps. Members were spread throughout the force, which consisted of a headquarters and three groups. The intention was to oversee the transition to majority rule, the force's role being to monitor and report on observance of the ceasefire by both sides and to try to deter breaches. The force was armed, albeit for self-defence only, with the Rhodesian Police assigned the role of enforcing the rules.¹³² The troops were distributed to five areas and tasked with monitoring five large Rhodesian Security Force bases. Thirteen two-man teams monitored smaller bases and guerrilla cantonments further afield.¹³³

Although the operation was successful, the outcome could have been otherwise. The elections took place in late February 1980, but the opportunity for the mission's derailment persisted beyond then. On one occasion, for instance, Australians helped dissuade a Rhodesian Security Force battalion from provoking a confrontation with the opposing Patriotic Front.¹³⁴

Such events demonstrated that the mission was a 'gamble, sent into a dangerous and volatile situation without the strength or the mandate to protect the local population'. To a large extent, the gamble paid off, and the force returned to Australia in March 1980.¹³⁵ But the view emerged that any expansion of the Commonwealth's international security role should be modest and not alter the organisation's loose, consensual and non-threatening character.¹³⁶

On reflection, Australia's small contribution remained consistent with the post-Vietnam War approach of successive governments. That approach involved offering niche forces for a measured contribution to generate the required effects in the pursuit of Australia's objectives. In this case, Australia's commitment helped to bolster international resolve to proceed and facilitated the success of the mission. The commitment also was consistent with Fraser's affinity with the British Commonwealth and involvement in African affairs.¹³⁷

Despite its success, the mission received little attention in Australia.¹³⁸ Perhaps the lack of media attention was because it went so smoothly. Regardless, it was seen as an aberration in a period of little overseas activity, although it presented a useful opportunity to practise deploying forces abroad. Yet with no apparent need to prepare for any further such operations, there was little imperative for lessons to be learned and applied from the experience. Besides, most of those who deployed were seasoned veterans largely unfazed by the experience – although non-Vietnam War veterans who participated did find it professionally rewarding.¹³⁹ In the meantime, the Army's focus shifted elsewhere.

VANUATU DEPLOYMENT

As independence for the Franco-British condominium in New Hebrides approached, the Australian Government was asked to provide some support to locate secessionist forces operating on the island of Espiritu Santo. The Australian Government agreed, and in May 1980 an Army Pilatus Porter single-engine aircraft, with an airborne radio direction-finder onboard, deployed for a short mission. The aircraft, along with an electronic warfare team, deployed for a few days to locate the HF radio used by secessionist forces.¹⁴⁰ The mission was uneventful, but helped to establish a positive relationship with the newly independent neighbouring nation of Vanuatu.

OPERATIONAL DEPLOYMENT FORCE

Sensing the need to have elements on a heightened state of readiness, in case of a regional crisis, the Australian Government established the Operational Deployment Force (ODF) in 1980 based around the 3rd Task Force (later 3rd Brigade) in Townsville. A number of exercises were conducted to test the ability of the force to respond at short notice. The first

was Exercise Swift Foot held around Brendan airfield near Charters Towers in July 1980. The 1 RAR Battalion Group, on short notice to move, was tasked to secure an 'air head' (a place for troops arriving by air, where troops and equipment can rally and reorganise before proceeding with their assigned tasks) for the Task Force headquarters and maintenance area, deploying by Chinook helicopters and Caribou aircraft. The battalion group included armoured personnel carriers, artillery and other support elements to test the ODF concept.¹⁴¹ Many more such tests were held in the years following, and the concept was refined over time. But this was a significant first step in ensuring that the Army had responsive and agile forces, based on light infantry, at its disposal for short-notice contingencies. The creation of the ODF was instrumental in maintaining an operational focus and high professional standards for the Army, particularly during the years of low operational tempo.

EXERCISE TRIAD

While the ODF received funding priority, other Army formations still participated in international activities like the tri-nation Exercise Triad in New Zealand involving United States, New Zealand and Australian forces. Triad provided a useful opportunity for ground and air elements to undertake combined and joint operations training in a 'limited war' setting. In 1981, for instance, more than three thousand service personnel participated.¹⁴² The third phase of the exercise was a command post exercise controlled from the North Island's main army base at Waiouru and structured around a fictional '4th ANZUS Division'. Subordinate elements came from the 25th Infantry Division from Hawaii, 2 New Zealand Task Force from Palmerston North and 6 Task Force from Enoggera in Queensland.¹⁴³ Once the United States suspended its treaty obligations to New Zealand, following the New Zealand Government's ban on nuclear ship visits in 1985, such trilateral exercises were placed in abeyance.

COMMONWEALTH GAMES, BRISBANE, 1982

In the meantime, the Army's focus returned to domestic priorities, particularly in Brisbane, host city of the Commonwealth Games from 30 September to 9 October 1982. For this event, 6 RAR, under Lieutenant Colonel Peter Langford, provided support. Tasks included driver support, ceremonial duties at major events, shooting-range butt parties and general

administrative support. The battalion also provided the flag party for the closing ceremony of the Games. Battalion headquarters established a command post, and 'A' Company was the stand-by response force in support of the SAS Regiment in the event of any terrorist activity.¹⁴⁴ The soldiers were happy to have the distraction from in-barracks peacetime life.

SPECIAL FORCES FOCUS

For the SAS Regiment, in preparing for the Games they soon realised that two troops might be needed to assault simultaneously. For this reason, Major (later Brigadier) Jim Wallace was brought in to command the deployed elements of 1st Squadron. In the meantime, the SAS commanding officer was at the Police Operations Centre alongside the police commander. The commanding officer of the 1st Commando Regiment established initial liaison with the police, undertook initial preparations for the deployment of the counter-terrorist teams, then acted as relief as required for the commanding officer of the SAS Regiment. The assault teams kept a low profile but made sure they were familiar with the layout and procedures of all Games venues.¹⁴⁵

This activity provided excellent training benefits for the special forces, but only limited lessons were drawn for the conventional forces: although, with hindsight, there were clear benefits of working closely with police and other government agencies. It was several years before the Army was called upon again to perform a similar task.

As the Hilton Hotel bombing in 1978 and the Commonwealth Games in 1982 demonstrated, from the mid-1970s Australia experienced a surge of concern over the threat of terrorism. With a real-time operational focus, in part the result of the counter-terrorism (CT) role and better funding, the Army's most highly capable elements resided in what came to be known as Special Operations Command. The SAS Regiment was given the highest priority for resourcing for the CT role, but some of the assets provided in this way were 'diverted for use in the conventional special forces role'. The SAS Regiment had close links to UK and US special forces, with whom they shared operational, training and equipment experiences for both CT ('black') and 'green' (war-like) roles. Information and training were shared with some ASEAN countries, although such sharing required sensitive political handling.¹⁴⁶ In addition, with a domestic CT focus, the special forces developed capabilities that proved useful in a counter-insurgency context, paralleling law-enforcement roles.

UGANDA

In the meantime, Australia once again was invited to assist in Africa. With Prime Minister Fraser remaining interested in Commonwealth affairs, the Australian Government committed a five-man team in 1982 to participate in the Commonwealth Military Training Team in Uganda (CMTTU): a 36-man training team from seven Commonwealth countries.¹⁴⁷ Four teams of five, including infantry officers, warrant officers and senior non-commissioned officers, deployed on six-month rotations. Their role was to help train and discipline the Uganda National Liberation Army formed after the overthrow of the dictator, Idi Amin. In particular, the team helped train Ugandan Army warrant officers and non-commissioned officers as instructors in weapon-handling, field craft and minor tactics. The last contingent returned to Australia in March 1984.¹⁴⁸ But the team's experience left little lasting impression on an Army increasingly focused on grappling with a continental defence strategy.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE 1980s

In 1982 the Army, under Lieutenant General Sir Philip Bennet, published *The Army in the 1980s*, known otherwise as *The Little Red Book*. This booklet, authored principally by David Horner, was a guide to the Army's role, functions, organisation and development. Drafted under the Army's chief of operations, Major General (later Lieutenant General and Chief of the General Staff) Laurie O'Donnell, the booklet confirmed the Army's 'core force' concept. The concept was predicated on a benign strategic environment wherein the advent of significant threats could be predicted with sufficient warning time to expand the force to meet the needs that might arise. The force also was required to remain capable of engaging in limited conventional war should such a requirement arise at short notice.¹⁴⁹

The efficacy of planning based around a core force would be challenged by Britain's deployment at short notice to reclaim the Falkland Islands in 1982 and by the US invasion of Grenada in 1983. Both events appeared with little warning and reminded senior Defence officials in Australia that predicting the future, and closely basing a force structure on the predictions, was a fraught venture. Britain's experience was of considerable professional interest to the Australian Army but, with budgetary constraints and a focus on continental defence, the Falklands campaign

prompted no major Australian reforms.¹⁵⁰ Instead, the Army's existing plans would be buffeted further by upcoming reviews, particularly once there was a change of government.

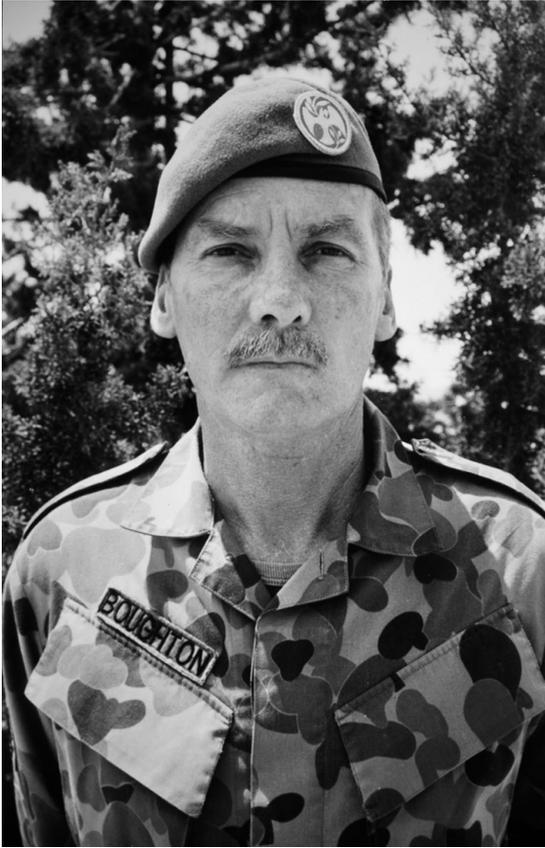
THE HAWKE LABOR GOVERNMENT

With the electoral defeat of the Fraser Government in March 1983, the new Labor Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, and his Foreign Minister, Bill Hayden, set about cultivating a pragmatic approach to foreign policy. But despite indications of a willingness to commit to peacekeeping operations, the Hawke Government's early decisions were to put peacekeeping into reverse.

Hayden was seen as being suspicious of overseas military commitments and was instrumental in ending Australia's 35-year commitment to peacekeeping in Kashmir. In December 1984 a draw-down of Australian observers from UNMOGIP in Kashmir began and was completed the following year, despite the fact that UN officials expressed great disappointment over the decision. The situation on the border appeared unchanging year after year, and the commitment to UNMOGIP was seen by Hayden as having outlived its usefulness. By some curious logic, Hayden considered that with just over a dozen uniformed personnel in UNTSO and UNMOGIP, Australia was over-committed to the United Nations – a move seen as laughable by Canadian counterparts, who maintained about 1600 troops on peacekeeping operations.

The Hawke Government also was instrumental in the hasty withdrawal of RAAF helicopters from the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) mission in the Sinai.¹⁵¹ Earlier, in 1983, the Hawke Government had rejected an American request to provide peacekeepers in Grenada, following the US intervention there. Similarly, with the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) on the Sinai Peninsula, Hayden needed to be persuaded by Israel, Egypt and the MFO even to allow RAAF helicopters and troops to stay until 1986.¹⁵² The fact that the Hawke Government took this position reflected its benign assessment of the strategic landscape. They did not see the need to engage abroad in this manner. It would not be until Gareth Evans became Foreign Minister in 1988 and as the end of the Cold War approached that there was an upsurge in Australian military deployments.¹⁵³

In the meantime, Defence Minister Gordon Scholes made a statement in March 1984 reiterating the shift in emphasis away from forward defence. Scholes declared that the government saw no primary defence



Warrant Officer Class 1 (WO1) Brian Thomas Boughton, Multinational Force and Observers (MFO). Boughton served as regimental sergeant major (RSM) of Australian Contingent 12A, of the MFO, which was in the Sinai from January to July 1999. In 2001 WO1 Boughton was appointed regimental sergeant major of the Army (RSMA). He also served with 7th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (7 RAR), in Vietnam between November 1969 and October 1970. (AWM P03689.001)

role outside Australia's region, while recognising that Australia's association with the West could lead to calls for involvement in peacekeeping operations.¹⁵⁴

EXERCISE KANGAROO 83

Consistent with the guidance Scholes gave, Exercise Kangaroo 83 was conducted in the north and north-west of Australia. This was the first

major exercise to be based there since the Second World War and was designed to test the ADF's ability to respond to low-level conflict with a mythical country called Kamaria. About seven thousand ADF personnel participated alongside naval and air elements from the United States and New Zealand.¹⁵⁵ One participant observed that exercises in the 1980s and 1990s often were more concerned about the success of the practice rather than the practice of success. With the exception of free-play, command-post exercises, most field exercises used to be judged on how well they went rather than on testing for coping with the unpredictable.¹⁵⁶

INTEGRATION OF WOMEN

With the incoming Hawke Government eager to address equal employment opportunities for women, the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC) was disbanded at the beginning of 1984.¹⁵⁷ Former WRAAC members were integrated into a number of corps but not the combat arms corps of infantry, artillery and armour. The decision came after years of incremental changes started by the Whitlam Government, and was accompanied by pay and entitlement reforms for women that matched those in the rest of Australian society. Still, the number of women in the Regular Army remained low, with approximately 1500 women out of 30 000 troops during the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁵⁸

In the following years, the Army struggled to raise the proportion of women in its ranks. This was in part because of the physical challenges associated with the routine of the Army's male-oriented training and field work. Adjustments to physical training were required to ameliorate the negative effect on women's physiology. In addition, the ADF was accused by some of misogynistic tendencies.¹⁵⁹ In a world in which traditions of mateship in the Army were shaped in almost exclusively male terms over the two world wars and beyond, it took time for the organisation's male-dominated culture to become gender-neutral. Still, the integration of women into their respective corps contributed to the strengthening of the identity and significance of the Army's various corps and regiments. Integrating women into the corps for which they were trained was widely recognised as being a step in the right direction. It also helped reinforce the significance of the Army's corps and regimental identities.¹⁶⁰

THE IMPACT OF DIBB AND THE WHITE PAPER

Shortly after the disbandment of the WRAAC, in 1986, a former senior intelligence official, an academic and later a senior Defence official,

Dr Paul Dibb, released a report on his strategic review of Australia's defence, which had been commissioned by Scholes' successor as Defence Minister, Kim Beazley. Dibb's approach was consistent with the broad direction of post-Vietnam War strategy, with an emphasis on domestic defence without excluding the prospect of making niche contributions to alliance commitments where necessary or expedient. But Dibb particularly emphasised northern defence, with a priority on air and maritime assets and a problematical 'goal-keeper' role for ground forces.¹⁶¹

Dibb's seminal work generated considerable angst for the Army. The Army Presence in the North (APIN) was a major initiative arising from the Defence White Paper, which led to the relocation of the 1st Brigade from Sydney's Holsworthy Barracks to Robertson Barracks in Darwin, which was constructed in the 1990s.

In terms of broader defence priorities, his ground-breaking approach also resulted in the establishment of Headquarters Northern Command (HQ NORCOM) in Darwin as a joint headquarters to command forces in northern Australia. NORCOM would come to play a prominent role alongside various ADF elements and other government agencies in the protection of Australia's northern borders.

Other initiatives arising from the 1987 White Paper included the establishment of RAAF Base Tindal and the bare northern bases; the establishment of the two-fleet Navy (based in Fremantle and Sydney); the home-porting of more and more-capable ships in the north; and the establishment of the Joint Offshore Protection Command, including its component parts – as a precursor to Border Protection Command (established 20 years later). At a time of a benign threat environment, defence strategy benefited from the focus on the 'Defence of Australia' construct. Indeed, the successful groundwork undertaken as a result of Dibb's initiatives left the Army and the ADF well placed to move forward with the development of more robust capabilities for offshore deployments later on.

In the meantime, the focus on other defence priorities left many in the Army disillusioned and frustrated. The Army's remaining role featured motorised or mechanised operations and peacekeeping, while not allowing peacekeeping to determine force structure. The 1987 Defence White Paper stressed a ground forces role reliant on continental task forces for low-level contingencies, supported by RAAF forward operating bases. This approach led the Army to modify its tactical organisations in order to be more suitable for operations in remote and harsh conditions. The lack of an identifiable threat led to further emphasis on the 'core

force' concept, whereby residual capabilities would be retained to deter low-level military operations. More refined intelligence capabilities would, in theory, enable the ADF to vector its light and mobile but meagre resources onto specific targets.¹⁶²

The 1987 White Paper also stressed the role of Army Reserve's Regional Force Surveillance Unit (RFSU) patrols in support of a layered approach to the defence of Australia. This involved the three RFSUs: the Pilbara Regiment, Northwest Mobile Force (known as Norforce) and 51st Far North Queensland Regiment (51 FNQR). These units engaged with numerous government agencies operating against foreign fishing vessels and suspected illegal or irregular entry vessels. This had the incremental effect of generating a plan that spanned all the government agencies concerned with border security. The experience helped prepare the Army for the increasingly inter-agency approach to domestic and offshore operations in the years that followed. According to one RFSU commander, by 2007, the RFSUs provided a mature and robust capability able to operate in remote and austere conditions as part of an inter-agency network.¹⁶³ Their work was effectively complemented by the work undertaken by 7th Intelligence Company, whose headquarters in Darwin controlled a reporting network across the Top End.

EXCHANGE ARRANGEMENTS

The refocus on the defence of Australia during this period led to the demphasis on counter-revolutionary or counter-insurgency warfare (prevalent before and during the Vietnam War) in favour of conventional operations. These included practising warfighting skills for traditional military tasks including to advance, attack, defend and withdraw, albeit against a relatively benign hypothetical adversary. Tactics and combat drills practised during this period still belonged in Vietnam, with many instructors relying on their experience there as the principal benchmark.¹⁶⁴ Reflecting on his experience as a junior officer in the 1980s, Brigadier (Retd) Justin Kelly observed that, being bereft of a real enemy presenting real imperatives, the Australian Army was free to design its own exercises to stay within its own comfort zone. This was in stark contrast to the British Army on the Rhine (BAOR). 'When I got to work with NATO armies I was stunned by the complexity of the battle of which they were a part – anti-tank guided weapons, helicopters, masses of armour and the power of self-propelled artillery forced them to adapt their tactics. We were free to design a more compliant enemy.'¹⁶⁵

Kelly's experience was similar to that of several officers from the various corps posted on similar exchanges. As one junior officer at the time observed, 'Exchange personnel were key. We had combat-experienced Americans and Brits here and we had Australians scooping up information and experience there. This was a matter of survival in our eyes as we were asking force structure questions – asking why we had cavalry and tanks and mechanised infantry.'¹⁶⁶

These officers were exposed to the workings of British, American and some Canadian units that were focused on the Soviet military threat in Europe. Kelly noted that, for the armoured corps at least, the BAOR exchange officer would return to Australia as a tactics instructor at the armoured school.¹⁶⁷ Similar arrangements occurred with virtually all of the Army's schools. This way, the Australian Army kept abreast of tactical, technical and procedural developments in fellow ABCA partner armies, even if there were limited scope for them to apply their knowledge in an Army facing a more benign outlook. This was particularly useful for benchmarking Australian standards during this period.

TACTICAL PROFICIENCY AND INNOVATION

Despite the contrast with British and other counterparts, Kelly noted that Australian soldiers still maintained an edge in terms of tactical proficiency: 'Our crew, individual skills and low-level collective skills were uniformly of a higher standard,' he claimed. 'In part this represented the up-side of the small unit, low-level focus that we retained as a point of pride.' Australian troops could retain this perspective because they had no imperative to develop the higher-level, collective skills of their European and North American colleagues.¹⁶⁸

At the same time, while resources were constrained, particularly for those not part of the 3rd Brigade's ODF, there was encouragement for a high level of innovation at the junior officer and junior soldier level. Junior officers were encouraged to write, and training was imaginative and strained the bounds of strategic guidance. Soldiers learned from the lessons of other armies and adapted them to Australian conditions.¹⁶⁹

EXERCISE TASMAN EXCHANGE

One Army with which regular exercises were held and from which considerable benefit was derived was the New Zealand Army. Australia and

New Zealand's close relationship was one riven with rivalry, particularly on the sporting field. The rivalry was compounded by different strategic perceptions, which fed a sometimes unhelpful rivalry between Australia and New Zealand in the South Pacific. This was illustrated in the handling of the deployment to Bougainville (discussed in [chapter 2](#)). But the general sense among Australians was that there was no one preferred alongside in battle more than New Zealanders. But Australians felt concerned that Kiwi soldiers were not being supported appropriately by their own government. With this in mind, Australia always saw exercises and exchanges with New Zealand as vitally important.¹⁷⁰

Exercise Tasman Exchange, a field exercise involving Australian and New Zealand units, provided one of the numerous continuing links between the armies of Anzac. Such exercises were important opportunities for the trans-Tasman strategic cousins to stay connected while honing military skills. Live-fire support coordination was exercised under the Tasman Exchange arrangements, which enabled artillery units to maintain rarely employed but vital skills for combat operations requiring artillery support.

'JOINTERY' FOR THE DEFENCE OF AUSTRALIA

Meanwhile, Australia followed a slow route towards closer integration, or 'jointery', in the command and operations of the three services. The lack of common inter-service (i.e. navy–army–air force, or 'joint') experience had the effect of delaying improvements in operational inter-service cooperation and the development of institutions for national-level joint military command and control of forces. But the emphasis on continental defence made Australian inter-service integration a higher priority than before. This inter-service impetus proved beneficial when the surge in operational tempo occurred following the end of the Cold War.

The Chief of the Defence Force Staff from 1984 to 1987 (subsequently retitled Chief of the Defence Force, or CDF), General Sir Phillip Bennett, capitalised on the momentum generated by the emphasis on continental defence. He formed Headquarters ADF in September 1984 as an interim step towards enhanced jointery. He also established a 'two-star' (major general or equivalent level) position for strategic-level joint operations and plans and subsequently a three-star (lieutenant general or equivalent level) position as Vice Chief of the Defence Force (VCDF) to act as the Chief of Staff of Headquarters ADF.¹⁷¹

STILL CATERING FOR DEPLOYMENT CONTINGENCIES

While strategic guidance directed the Army to focus on the defence of Australia, Bennett's successor as CDF, General Peter Gration, observed that the strategy still allowed for forces to deploy further afield if required. To Gration, engaging in UN- or Commonwealth-mandated opportunities was an effective way of keeping the Army motivated when there were few significant challenges on the horizon. But without the 'Defence of Australia' strategy the Army would likely have been run down further.¹⁷²

Lieutenant General (Retd) John Grey, Army Chief from 1992 to 1995, noted that the Army in the late 1980s still had forces available for contingencies that might arise: '3rd [Brigade], Townsville, comprising 1 RAR, 2/4 RAR with supporting arms units and logistic support units provided at all times a company group available for deployment at short notice. 3 RAR (Para) at Holsworthy and some elements of 1st [Brigade] were tasked to have a company available at relatively short notice should a parachute capability be needed. The remainder of 1st [Brigade], which included 1 Armoured Regiment and 2 Cavalry Regiment, an artillery regiment and other supporting arms and logistic units, were trained to be a follow-on force.'¹⁷³

The Army Reserve, however, was in a far weaker state. As Grey observed, 'The Army Reserve comprised Ready Reserve units and Army Reserve formations and units. While the Ready Reserve units received priority for training resources and equipment, the remainder of the Army Reserve could best be described as the lower end of the food chain, despite the dedication of the members to serve and sacrifice their otherwise family or free time.'¹⁷⁴

EROSION OF FORCE PROJECTION CAPABILITIES

In the meantime, further investment in the Army was constrained by the land-force scenarios associated with the 'Defence of Australia' strategy. The 'credible' scenarios of low-level contingencies were never very credible, and the core force eventually became a hollow force, with most units being below strength, inadequately equipped and poorly prepared.¹⁷⁵ The transformation process, with land forces focused on the continent itself,

also resulted in the further erosion of amphibious and other force projection capabilities in the three services.¹⁷⁶

For instance, in 1982 Australia's last aircraft carrier, HMAS *Melbourne*, was paid off and not replaced. Apart from savings accrued, the justification was that continental defence did not require such 'offensive' capabilities. This was argued despite the fact that HMAS *Melbourne* had last seen effective duty as a mobile disaster relief platform in Darwin and might have proven valuable off the coast of Fiji in 1987. Fortunately HMAS *Tobruk* was commissioned in April 1981, providing the Defence Force with a modest amphibious capability. But beyond the ability to carry a helicopter on HMAS *Tobruk*, and on the Navy's frigates, air cover was to be provided for with land-based RAAF aircraft.¹⁷⁷ Yet the projection of forces would prove to be an ongoing requirement levied on the ADF, as the events in 1987 would illustrate.

OPERATION MORRIS DANCE, FIJI, 1987

On 14 May 1987 Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka and elements of the Royal Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) staged a military coup in Fiji, in an attempt to secure traditional Fijian land ownership and to ensure that political power remained in the control of ethnic Fijians.¹⁷⁸ The key government ministers managing the crisis, Prime Minister Bob Hawke, Defence Minister Kim Beazley and Acting Foreign Minister Senator Gareth Evans, initially wanted to see what they could do to rescue the deposed prime minister, Timoci Bavadra, perhaps by sending a helicopter in to accomplish a rescue. The CDF, General Gration, was consulted, and he quickly explained some of the insurmountable difficulties, including the trouble in locating the captive prime minister's exact whereabouts and the logistic challenges in getting in and getting him out. Once it was clear that New Zealand was not interested in mounting a military operation, Hawke, Beazley and Evans quickly rejected military intervention, particularly once evidence emerged of widespread support for the coup.

Nonetheless, planning was undertaken in Canberra, coupled with briefings from the Joint Intelligence Organisation, where the desk officer, Captain (later Lieutenant Colonel) Janet Hanson briefed presciently on the likely outcome of events in the lead-up to the coup. But it was not until 20 May that a warning order was issued for preparations to support the potential evacuation of an estimated four thousand Australians from Fiji. The ODF had been designated for response to contingencies, and the

force was on seven days notice to move but managed to mount and dispatch a company group in 48 hours. The 150-strong Advance Company Group (ACG) was based on B Company, 1 RAR, under the command of Major Gary Stone. Before departure, Stone's Company Group was pared back to only 120 personnel because of political sensitivities dictating the size of the force and the type of weapons allowed – rifles only. Gration explained that the choice of deploying with rifles only was a deliberate one: he was eager to impress on the soldiers that to go ashore was to go only with an invitation from the Fijians. No other circumstances were contemplated.¹⁷⁹

The Advance Company Group was then flown by RAAF C-130 Hercules aircraft from Townsville to Norfolk Island and deployed in an ad-hoc fashion on board a variety of Australian naval vessels, first the amphibious ship, HMAS *Tobruk*, and subsequently to the supply ship, HMAS *Success*, and the warships HMAS *Parramatta* and HMAS *Sydney*. For 15 days the troops were standing by, reviewing intelligence briefs and plans and conducting physical training in the ships off the Fijian coast, 2000 nautical miles from Australia. By 7 June the troops were back home.

The operation was, on one level, uneventful. Yet as military historian Bob Breen observed, 'The adventures of the Advance Company Group and embarked helicopters should not go down in Australian military history as a benchmark for prompt, strong or smart joint force projection.' Indeed, even at the staging base at Norfolk Island there were several practices that reflected poorly on the Defence Force's capabilities, if not the resourcefulness of the soldiers and sailors involved: vehicles were ferried from shore to ship in small lighters that miraculously did not capsize. Helicopters flew without night vision equipment and without proper training for at-night and over-water flights. Not surprisingly, one of the helicopters crashed on the deck of HMAS *Tobruk* – an event that would be echoed eerily in similar circumstances 19 years later (as discussed in [chapter 11](#)).¹⁸⁰

After the event, the operation came under considerable criticism in the media and through a paper published by the Australian National University's Strategic and Defence Studies Centre. That paper argued that while the response to the crisis was essentially executed in a timely and efficient manner, 'this first genuine short-notice operational deployment in 20 years naturally revealed oversights and inadequacies'. A strong defence followed in the *Australian Defence Force Journal* prepared by Colonel Adrian D'Hage, who had worked for Gration, during Operation Morris Dance. But the incident raised questions about Australia's

response and readiness and about some of the assumptions that underpinned the planning.¹⁸¹

Numerous planning and logistic procedures were poorly implemented and, due to concerns about secrecy, insufficient intelligence in support of tactical planning was available. Troops on board could not access up-to-date overhead imagery of Fiji, nor could they gain access to detailed intelligence estimates on the disposition of forces and potential evacuees, which meant that on-board training and preparation involved guesswork. Hence the embarked force was left inadequately prepared and equipped for the work they might have been tasked to undertake. Even the operational concept presumed that the Fijian authorities would be prepared to facilitate the entry of Australian forces, and the limited availability of helicopters meant only one platoon could land at one time. This planning relied on untested assumptions that could have exposed the force to significant difficulties beyond those they experienced.¹⁸²

To be fair, Morris Dance was never intended to test the limits of Australian military capabilities. As Gration explained, 'We did not say after Morris Dance that this demonstrated the requirement for an amphibious capability. It just didn't come into the equation.' HMAS *Tobruk* was considered to be very good, even though in the strategic concept there was no requirement for amphibious ships. The issue was that the Navy saw amphibious ships as serving the Army's needs and therefore not a budget priority for Navy, whereas Army saw the funding of amphibious ships as the Navy's responsibility.

As far as Gration was concerned, the mission was a success: the Navy had responded in the time frame identified; the fleet commander had suggested that Army troops would be helpful; and troops were provided in a timely manner. 'The problems experienced in Townsville were not of strategic consequence. All the troops and ships did everything that was asked of them.'¹⁸³

Yet to others, the issue related to the ability of the Australian Government to protect its citizens overseas. Had the Fijian authorities refused to cooperate in the event of calls for an evacuation the only option left would have been for the citizens to be abandoned or for a very large operation to be mounted against opposition. In the latter case, the Australians conceivably would have been hostages, and Australia lacked the capability to mount such an operation anyway.¹⁸⁴

Operation Morris Dance illustrated the limitations of basing military force structures on an approach that precluded planning for projecting land forces by sea. This left few options for projecting force away from

Australia's shores. Operation Morris Dance demonstrated that significant capability shortfalls had emerged in the years since substantial Australian land forces had last deployed on operations in Vietnam. The shortfalls identified included inadequate intelligence support to deployed forces, inadequate procedures and opportunities to practise cooperation between the Navy and the Army, and inadequate mechanisms to place forces on standby to enable them to undertake adequate pre-deployment preparations, including planning to deploy with the appropriate equipment for the tasks envisaged. These shortcomings would remain outstanding for several years thereafter.

Several of these shortcomings would be exposed again on the short-notice operations launched following the end of the Cold War, as [chapter 2](#) explains. One of those was what one commentator described as the 'seemingly supine acceptance of number caps'. The Army was asked, without context, how many men there were in a rifle company and were then told that the force cap for Morris Dance was 120 soldiers. The result was that the contingent included a force of only a platoon (plus) of infantry with the necessary supporting components taking up the rest of the numbers: this was 'not the sort of stuff to build confidence in our senior leadership'.¹⁸⁵ What was needed was a systematic analysis of the mission to be accomplished and the force elements required to undertake the tasks. Only then should officials in Canberra have indicated to the Defence Minister the projected numbers they anticipated being required to undertake the task properly and safely. The question of force caps would be a recurrent issue with subsequent deployments as well.

The real problem with Morris Dance, argued Breen, 'was that there was no joint rehearsal of evacuation operations. In light of the growing risk to Australian nationals in Papua New Guinea, this was poor risk management and equally poor anticipation. "She'll be right on the day, mate" was the ethos.'¹⁸⁶ Certainly, several years had passed since Australian land forces had last deployed on operations and the peacetime tempo had eroded the operational edge. In addition, the arrangements for the new HQ Australian Defence Force (announced only two months before Morris Dance) had little opportunity to be rehearsed or confirmed.¹⁸⁷ Not surprisingly, therefore, operational, logistic, communications and intelligence challenges mounted. Operation Morris Dance provided a sobering demonstration of the limits of Australian military power in the late 1980s. Even if it had wanted to or needed to, Australia simply could not deploy a land force into the South Pacific safely and effectively if there were any prospect of onshore opposition to such a move.

In the view of one former Commander Special Forces, Brigadier Jim Wallace, Morris Dance was a 'Keystone Cops-like exercise' that reflected the lack of training in amphibious operations and validated the raising of a Regular force commando unit.¹⁸⁸ It would take some time before the Army's commando capabilities would be expanded, but there was growing momentum for the Army's special forces, including the commandos, to play a more prominent role on operations.

The experience with Morris Dance, when juxtaposed with the strategic guidance in the 1987 White Paper, illustrated the paradox of Australian governments emphasising continental defence while feeling compelled to deploy forces well beyond when unforeseen circumstances arose.¹⁸⁹

It would take years of operational deployments for the key lessons observed during Morris Dance (on planning, equipment, intelligence support and inter-service cooperation) to be fully learned. This slow response indicated that, after several years of peacetime experience, the Army and the ADF's ability to learn from operational study needed to be refined.

OPERATION SAILCLOTH, VANUATU

In the meantime, a year after Morris Dance, in May 1988, 2/4 RAR was placed on stand-by for deployment to Vanuatu had Australian citizens been in danger following the outbreak of violence. 'A' Company 2/4 RAR was placed on two hours notice, with the remainder of the battalion on four hours notice to move from midnight on 19 May. In the end, the force was not required, but it was an excellent test of procedures and reflected that the lessons of Morris Dance appeared to have been absorbed.¹⁹⁰ Certainly, for the forces on stand-by this was the case, but for the wider Army and ADF, greater jolts would be required for the lessons to be truly absorbed. An Australian Joint Service Plan emerged from this experience, following some combined planning for contingencies in the South Pacific conducted by Australia and New Zealand together. This was a significant step forward, but even here, there were concerns that political and bureaucratic pressure would limit the size of forces needed for credible contingency purposes.¹⁹¹

REFLECTIONS

The post-Vietnam War period through to the end of the Cold War saw the Army face a number of challenges. It is worth reflecting on this

experience through the prism of the five reasons identified as having contributed to the Army's professional prowess. With individual training, this was the period that saw, in 1986, the opening of the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) – one of the major steps towards more effective jointery in the Defence Force (a point illustrated in subsequent chapters). This period pre-dated by over a decade the creation of the joint services Australian Command and Staff College at Weston Creek in Canberra, although the Joint Services Staff College (aimed at lieutenant colonels and their equivalents in the Navy and Air Force) had been operating throughout this period, as had the ADF Warfare Centre and its predecessor, the Australian Joint Warfare Establishment. These places offered courses affecting the inter-services operational domains, including air-ground cooperation and amphibious planning. Arguably, had the joint staff college been created earlier, the concepts and capabilities drawn upon for Operation Morris Dance might have been better honed.

Concerning collective training, the emphasis on defence-of-Australia planning affected the nature of field training exercises undertaken. The threat scenarios for these exercises tended to be relatively benign in light of the national defence strategy. That strategy drove an emphasis on continental defence planning, which resulted in only a limited emphasis on amphibious capabilities and high-end warfighting. These factors, combined with the absence of a high operational tempo, created numerous challenges as the Army strove to remain relevant, capable and honed for future challenges. The low tempo also contributed to institutional inertia in terms of learning from experience that led to resistance to adaptation. The Army preferred to stick with the tactics, techniques and procedures that it knew. It would be some time before the Army adapted fully to the post-Cold War dynamics.

In terms of regimental or corps identities, Operation Morris Dance and Operation Damon in Zimbabwe demonstrated the Army's ability to configure and deploy rapidly groups structured specifically for the missions' tasks. Admittedly, the operations proved to be relatively benign. In addition, there remained considerable gaps in capability that would become more disconcerting in the years that followed.

As for ties with allies and regional partners, Operation Damon demonstrated the lingering pull of Britain. In the case of Operation Morris Dance, if anything, it demonstrated the need for closer collaboration with Australia's Anzac cousins, the New Zealanders. Only a coordinated Anzac approach would prove effective in managing Pacific security affairs of this nature. Australia and New Zealand eventually came to see this as

a natural way of operating together in the South Pacific, but it took a few more ventures before that lesson was learnt properly by both sides. Throughout, the ABCA ties continued to help Australia benchmark its own standards and keep abreast of technical and conceptual developments. In the meantime, ties with close regional partners featured less prominently but remained significant for providing important training opportunities and a regionally attuned mindset.

The Army's links with wider society reflected the real and perceived limits of tolerance for 'adventurous' military actions offshore in the immediate post-Vietnam War years. The governments of the day had little appetite for going beyond the commitment offered for Operation Damon in Zimbabwe. Similarly for Operation Morris Dance, despite being considered a middle power, Australia's small-power pretensions and its limited sense of regional responsibilities precluded a bolder ADF posture. This was also a consequence of the ADF's inadequate joint-force capabilities, which presented government with a narrow range of military options in response to the Fiji crisis. In effect, the links with society (particularly through the government's perception that more capable and far-reaching capabilities for the ADF were unnecessary) acted as a check on the government's freedom of action on how the Army and the wider ADF was structured and employed.

Notwithstanding the policy shift towards continental rather than forward defence and the development of the core force concept, the years from 1972 to 1989 saw the Army continue to train for scenarios that were inspired by the Army's Vietnam experience. Deployments to such places as Zimbabwe capitalised on skills soldiers had acquired during that conflict. The experience gained from Morris Dance should have had an educative effect on strategic thinking about the defence of Australia and the approach to military operations for the Australian Army. Indeed, the strategy appeared to be at odds with the practice, generating what Michael Evans described as the 'tyranny of dissonance'.¹⁹²

Interestingly enough, that dissonance was not so sharply felt by many Defence policy-makers and senior commanders. Some chiefs, such as General Gratton and others, recognised the constraints on strategic circumstances that led to the government emphasising continental defence above other priorities. Under tight financial constraints, the Army had to focus on maintaining core capabilities and capitalising on opportunities for operational deployments as and when they arose. The memory of the Vietnam War was fading, but the imperative to avoid overseas

commitments that could be seen as likely to generate controversy at home remained strong.

Critics could argue that notwithstanding the five reasons for prowess, there were some enduring negatives that the Army had to face: first, for many years the Australian Army was what the former director of the Australia Defence Association, Michael O'Connor, once called an 'Army without a strategy and a strategy without an Army'. Some contended that the post-Vietnam War period, until the end of the Cold War in 1989 at least, saw the Army as the orphan service when compared to the RAN and the RAAF. This was because the focus from the mid-1970s to the 1990s was on a strategy that emphasised the sea and air components of the air-sea-land gap to Australia's north – overlooking the Army's potential role with respect to the islands and offshore infrastructure off Australia's northern coast. Second, the haphazard nature of resourcing for the Army had a serious impact on its ability to perform.

Events would demonstrate also that the concept of an adaptive learning organisation, responsive to the emerging strategic and operational trends, was not yet mature in the Australian Army. With the end of the Cold War approaching, the Army was about to witness a significant upturn in operational tempo, and many lessons would need to be repeated before they were learnt. They are the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER | 2

THE POST-COLD WAR EXPERIENCE TO THE LATE 1990s

In hindsight, Operation Morris Dance in 1987 was a precursor to a significant increase in operational tempo from the late 1980s onwards that coincided with the end of the Cold War. With it would come a number of tests to the limits of governmental casualty cringe and the preference for restrained contributions to operations far afield. The easing of the government's concerns about deployments far afield was articulated, for instance, in the 1989 strategic planning document *Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s* (ASP90). Influenced by the Morris Dance experience, ASP90 recognised that situations might arise that required Defence Force involvement in the South Pacific, including evacuation of citizens or disaster relief.¹ ASP90 began to shift strategic guidance away from a focus on continental defence to include a potential for ADF involvement in other tasks, including alliance obligations, peacekeeping, disaster relief and evacuation operations.²

This chapter reviews the experience on operations from 1989 to 1999, demonstrating the cumulative effect on the Army. The chapter briefly considers the effect on the Army of the strategic reviews and restructuring of the 1990s and spans the Gulf War and the so-called revolution in military affairs that it appeared to represent.

The chapter also considers the peace operations to which Australia contributed in Iran and Iraq, Namibia, Pakistan and Afghanistan, Western Sahara, Cambodia, Somalia, Rwanda, Mozambique, PNG (Bougainville and northern coast tsunami relief) and Indonesia (Irian Jaya). This review demonstrates that while individuals by and large gained immense

professional and personal benefit from the experiences, the Army gained little corporately from many of these missions.

The Army lacked a systematic approach to capturing lessons learned and passing them on to enhance training and capabilities. As a result, the Army had to learn and relearn many lessons. Cumulatively, however, the rapid growth in the number and scope of operations pushed the Army to perform beyond its peacetime comfort zone. Lieutenant General John Grey, the CGS from 1992 to 1995, was one of the advocates for involvement in United Nations peacekeeping missions: 'Such commitments were in my view the closest exposure likely to arise in which participation by our Army would enable us to assess its professional expertise and doctrinal base.'³

UN OPERATIONS IN IRAN AND IRAQ

The surge in UN-mandated peacekeeping operations commenced with Operation Sailcloth in support of the United Nations Iran–Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG). Between August 1988 and October 1991, 2300 UNIIMOG troops deployed, including 65 Australian Army officers. The conflict between Iran and Iraq, which had gone on since 1980, mattered to Western countries if for no other reason than the Persian Gulf oil reserves. The prospect of improved regional economic activity after the ceasefire also appeared to warrant participation.⁴

From 1988 onwards the Australian Government demonstrated that it was prepared proactively to use military forces for political objectives far afield. Defence Minister Kim Beazley later agreed that those who claimed Australia effectively had returned to forward defence were 'largely correct'.⁵ Operation Sailcloth appeared to be one of the first such examples.

The Army selected some of its best officers for the job. This mission involved contingents of 12 officers deploying as individual team members of composite observer teams along the 1400-kilometre Iran–Iraq border. UNIIMOG consisted of 350 observers from 26 countries deployed along both sides. The mission provided an excellent opportunity to gain from the experience, observing major deployed military formations, learning about other countries' military equipment and tactics and about the calibre of other team members' armies. Individual displays of courage under trying conditions were evident, such as when Major (later Colonel) Ross Parrott helped to prevent a resurgence of fighting between Iraqi and Iranian troops, and traversed a minefield deftly to negotiate with both sides

to help account for a missing Iraqi soldier. He was awarded a Conspicuous Service Cross for his efforts.⁶

Australians also faced several major ceasefire violations, coming under fire and being threatened by the Iranians. Captain (later Major General) Craig Orme watched several attacks in which rounds landed close to his position. On one occasion, he faced off an Iranian tank with the barrel aimed between his legs determined to force the Iraqis to remove a new bunker they had built close by. Orme moved slowly to hide the sight of his shaking legs but managed to defuse the situation.⁷

Working with the United Nations was a challenge, and provided salient lessons for the Australians. For most, the experience was frustrating and disheartening, faced with incompetence and significant cultural differences between contingents. In small teams, for instance, all members needed to contribute to the tasks at hand, but some would expect more junior-ranking people to do the work for them. Working alongside personnel from other countries, seeing their strengths and weaknesses, brought attention to much of the corruption and incompetence evident in the United Nations and validated the Australians' sense of their own military professionalism. The experience served as a form of professional benchmarking against international counterparts.

The UNIIMOG mission came to an abrupt end at the time of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Iranian territory. Australian observers withdrew shortly afterwards. For many, the mission was an invaluable professional experience and a career high point.⁸ In the meantime, the Army committed forces to its most significant mission during this period with the launching of the UN mission to Namibia – a mission postponed for a decade by Cold War stalemate.

OPERATION PICARESQUE IN NAMIBIA

Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser had repeatedly demonstrated his interest in African affairs and his eagerness to be active in Africa in the 1970s and, in 1979, he offered a force of 250 engineers and 50 headquarters and support personnel to the proposed 8000-strong United Nations Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG) for Namibia. The UN mission was endorsed to facilitate elections that would see Namibia make the transition from South African control to independence. When eventually deployed, UNTAG became the largest UN peacekeeping mission since the Congo in 1960-64. The force came predominantly from the Army's 17th



Members of 3 ASC to UNIIMOG, Tehran, Iran, 12 April 1990. Left to right : (back row) Bob Jones, Frank Dutton, Andy Leith, Lieutenant Colonel Garry Stone, Ross Parrott; (front row) Terry Lindsay, Jim Simpson, Shane Caughey, Ross Jacob, Geoff Gillespie, Major Stuart Douglas Cameron, Ross Kershaw, Geoff Hourn, John Harrison. Stuart Cameron was killed as civilian member of the humanitarian relief organisation Care Australia in northern Iraq on 7 January 1993. (AWM P01713.005)

Construction Squadron.⁹ Fraser declared: ‘The Government has carefully weighed the international circumstances in which Australia finds itself at this time. It has concluded above all that now is a time for Australia to assume its international responsibilities.’¹⁰ Fraser’s announcement of a force contribution occurred during heightened Soviet activism in Africa and reflected a concern to support American resolve in response. The intention was to supervise a transition to Namibian independence, beginning with disarmament and an election.

After ten years of deliberation and delay, and as one of the first signs of the emerging thaw in the Cold War, UNTAG was launched. Prime Minister Hawke was a long-standing opponent of apartheid, and Beazley was a strong supporter of the US alliance. Both enthusiastically committed Australia to the US-brokered plan, seeing the implications a successful Namibia mission might have for peace in Cambodia.¹¹

Australia contributed a contingent of 304 (later increased to 314) engineers from February 1989 to March 1990. For the first of two six-month rotations, the contingent was under the command of Colonel Richard Warren, who had served in PNG and Vietnam. Warren also acted as UNTAG chief engineer. The Australian contingent included an engineer squadron, comprising two construction troops, a resource troop, a plant (earth-moving equipment) troop, field engineer troops, a construction workshop, as well as communications and medical support.¹²

UNTAG was slow to deploy and faced numerous challenges, including an armed incursion by 1500 Namibian independence fighters on 1 April 1989, the day of the formal ceasefire. At that stage only British signallers and Australian engineers were on the ground and able to respond. One engineer sergeant explained: 'It was really scary... We came out here to build roads and bridges. We weren't expecting to go out and play soldiers.'¹³ South African Defence Force personnel deployed in response saw the Australians as having betrayed their anti-communist fellow whites and sought to intimidate them at assembly points.¹⁴ Yet having been trained first as infantrymen and having confidence in their training, the engineers performed the role admirably. Indeed, Australian engineers found themselves having to adapt to and overcome a range of challenges, including manning safe havens, along with British soldiers, while the United Nations mustered the infantry forces intended for the role.¹⁵

Engineering tasks involved security for the force (concerning mines, booby traps and the threat of armed violence) and construction and works tasks in support of the UN's objectives. 14th Field Troop, under Lieutenant Steve Alexander, for instance, focused primarily on the security tasks, particularly unexploded ordnance and demining.¹⁶ The Australians adapted quickly to demining peculiarities evident in Namibia that were a result of the approach taken by the South African Defence Force. One innovative step taken by the United Nations was to lease a number of mine-proofed vehicles, known as 'Buffels' and based on a Mercedes UNIMOG truck but with a V-shaped hull to deflect the shock of a mine blast.¹⁷ The Australian Government declined the UN offer to purchase the second-hand Buffels after the mission. Still, experience with the Buffel would inform the design in Australia some years later of the Bushmaster protected mobility vehicle. The engineers would also benefit considerably from the experience, as the lessons learned reinvigorated engineer training.

Construction tasks included work on facilities in a number of towns, accommodation for UN personnel and on reception centres around the



Members of 14th Field Troop serving with UNTAG, on Buffel training at Oshakati, Northern Namibia, 18 June 1989. The Buffels, vehicles protected against land mines, were leased by the UN from the South African Defence Force. Left to right: Sapper Rob Wickham, Corporal Rod McGarvie, Sergeant Dave Sinai, Sapper Greg Roberts. (Photo: Pat Green. AWM CANA/89/0312/35)

country, which Captain Shane Miller described as ‘probably one of the most satisfying jobs we ever did there’.¹⁸ Although there were numerous challenges, many saw the deployment to Namibia as a great opportunity. Lieutenant Andrew Stanner, for instance, in charge of 9th Construction Troop, captured the sense in the contingent about the operation, saying: ‘This is fun; it’s an adventure.’¹⁹

The Australians also lacked experience at working the UN system, in contrast to other more UN-experienced contingents from Scandinavia, Canada and Britain. Lieutenant Pat Sowry, Warren’s liaison officer at UN Headquarters in Windhoek, observed that Australians ‘were understandably a bit naive as a contingent to the ways of the UN, at least in the initial phases’.²⁰ Australians, for instance, followed procedure, no matter how cumbersome and ill-suited to the circumstances, while other contingents knew effective shortcuts. Australia would have plenty of opportunity to learn on this and subsequent UN operations. Still, on completion of the



Australian field engineers serving with UNTAG conduct mine awareness training for Kenyan Battalion engineers at Okahandja, Namibia, 18 June 1989. Australian instructor Corporal Rod McGarvie, 14th Field Troop, displays inert anti-personnel mines to Kenyan soldiers. (Photo: Pat Green. AWM CANA/89/0313/04)

first rotation, the Australian troops were regarded ‘as the outstanding success of the UNTAG force’.²¹

For the second rotation, another engineer, Colonel John Crocker, was appointed to command. His contingent included 14 New Zealanders and five military police. Major Ken Gillespie was the second in command and operations officer. His experience would help prepare him for his later appointments as he rose to be VCDF, Chief of Joint Operations and, from 2008 to 2011, Chief of Army.²²

The roles Crocker’s troops performed differed from the first contingent largely because of the primacy of the need to support the conduct of elections, which were held over five days in November 1989. With different tasks, the second rotation had been drawn together from 78 different Australian and New Zealand units. For the elections, 30 soldiers, under Lieutenant Colonel Peter Boyd (Crocker’s legal officer) supplemented the 31 Australian civilian election monitors. Australia was prepared to send a third contingent, but the United Nations was eager to complete the mission as early as possible.²³



Lance Corporal James Pianta, 15th Troop, 17th Construction Squadron, a member of UNTAG, sets up a cannon shell for destruction. (Photo: Jason Keith Graham. AWM P03485.017)



Australian soldiers of the 17th Construction Squadron, members of UNTAG, along with UN workers and locals gathered around a mine protection vehicle, which had overturned after its driver, Sapper Jason McDonald, swerved to avoid hitting a local vehicle. (AWM P03485.063)

In the meantime, soldiers had been issued with anti-malarial tablets and warned about the need to take the medication regularly, to sleep under mosquito netting and to use mosquito repellent. Some problems were encountered with soldiers who failed to take their anti-malarial medication. In spite of warnings calling for strict enforcement, two soldiers were hospitalised with the disease and four others were under treatment. The threat of AIDS also led to a strict policy against 'fraternisation'. The experience reminded commanders and health professionals to be constantly vigilant. The solution involved maintaining compulsory roll-call checks to verify that the medication was taken. In addition, the force encountered discipline problems associated with excessive consumption of alcohol. Overall, though, for the Australians, Namibia provided valuable experience in the most complex peacekeeping task undertaken to that date. Notwithstanding the difficulties encountered, UNTAG represented a highly successful deployment for Australia.²⁴

UNTAG coincided with the end of the Cold War. It would prove to be the precursor of many more missions in the years that followed, commencing with Cambodia. It was also the first time in many years that Australian soldiers had been given a chance to prove themselves. One engineering officer in the contingent observed that, being conscious of the Anzac legend of which they were the custodians, the soldiers 'grew a foot taller when they deployed'.²⁵

But in Canberra the deployment was considered an aberration from the strategic guidance for the development of land forces. The Cold War was ending, but it was not yet clear how important such deployments would become. Those who participated were not encouraged to reflect on the longer-term implications and lessons because it was not mandated by strategic guidance. In the meantime, the Army's force structure was being developed with an overwhelming emphasis on the defence of Australia, leaving the Army with limited capacity or authority to prepare to send units abroad.²⁶

Lessons were indeed 'captured' – that is, recorded on files at least – but not considered with any haste or applied to refine existing practices and procedures. Peacekeeping was seen as not closely engaging Australia's national interests unless the United States was involved or the matter concerned trouble in Australia's neighbourhood. Justification for force adjustments and new equipment therefore had to be made on the basis of endorsed strategy and not on peacekeeping operations. In addition, some Vietnam veteran senior officers saw peacekeeping as useless. Yet for those without experience in Vietnam, the view of such opportunities was much

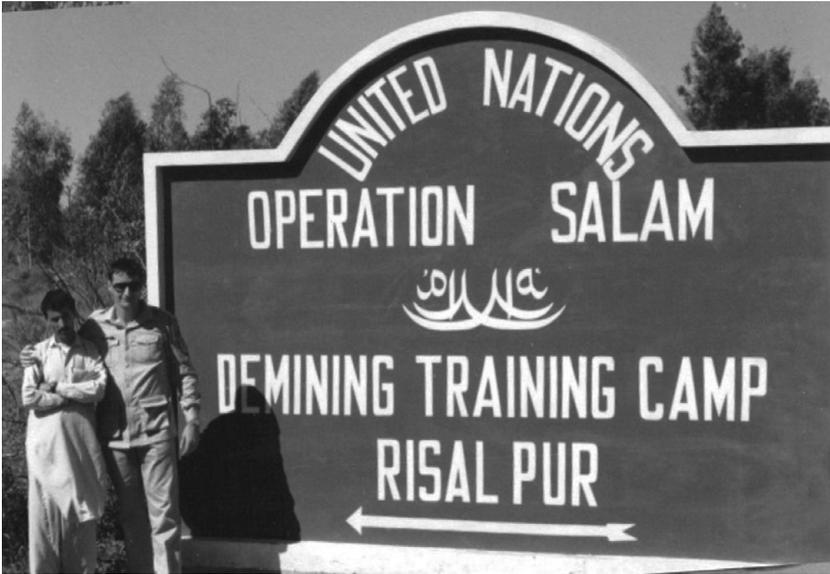
more upbeat. In fact the 1990s would see Australia increasingly drawn to make contributions to such overseas operations for which the focus on the defence of Australia did not adequately prepare them.

For the Army, the experience with UNTAG provided plenty of lessons for the engineers. As Gillespie observed, 'Namibia was the start of the re-education of our Army after Vietnam.'²⁷ The experience reinforced the need for operational preparedness as well as interoperability with coalition partners. Essentially, the operation provided a 'shot in the arm' for the engineers. The experience of having to organise, deploy and coordinate such a force was a useful experience, particularly for an army that was about to undergo a series of additional operational deployments.

OPERATION SALAAM, PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN

One such contribution was known as Operation Salaam (a salutation, sometimes spelt Salam, meaning 'peace') to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Between July 1989 and June 1993 the Australian Army deployed ten contingents of individual participants (a total of 92 Australian officers and non-commissioned officers) for, on average, periods of four to six months as part of the United Nations Mine Clearance Training Team (UNMCTT). The mine clearance component of Salaam was only one of more than a dozen humanitarian programs conducted under the operation's auspices. The mission was initiated at the invitation of Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, the UN coordinator for humanitarian and economic assistance to Afghanistan, in anticipation of the scheduled withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in December 1989 and the expected return of several million refugees to Afghanistan from neighbouring Pakistan and Iran. The program was supported by the United States, and the Americans encouraged Australian participation. In addition, this was an excellent opportunity to provide a handful of engineers with good training and experience on Soviet-bloc mines. In the end, the CGS, Lieutenant General Laurie O'Donnell, managed to confirm Australian participation despite little enthusiasm from Defence's international policy advisers, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) or their respective ministers.²⁸

Apart from the Australians, contingents deployed from Canada, France, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, Turkey, Britain and the United States. The first Australian contingent arrived in mid-July 1989 at Peshawar in Pakistan, a city surrounded by refugee camps. There they



Captain A.J. 'Boomer' Smith and driver Namdar Khan, Demining Training Camp, Risalpur, February 1990, 2 ASC Op Salaam. (Brigadier Andrew Smith)



Captain Marcus Fielding, a member of the UNMCTT – Afghanistan–Pakistan, in a Soviet T-54/55 tank captured by the Mujahideen at Gardez, Afghanistan. Vehicle parks such as these were regarded as trophies of war. (AWM P01728.001)



Members of the second Australian contingent to UNMCTT – Afghanistan–Pakistan, Pakistan, c. October 1989. Left to right: (back row) Warrant Officer 2 Graeme Toll, Staff Sergeant Ian Mahoney, Warrant Officer 2 Chris Reeves, SSGT Alan Mansell; (front row) Warrant Officer 1 Les Shelley, contingent sergeant major; Captain Bruce Murray, contingent 2nd in charge; Major Bill van Ree, commanding officer; Captain Andrew Smith, executive officer, Demining Headquarters, Peshawar, Pakistan; and Warrant Officer 1 Phil Palazzi, instructor. (AWM P0212.001)

were assisted by the New Zealand contingent, which had arrived several months earlier and which graciously provided a two-week training and orientation course for the Australians before commencing work in early August. With the onset of the Gulf War in August 1990, however, contingents from all participating nations other than Australia and New Zealand withdrew.²⁹

It was not until June 1991 that Australian UNMCTT members, commencing with Major Graeme Membrey, were authorised by the Australian Government to cross the border into Afghanistan to conduct quality-control inspections and refresher training. Once trained, Afghans also became demining instructors, progressively taking over the running of



Captain M. O'Shannessy of the UNMCTT – Afghanistan–Pakistan dressed in local clothing with members of the Mujahideen demining team, Khost, Afghanistan, 30 March 1990. (Photo: Marcus C. Fielding. AWM P01728.046)

the program organised by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid (UNOCHA) in Afghanistan.³⁰

Conscious of the need to learn from the experience, the Army published a *Training Information Bulletin* in 1992 on lessons from the deployment, which identified 36 types of mines in use in Afghanistan. Armed with this knowledge, the teams trained Afghan refugees in mine awareness and basic mine-clearing skills to enable them to return to their villages and pass on their knowledge.³¹

During a visit to the UNMCTT mission in 1992, the CGS, Lieutenant General John Coates, awarded the UNMCTT a CGS Commendation. The citation commended the team for its contribution to the training of Afghan refugees and villagers in mine awareness and clearance techniques. Contingents included such officers as Captain Harry Jarvie, who later commanded Australia's Reconstruction Task Force in Afghanistan's Oruzgan province in 2007. Jarvie was singled out for his exceptional effort. In August 1993, during a visit to a survey task in a minefield near Gardez in Afghanistan's Paktia province, Jarvie witnessed a mine explosion. He accompanied a local boy along an unsurveyed lane through a minefield to render first aid to an injured boy. Despite his best efforts the

boy died, but Jarvie's competent handling of a critical first aid situation reflected well on his character and his training.³²

By 1993 Australia was the last remaining country contributing a contingent to the UNMCTT. The Defence Minister, Robert Ray, on advice from international policy advisers, was eager for the contingent to return home and insisted on ending Australia's military contribution. Ray's insistence came despite the continuing support of the Army and the Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans, for troop contributions. In the end, Ray and his international policy advisers had their way, and the tenth and last Australian contingent returned to Australia in December 1993.³³ The experience gained in dealing with mines and improvised explosive devices during this mission proved remarkably useful when Australian soldiers returned to Afghanistan several years later, particularly in 2006 and 2007.

While the Army slowly became more of a learning organisation, there was scope to further capitalise on the UNMCTT experience. After all, mine and booby traps had long featured in insurgents' repertoires. Yet little focus was applied to this problem, with a couple of exceptions. The first exception was a major project initiated to develop a rapid route-clearance system. This project was well developed but cancelled in 2002 in favour of the acquisition of new tanks to replace the Army's ageing Leopard 1 tanks. The second exception was through the development of the Bushmaster protected mobility vehicle, which happened to be developed to counter the mine threat envisaged for 'Defence of Australia' scenarios from the 1980s.³⁴ In the meantime, the experience helped to further refine the skills of the Army's engineers.

CONSIDERING CONSTABULARY OR POLITICO-MILITARY ROLES

While the UNMCTT mission was underway, a former Defence Deputy Secretary, Alan Wrigley, was commissioned to write a report, which was published in 1990 as *The Defence Force and the Community: A Partnership in Australia's Defence*. The report recommended restricting Regular forces to a constabulary role overseas with sovereign defence of Australia being achieved by a large part-time force. The government rejected this view; having found more compelling Foreign Minister Gareth Evans's 1989 major policy statement entitled *Australia's Regional Security*, which espoused a proactive use of the armed forces for military diplomacy. In November 1989 Cabinet also had endorsed ASP90, which highlighted situations that could arise in the South Pacific and prompt an

ADF response.³⁵ Events in 1990 and 1991 would illustrate the utility of remaining flexibly disposed for contingencies that could arise with little warning.

CYCLONE OFA DISASTER RELIEF

One such contingency arose when Cyclone Ofa hit Western Samoa and Tuvalu from 1 to 4 February 1990. The cyclone struck with winds in excess of 200 kilometres per hour, leaving 25 000 people homeless and causing extensive damage to infrastructure. The government declared a state of emergency and called for international assistance. The UN Disaster Relief Organisation put out a request for assistance on 6 February, and Australia promptly responded with two relief flights. The first one included a medical doctor and \$800 000 worth of relief supplies, and the second one included an Army helicopter delivered by RAAF C-130 Hercules. The United States and New Zealand also provided support; New Zealand sent a relief flight with a hydro-graphical survey team.³⁶

FORCE STRUCTURE REVIEW AND ARMY'S ETHOS AND VALUES

A month before Wrigley was due to present his report, in May 1990, the Defence Minister, Robert Ray, commissioned a report entitled *Force Structure Review* to 'ensure that defence planning for the 1990s goes forward in a balanced way, taking proper account of strategic priorities and the likely resource environment'; in other words, to adjust the Defence Force's structure to a constrained budget. The report was completed and handed over to Ray by Secretary Tony Ayers and CDF General Peter Gratton in May 1991. The FSR proposed a 'long-term restructuring program' intended to maintain the momentum of the 1987 Defence White Paper by converting some combat capabilities – principally in the Army – to the reserves, generating 'greater efficiency in support and maintenance functions for all three Services', and by some 'adjustments to the major capital investment program'.³⁷

The reduction in the Army's strength as a result of the *Force Structure Review* adversely affected morale. Grey explained: 'The notion of "One Army" was difficult to see on the ground, except that the [Australian Regular Army] component was being reduced by 5200 positions following the Defence Force Structure Review, conducted before I became CGS.'³⁸

NON-OFFENSIVE DEFENCE

According to John Baker, the entire emphasis in that period was on destructive tension rather than cooperation, with the attitude being one of 'those bloody civilians are trying to pull us down again'. To Baker, Wrigley stood out as 'very bad' and someone who 'got everyone's back up'. Baker observed: 'There was no way the military were going to cooperate with people like Wrigley.'³⁹

Wrigley's approach sought to reduce the Australian Regular Army so that the government could not be involved in overseas expeditions. Wrigley's views were rejected, but they reflected the influence of the 'non-offensive defence' view of defence strategy. This view, championed by some academics, argued that the creation of even a defensive amphibious force could not be supported because of fears that such forces might be destabilising.⁴⁰ This view contended that, despite the utility for Australia's own immediate defence and for prospective humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations, the acquisition of equipment that could conceivably be used to threaten neighbours was escalatory and therefore dangerous.⁴¹ But Australia's lack of such capabilities had done nothing to deter the Japanese advances into the South-West Pacific area in 1942. The non-offensive approach stood to leave Australia exposed. Moreover, without purportedly offensive capabilities, the ADF could offer the government few viable policy options in a crisis. This non-offensive approach was predicated, in part at least, on threats from sources that could be rationally deterred – a contention that became increasingly questionable following the onset of the so-called war on terror.

The influence of the 'non-offensive defence' school's rationale in the 1980s and early 1990s led to less emphasis on the ability to project and sustain land forces for contingencies beyond Australia's shores.

OPERATIONS DURING THE GULF WAR, 1990-91

While the *Force Structure Review* was underway, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 presented a range of political and security challenges. With the invasion of Kuwait a unique moment occurred which marked a clear sign that the Cold War had ended. For the first time in almost half a century, the United States was free to call upon the international community with a UN sanction to rally in support of its efforts to oust an invader: this time, the Iraqis from Kuwait. Australia's

contribution to the 1990-91 war that ensued was seen by some as the moment when the Australian Labor Party shook off its anti-Vietnam War mentality and was willing to send Australian forces to war overseas again.⁴² Foreign Minister Evans observed: 'Australia had a very strong interest in demonstrating both that acts of aggression of this kind were not tolerable, and that the international community had the means and the will to respond to them.'⁴³

Prime Minister Bob Hawke was the most 'hawkish' on participation, advocating a military contribution to encourage US multilateralism. But he was eager to avoid being the single Commonwealth country to join the coalition. Canada's participation, announced on the same day as Australia's, was heartening. Yet once again, the contribution was carefully calibrated and drew primarily on naval forces, together with rapidly deployable and interoperable capabilities that could form part of the US-led coalition.⁴⁴ This was a force, the government reckoned, that would not lead to massive casualties and the prospect of further domestic disension of the kind seen during the Vietnam War. Even so, while opinion polls showed support for Australian involvement, the war still generated considerable anti-war protest activity in capital cities around the country that echoed faintly the anti-Vietnam War protests of 1970. The consternation appeared to validate the government's decision to keep Australia's contribution carefully contained.⁴⁵

Australia sent two warships and a support ship to the Middle East, the contribution being announced in early August 1990.⁴⁶ However, in light of the Navy's limited capability, the 16th Air Defence Regiment was required to provide a small air defence detachment, under Lieutenant (later Brigadier) Gavan Reynolds, for close-in protection on board the replenishment ship, HMAS *Success*. Nine Army personnel who were on exchange when their respective units deployed to the Gulf also served with UK forces during Operation Desert Storm together with a further nine with the US Army or Marine Corps. Major (later Major General) John Cantwell, serving with the UK 1st Armoured Division, was assigned as a British liaison officer working to the US 1st Infantry Division. His harrowing experience is vividly captured in his account of that action, *Exit Wounds*.⁴⁷

Australia also committed a mine clearance team, medical personnel and a specialist intelligence support team sent to work as integrated officers at US headquarters. Two such officers, Major Gary Hogan and Captain David Gillian, would later become brigadiers. Another, Captain Greg Moriarty, would go on to become Australia's ambassador to Tehran and subsequently Indonesia. But no Australian Army units would



A contingent of Army and RAAF personnel greeted on return from service in the Gulf War. Left to right: Major Gary Hogan, Flight Sergeant John Graham (RAAF), Major General Baker (Director, DIO), Senator Robert Ray (Minister for Defence), Warrant Officer 2 Gary Sheppard, Senator David MacGibbon, Sergeant Noel Beutel (RAAF), Captain Dave Gillian, Flight Lieutenant Margaret Larkin, Captain Greg Moriarty, Warrant Officer 2 Duncan Craig, Warrant Officer Mal Page, Flight Lieutenant O'Brien, General Peter Gration (Chief of Defence Force).

be deployed, in large part because Australia felt ill-prepared to contribute substantial ground forces to battle, particularly given their lack of state-of-the-art tanks and the abundance of ground force support from other nations.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the Hawke Government was impressed by the Bush Administration's efforts at multilateralism, which was marked by a patient build-up of international resolve through the United Nations and by Bush's careful construction of a 'coalition of the willing' before commencement of the offensive phase of the war.

Military historian David Horner observed: 'The Gulf crisis was the first major test of the new command arrangements', and suggested that it would 'be an ideal model for future ADF activity'.⁴⁹ To be sure, the ADF's 'joint' command and control arrangements had evolved, but there was still scope for significant improvements to streamline and increase the responsiveness of the ADF's command and control arrangements. Events in the years to follow demonstrated that mounting and conducting land-force

operations away from Australia's shores was more challenging to command and control than Australia's Gulf crisis commitment. After all, the Gulf commitment excluded any substantial land or combat-capable air force presence and centred instead primarily on contributing a small naval task group to work as part of a larger US-led naval task force.⁵⁰

OPERATION HABITAT

Australia had avoided making a ground force contribution for the liberation of Kuwait, but afterwards, a humanitarian assistance crisis among the Kurds in northern Iraq in 1991 created more than a million refugees. Australia was approached for support and felt compelled to participate. In addition, with the Army having missed out making a significant contribution in Kuwait, an argument was made that the Army should be given a role. Australia's contribution, under Operation Habitat, included 72 Army (including several SAS medics) and three RAAF medical, dental, engineering and logistic personnel, deployed to Turkey and northern Iraq between 16 May and 16 June 1991.⁵¹ This was the first deployment of an Australian Army medical unit since the Vietnam War.⁵² This time, the deployment included Captain Tam Tran, an Army doctor who had moved to Australia as a Vietnamese refugee and recalled being treated by Australian aid teams as a child during the Vietnam War. The group deployed with six tonnes of stores, intended to be sufficient for 30 days, and worked alongside British military medical staff deployed under Britain's Operation Haven. Once again, with an operation far from its immediate region, Australia was satisfied with its contribution being fostered by the forces of another country.

Military medical and disaster planning was said to revolve around a casualty estimation, both of severity and of numbers of wounded. As this information was not available, planning was based on defining the capability of the team, with flexibility being key in order to adapt as circumstances became clear. The Australian contingent was based in Giri-Pit, 30 kilometres north of Dohuk, in the vicinity of wheat fields and in the shadow of 3000-metre mountains. Operating in teams of five, with a Land Rover and a trailer full of stores, they would travel about 200 kilometres and see between sixty and a hundred patients per day. Seriously ill patients were transferred to the British hospital. In the end the team treated more than three thousand patients. More than 80 per cent were children suffering from diarrhoea, dehydration, malnutrition, scabies or skin infections. Working with the Kurds was said to be immensely rewarding. As Little and Hodge explained, 'We, in our slouch hats, were



Corporal Ross Osborne treating refugees, northern Iraq, June 1991. He was a member of Charlie Team, an Australian Army medical aid team serving in northern Iraq as part of the Australian services contingent Operation Habitat. The team had a roving commission to provide treatment to Kurdish refugees fleeing Iraqi forces in the wake of the Gulf War. (AWM P01665.011)

easily recognisable, and were greeted with kindness and generosity wherever we went. The Kurds could hardly believe that soldiers from so far away had come to assist them in their moment of need. They were extremely grateful and shared whatever they had with us.⁵³

OPERATION BLAZER

As part of the ceasefire arrangements Iraq was required to 'unconditionally accept the destruction, removal, or rendering harmless' of its weapons of mass destruction. To oversee this work the United Nations set up a Special Commission (UNSCOM) of weapons inspectors. The Australian Government saw there was benefit to be gained by making a small contribution. Five ADF personnel deployed as part of Australia's initial contribution under Operation Blazer in March 1991, tasked with overseeing the identification and destruction of the weapons. Rotations of UNSCOM inspectors continued until 1997, visiting suspected Iraqi chemical and biological weapons manufacturing and storage facilities. The teams discovered a range of sites and supervised the destruction of hundreds of tonnes of material.

Two other members of the ADF were part of the UNSCOM International Atomic Energy Agency Inspection Team. With the destruction of Iraq's biological weapons facilities in mid-1996, UNSCOM was confident that Iraq effectively had been disarmed. But with discrepancies between imported items and inventories, and Iraq's lack of cooperation, the extent of Iraq's disarmament was not evident at the time. A hundred and twenty-five Australian civilian and military personnel were involved in UNSCOM, making a substantial contribution to its performance.⁵⁴

These operations contributed to the Army's growing collective experience and further helped to refine practices and procedures. But with only a minor direct land force contribution to the war and its aftermath, the Australian Army learned most from studying what American and British counterparts learned, particularly concerning precision technology systems that made use of the global positioning system. At the time these lessons were considered revolutionary. Indeed American and British experience was instrumental in prompting significant Australian doctrinal and organisational renewal.

POST-COLD WAR REPOSITIONING

The 1991 Gulf War displayed the revolution in information technology. Spectacular demonstrations of high technology for modern warfare popularised the notion of a Revolution in Military Affairs, or RMA. The 'revolutionary' aspect was that advanced military technology appeared to portend a dramatic shift in the balance of power and favoured technologically superior forces over others. In the years that followed, land forces' digitisation and 'information warfare' featured prominently.⁵⁵ In the meantime, much of the Army's equipment technology was Vietnam War-vintage material, including its armoured vehicles, weapons and communications systems. There remained scope for considerable investment to modernise the Army.

Reflecting, in part at least, the need for reinvestment in high-technology equipment made apparent by the Gulf War, as well as the changing post-Cold War international dynamics, the Defence Minister endorsed the department's argument that there was a need for a rearticulation of the strategic guidance. The 1993 *Strategic Review* allowed for roles other than the defence of Australia to influence training and the acquisition of matériel for specific missions. This concession reflected the surge in operational commitments abroad since 1989. But the paper confirmed that they did not determine the ADF's overall force structure.⁵⁶

In the meantime, in the years immediately after the Gulf War, discussions took place within the Army concerning 'manoeuvre theory' and the place of 'protected mobility'. Manoeuvre theory concerned the notion of gaining a comparative advantage in a conflict by rendering an opponent's forces ineffective through 'dislocation': that is, being in the wrong place at the wrong time, being exhausted, or being otherwise unprepared. The debate also was about protected mobility, the use of armoured vehicles to transport troops, and whether troops should fight from within the vehicle or dismount and fight. The significance of armed reconnaissance helicopters (a capability then absent from the ADF's inventory) became pressingly apparent, particularly as during the ground phase of the Gulf War armed reconnaissance helicopters had made a significant contribution. The impressive effect of so-called joint fires (i.e. the coordinated use of firepower by air, land and maritime forces) also was seen as an area where the ADF should improve.

Another concept considered included the aggregation of intelligence surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR) elements. Effective and timely coordination and fusion of information sources acquired from ISTAR elements was seen as contributing to the success of the Gulf War. US and coalition forces that had access to ISTAR support gained an appreciation of the situation in front of them utilising satellite imagery, signals intelligence and a range of other sensors brought together and delivered to field commanders in an unprecedented manner. It would take several years for these concepts to mature, but the period of reflection that followed the Gulf War was an important part of that process.

One junior officer recalled that, after the Gulf War in 1991, there was a feeling

that our allies' doctrine and methods had left us far behind as well. The adoption of manoeuvre theory and mission command had been either driven from the bottom up (with manoeuvre theory) or at least grasped more fully there (with mission command). This pre-disposition to innovate and to challenge the bounds of guidance was to us far more important than the flash hardware that came from networked warfare and the promise of the [Restructuring the Army initiative]. Tactical prowess and searching for the boundaries of what was possible with what we had was what we sought to do, not just doing what we were told to focus on.⁵⁷

For the Australian Army, the RMA was viewed as a way to retain a competitive edge over potential rivals; while recognising that ‘the RMA does not provide a “silver bullet”’. Warfare, it was agreed, would continue to be a ‘human endeavour that remains uncertain, chaotic, dangerous, and at times bloody’.⁵⁸ This focus seemed appropriate, particularly as defence of Australia remained the priority. Army’s aspirations for much of the updated technology it required remained something for the future, particularly as the recommendations from the *Force Structure Review* began to be implemented.

EMPHASIS ON ETHOS

To counter the corrosive effects on the Army of the *Force Structure Review*, Grey decided to focus the Army on its ethos and values, which included pride in its history. *Army’s Ethos and Values* was published as a booklet. The publication began with a statement that the Army was an important element of Australian society, and was a team comprising Regular soldiers, Reserve soldiers, Defence civilians and contractors. It described the primary elements of that ethos as service – to the nation, the Army, the unit and comrades.⁵⁹ Grey recalled that the re-entombment of the Unknown Soldier at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra in 1992 was ‘enormously helpful’ in this regard, as was the national parade held on the occasion of the opening of the Vietnam Memorial on Canberra’s Anzac Parade.⁶⁰ Grey’s actions also helped rehabilitate the Army’s iconic image in Australian society in the post-Vietnam War years.

Australia’s Prime Minister, Paul Keating, saw the entombment of the Unknown Soldier in Canberra as a significant act of affirmation of an independent Australian identity. This act placed the Australian Army at the centre of that image. For the Army at least, the national Vietnam veterans’ parade also had a cathartic effect, with veterans and the Army finally being warmly received by the people whose government had sent them to fight.

GRAPPLING WITH POST-COLD WAR PRESSURES

In the meantime, having missed action in the Gulf War, the Army bore the brunt of the nation’s involvement in international security operations. For most of the 1990s, peacekeeping missions provided opportunities for operational experience and testing of capabilities abroad.

The end of the Cold War and the significant increase in the number of security operations led to an attempt by DFAT to redefine the ADF's missions in terms of 'cooperative security'. Cooperative security, it was argued, relied on the United Nations and other multilateral security institutions to obviate the need for large and expensive armed forces.⁶¹ Foreign Minister Gareth Evans took an active interest in endorsing and supporting the notion of cooperative security, writing, publishing and speaking extensively on the topic.⁶² Evans was instrumental in ensuring that this notion became influential in Australian defence and security policy formulation. Yet officials in the Department of Defence resisted abandoning traditional concepts of security and refused to concede that the diplomats were correct in their optimistic assessments of defence and security matters as being discretionary activities in the post-Cold War era.

While this interdepartmental debate continued, demands for post-Cold War 'peace' dividends were being called for from the ADF and the Army in particular. Such cutbacks reflected similar developments in Canada, Britain, the United States and elsewhere. There were significant 'efficiency reviews' and force reductions that resulted in organisational trauma for all three services. These included the *Force Structure Review*, the Commercial Support Program and the Defence Reform Program. As a consequence, by 2002, the ADF full-time strength was reduced to 50 784, down from a post-Vietnam War high of 73 185 in 1982.⁶³ In the meantime, the operational tempo continued to increase again, starting with the deployment to the Western Sahara.

OPERATIONS IN WESTERN SAHARA

Reflecting post-Cold War dynamics in the United Nations similar to those that led to the mission to Namibia in 1989, the UN-supported calls for an act of self-determination for Western Sahara had been unheeded from the 1960s until April 1991 when the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was established. With Australia courting the United Nations to gain leverage in Cambodia, a contribution of communicators was offered.⁶⁴ Royal Australian Signals Corps officer Lieutenant Colonel Ian Gordon (later Major General and Commander of UNTSO) had participated in the UN survey mission in 1990 and led the Australian contingent of 45 signallers who deployed in September of that year, after considerable delay and local obfuscation. Eventually, the Australians were stationed at ten of the UN team sites,

establishing radio nets and training military observers in radio procedures. Subsequently, however, they were centralised in the UN Liaison Office in bordering Algeria. After further delays the Australians were permitted to use their recently acquired Raven radios.

The proposed referendum was repeatedly delayed, and Gordon joked: 'If it's not on, it's not on, except when it's on later.' As Londey observed, 'His joke proved prophetic.' The referendum was repeatedly delayed, and another four rotations of signallers deployed before the Australian Government decided to withdraw its contingent.

During this operation Australian participants experienced the risks of operations first hand. Major Susan Felsche, the medical officer with the fourth contingent, was killed when the Pilatus Porter aircraft in which she was flying crashed on take-off during a routine medical support mission. Felsche was the first Australian female soldier to die on operations since the Second World War.⁶⁵

The MINURSO experience reminded the Australians of the inherent dangers faced on such nominally benign operations. The mission also gave a foretaste of the difficulties that faced operating on a UN mission with a very small Australian support base assigned. The mission did, however, provide Army communicators with an excellent opportunity to put their skills to the test and provided contingent commanders like Gordon with formative command experience.

The demonstrated ability of Australians to be flexible and proficient and to use their initiative meant that, in the following years, the United Nations would repeatedly turn to Australia for support with running complicated aspects of their operations, such as communications, engineering and medical support. Nonetheless, a 'peacetime Army' ethos remained throughout the Army, with support elements not immediately engaged operating at a more relaxed tempo. After all, only a small proportion of the Army was involved in such deployments. Therefore, although individuals gained from the experience personally and professionally, the Army as a whole appeared to have learned little from the experiences. Still, there would be numerous other opportunities to test and learn, not the least of which was in Cambodia.

OPERATIONS IN CAMBODIA

Australia's involvement in the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1991 was the most challenging peacekeeping commitment



Discussing the satellite base station, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, October 1992 (left to right): Bruce Boler, OTCI; Lieutenant General John Sanderson, Commander, UNTAC; Lieutenant Colonel Steve Ayling, Commanding Officer, Force Communications Unit; an Indian soldier. (Photo: Wayne Ryan. AWM CAMUN/92/060/10)

undertaken by Australia up to that point and represented a significant increase in the level and complexity faced. As with Namibia, a few years previously, the resolution of the conflict in Cambodia was made possible in large part by the post-Cold War thaw in international relations as well as, to a considerable extent, the dynamic drive and energy of Australian diplomacy led by Foreign Minister Gareth Evans.⁶⁶ With no small thanks to Evans' efforts, overall military command of a UN mission was entrusted to an Australian officer for the second time in the history of the United Nations, namely Lieutenant General John Sanderson.⁶⁷

UNTAC was preceded by the UN Advance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC), which began operations in Phnom Penh in November 1991. Australia provided 40 signallers, and this number increased to 65 by February 1992. The signallers were under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Russell Stuart, who was wounded in February 1992 by ground fire when flying in a helicopter over territory controlled by the Khmer Rouge near the border with Thailand.⁶⁸

The Australian contingent grew to more than six hundred personnel in a force that comprised 16 000 troops and several thousand civilian police and military observers. An even larger Australian contingent was considered by the Australian Government but ruled out due to concerns about cost and a fear that the situation could have deteriorated and demanded a larger force akin to the one committed to Vietnam three decades earlier. Such a commitment would have challenged the Army's ability to sustain the numbers without introducing conscription. This risk was seen to make the option politically untenable.

The majority of Australians were in the Force Communications Unit formed from Royal Australian Corps of Signals elements along with 40 New Zealanders. Other Australian contributions included a 30-person movement control unit, a 20-person military police team and, for seven weeks from May to July 1993, an aviation group of six Army Black Hawk helicopters with 109 personnel. With Sanderson as commander, another 40 personnel were posted to UNTAC headquarters in Phnom Penh. These troops were deployed in 55 locations across Cambodia; often in remote parts of the country under Khmer Rouge influence.⁶⁹ Reflecting on the challenges facing him, Sanderson recalled: 'The task required dealing with approximately 250 000 combatants, with over 400 000 weapons ranging from fighter aircraft to rifles and pistols, in a country, completely ravaged by war, where somewhere between 4 and 10 million mines had been laid at random, [where there was] no communications infrastructure and [where factions had] very loose control . . . over their forces.'⁷⁰ The scope of the challenge was immense and complex. One consequence of accomplishing this mission was a significant boost in self-confidence and reputation for Australian forces.

Foreign Minister Evans argued: 'Australia's ability to talk comfortably to every country involved in the Cambodian dispute owed much to the fact that we were not carrying any great or major power baggage.'⁷¹ Nonetheless, the mission faced apparently insurmountable local challenges that constrained the implementation of the UN mandate. Such constraints affected the UN's ability to act impartially, which led some to consider it an additional or 'fifth faction' in the domestic Cambodian political scene for the duration of the UN mission. These constraints exposed the limited utility of 'Chapter VI' mandates authorised under the UN Charter. The limitations and risks associated with operating under 'Chapter VI' constraints would be an enduring lesson for the Army and the wider ADF from the Cambodian experience.⁷²



Lance Corporal Paul Astbury of the Signals Platoon with the 5th/7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, UNTAC, calls in a radio check, Thbeng Mean Chey, Cambodia, 19 February 1993. (Photo: Wayne Ryan. AWM CAMUN/93/109/04)



Sign at the front entrance to the Pteah Australii, headquarters of the Force Communications Unit, UNTAC, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 31 March 1993. (Photo: Peter Aitken. AWM P01724.038)

Australia's contribution to UNTAC was a varied one. No Australians were killed during the operation, although a number were in positions of great danger, particularly those signallers tasked with working remotely in areas influenced by the Khmer Rouge.⁷³ But of greater significance for the development of the Army was the challenge of command and support for a complex, politically charged operation over a large geographic area that was essentially bereft of infrastructure. The experience reminded participants of the significance of effective robust communications and of the significance of a number of otherwise under-utilised force elements in the Army's inventory: elements that proved their worth in places lacking infrastructure or where the threat to safety and security is high. To be sure, the communicators gained excellent experience, testing and refining their procedures and honing their professional skills, but the Army as a whole learnt little from the Cambodia experience. Army aviators also benefited from practising deployment procedures and flying in unusual and challenging circumstances. Select staff and command appointments also provided relatively rare opportunities to practise, test and adjust what had been learnt.

It would take further hard lessons, however, for the Army's institutional learning ethos to gather additional momentum. This was partly because the institutional arrangements in place did not adequately capture lessons learned, then disseminate them promptly and widely to the relevant Army units and training establishments. It was also because of the mindset at the time whereby operations far from shore were aberrations that were not meant to determine or to shape the Army's force structure.

Largely as recognition for his outstanding service, Lieutenant General Sanderson was subsequently appointed Chief of Army between 1995 and 1998. Sanderson would take his experience from Cambodia with him to help reshape the Army of the mid-1990s.

With the end of the UNTAC involvement, in November 1993, Australia established a small Defence Cooperation Program in Cambodia under Operation Banner. This mission involved deploying seven demining advisers in January 1994 to work with the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC). Teams continued to deploy until Australia withdrew its contribution following the July 1997 coup in Cambodia.⁷⁴ On reflection, the operation had helped maintain a high proficiency in mine awareness among the engineers and contributed to making Cambodia safer. But its influence on the wider Army was negligible. In the meantime, the operational tempo continued to gather pace slowly, with further opportunities to learn and adapt.

OPERATIONS IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

Events in Cambodia precluded Australia from focusing on developments in Yugoslavia as Croatia and later Bosnia-Herzegovina broke away. The incentive for Australian involvement was further diminished by the domestic controversy over conflicting Serb and Croatian immigrant groups objecting to military deployments that could be seen as taking sides. In contrast, New Zealand contributed an infantry company group to Bosnia as part of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in February 1992. Australia contributed a handful of Army officers, the most prominent of whom was Colonel John Wilson, seconded from UNTSO to serve as the chief military observer until the end of 1992 alongside the Canadian force commander, Major General Lewis MacKenzie.⁷⁵

From 1994 to 2004, about 260 Australian military personnel worked in small groups in the former Yugoslavia. Most were assigned to the British sector headquarters of the NATO Implementation Force (later renamed Stabilisation Force) in Banja Luka under Operation Osier. Their role was to assist the British Army and to provide junior officers with professional development opportunities. ADF personnel also were involved with the NATO intervention force in Kosovo (KFOR) from June 1999 onwards. Those involved were usually on exchange postings to UK and US units stationed in Kosovo.⁷⁶ The last batch of one Air Force and six Army officers deployed on Operation Osier returned to Australia in February 2004. According to one report, the Australian effort had been 'well regarded by the British Army commanders who regularly commented on the high standards delivered by the officers that contributed to the mission'.⁷⁷

For Canadian, British, American and New Zealand forces, among others such as those of Malaysia, the experiences in the former Yugoslav republics proved formative. Canadians, for instance, experienced their first battle on operations since the Korean War when they were caught up in an effort to protect a Serbian community at the 'Medak Pocket', which the Croats were intent on eliminating, in September 1993. The Canadians engaged in a firefight with Croatian forces that challenged their skill and discipline as soldiers. The experience reminded Canadians that even on peacekeeping operations, forces need to be equipped and prepared for combat operations that could arise with little notice.⁷⁸

For Australia, however, the focus on Cambodia, then Somalia and other distractions closer to home, left little room for seeking to understand the intricacies of the problems in the far-away former Yugoslav



Logistic support elements where Australian soldiers were based in Bosnia in 2000. (Lieutenant Colonel Peter Bishenden)



Major Peter Bishenden being awarded his NATO medal by Canadian Major General Rick Hillier, Commander Multinational Division (South-east) in Bosnia-Herzegovina. (Lieutenant Colonel Peter Bishenden)

republics, let alone for drawing important lessons from allies' experiences for the Australian Army.⁷⁹ Still, the niche contributions made were consistent with the approach taken by Australia of deploying small, largely token, elements in support of allies, particularly when remote from

Australia and when not considered of direct concern to Australian security priorities.

CGS EXERCISES

Successive Chiefs of the General Staff and (then, when renamed) Chiefs of Army held annual 'CGS Exercises' or 'Chief of Army Exercises'. These provided the Chief with an opportunity to focus on higher-level issues of concern for debate and discussion among senior officers. In 1993, for instance, then CGS, Lieutenant General John Grey, chose the topic of peacekeeping: challenges for the future, addressing the experiences in Somalia and Cambodia. This involved a number of participants addressing implications from the operations for the future of the Army. In 1994 the topic was the force of law: international law and the land commander, reflecting on the legal challenges of peacekeeping, including administering an essentially lawless province in places like Somalia. In 1995 the topic was armies and nation-building. This reflected the Army's focus on reconsidering its internal structures and arrangements in response to strategic guidance. While the discussions in these sessions were clearly structured by the Chief's priorities, they provided an important opportunity for considered reflection on key issues facing the Army. The proceedings were subsequently published to ensure that the wider Army could benefit as well.⁸⁰

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE COMBAT FORCES

Lieutenant General Grey was concerned that, although engineers and signals people had been deployed on UN or multinational force overseas deployments, the Regular force combat units were missing out. As he put it, 'in particular the short-notice units had not been used when overseas commitments had arisen in the preceding years':

A minimal activity of an Australian infantry company protecting the airbase at Butterworth, Malaysia, provided an overseas window, but this was uneventful and boring work that provided marginal training value and no operational value.

Importantly, from a morale perspective, I was determined to seek opportunities for the 3rd Brigade units on short notice to be used and not bypassed by committing technical units only. This was unlikely to be easily achieved since the UN accepted infantry units offered by

under-developed countries because they were cheaper to pay and it helped the economies of the countries involved. However, on the ground the results showed that a number of these forces were not well trained for their role, not well disciplined, nor did their officers understand the Laws of Armed Conflict or the applicable UN mandate. I considered that Australia could contribute meaningfully and very professionally where the deployment was seen by Government to be in our national interest.⁸¹

The experience in Somalia would be seen as a significant milestone, particularly because it gained so much credibility for the Army and did so much for morale.

OPERATION SOLACE, SOMALIA

While operations were still underway in Cambodia, Australia was invited by the United States to assist in restoring some form of hope to the people of Somalia. With the end of the Cold War, Somalia had degenerated into a state of virtual anarchy, which was compounded by a serious famine. That famine and the dire circumstances faced by the people of Somalia were captured in television reports that were broadcast around the world. The experience was associated with what came to be known as the 'CNN effect'. The United States Government, feeling confident after its successes in the Persian Gulf and no longer facing the same level of existential threat from the Russians, felt prepared to lead the international community on a humanitarian assistance operation to Somalia. The Australian Government, eager to encourage the United States in its newfound internationalist and humanitarian inclinations, and conscious of the public perceptions of the extent of the humanitarian disaster unfolding in Somalia, saw the utility in becoming involved as well.⁸²

In the meantime, Grey had formed a close professional relationship with General Gordon Sullivan, the Chief of the United States Army, which proved significant as events unfolded. Sullivan visited Australia in 1992, saw the SAS Regiment and visited the 3rd Brigade and 1 RAR in Townsville. Consequently, when the United States put together a multinational force for Somalia, Grey recalled, 'It was not surprising that the US Government approached the Australian Government seeking our participation. The invitation to commit to Somalia provided the opportunity to demonstrate the Army's professionalism as part of the Multinational Force with the United States and France participating, and I advocated

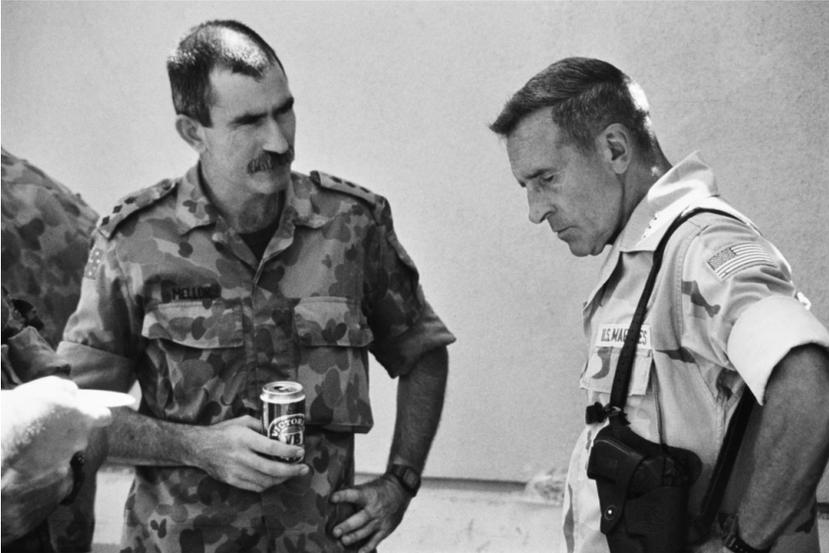


Soldiers from 1 RAR serving with the Australian contingent to UNITAF control the crowd during food distribution at the village of Sahmandeera, Somalia, 20 January 1993. (Photo: T.R. Dex. AWM MSU/93/0025/33)

strongly to the CDF that a battalion group should be committed. This was contrary to the initial request I received questioning whether engineers could be made available.⁸³

Australia had already committed 30 movement-control staff to assist with the UN Office in Somalia (UNOSOM) in 1992. But under Operation Solace, Australia contributed combat forces and supporting elements as part of the US-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF) in Somalia. The deployment occurred between January and May 1993, with lead elements of the force headquarters having arrived to prepare the way for the force in December 1992. This was the biggest combat force to leave Australia up to that time following the Vietnam War, and it tested the Army's ability to adjust from the peacetime training environment to warlike operations far from home. The 17-week contribution included an arbitrarily imposed personnel ceiling of a thousand troops, centred on a 930-strong light infantry battalion group based on the 650-strong 1 RAR commanded by Lieutenant Colonel (later General and CDF) David Hurley.

The group included a range of force elements from the 3rd Brigade, including 36 armoured personnel carriers (APCs) and 90 soldiers from B Squadron 3/4th Cavalry Regiment, a field engineer troop from 3rd



Colonel W.J.A. Mellor, Commander Australian Forces, Somalia, enjoys a beer at a barbeque with Commander UNITAF Lieutenant General R.B. Johnston, US Marine Corps. (Photo: George Gittoes. AWM P01735.007)

Combat Engineer Regiment (3 CER), a civil-military operations team from 4th Field (Artillery) Regiment, a hundred-strong Battalion Support Group from the 3rd Brigade Administrative Support Battalion (3 BASB), a communications troop, a human intelligence team and other support components as well as naval assistance (HMAS *Tobruk*), which, oddly enough, remained under command of the Maritime Commander in Sydney. The complement of HMAS *Tobruk* was not counted in the personnel ceiling of a thousand. Other than the Sea King embarked on HMAS *Tobruk*, the force deployed with no helicopters, and this limitation constrained the battalion group's freedom of action. The force also included a national command element (NCE) under Colonel Bill Mellor, who was assigned from the Brisbane-based Deployable Joint Force Headquarters (DJFHQ) to work alongside the US headquarters in Mogadishu. Mellor observed that almost all of the staff of HQ AFS (Australian Force Somalia) came from DJFHQ. 'The whole notion of having a Deployable Joint Force Headquarters was to deploy and command forces. This is what we did.'⁸⁴ As the first Australian deployment of ground combat forces since Vietnam, Somalia helped to validate and refine force structure concepts – including the requirement to maintain amphibious capabilities for the

projection of land forces. As one soldier put it, 'It was our great test, the chance to prove our worth as soldiers, to ourselves and the world.'⁸⁵

Lieutenant General Grey commented further: 'This was a pivotal point for the Army and the nation. It was the first [combat] unit deployment since Vietnam and because it was successful the media provided positive reporting. When combined with Lieutenant General John Sander-son's personal UN command in Cambodia and the well-earned reputation of our Army's signals personnel deployed in small UN ground observer parties, morale and professional confidence rose throughout the Army.'⁸⁶

The Australian force was allocated a sector around the town of Baidoa in south-central Somalia, north-west of the capital, Mogadishu. They were there to provide security for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. In effect, however, they helped to protect humanitarian relief convoys, restore security in the town, and create the conditions for societal reconstruction. As Mellor observed afterwards, 'David Hurley kept his eye on the primary mission and while there was very good work done, particularly in the restoration of security in Baidoa and the outlying areas (by Mike Kelly and his band of Military Police), it was always in support of the primary mission and was not an end unto itself.'⁸⁷

Australian soldiers in Somalia faced numerous testing challenges, and there were several incidents in which soldiers' frustrations conceivably could have resulted in fiascos. The different command approaches of company commanders, for instance, reflected these tensions.

Overall, however, the ADF, and the Army in particular, found the Somalia experience invigorating. The experience reinforced the need for well-rounded 'combined arms and services' capabilities and validated the focus, for Army at least, on individual soldier skills. Human intelligence skills also featured prominently, for the first time since Vietnam, as commanders had few alternative high-tech information sources to draw upon to gain a sufficient understanding of the complex inter-tribal dynamics. The Australian troops sought to strike a balance between societal reconstruction and a willingness to use force to establish and maintain security.⁸⁸

Notwithstanding their successes, there were also many lessons to be learned from this deployment for the Army and the wider ADF. The significance of the Somalia mission was perhaps greatest in terms of the lessons that had to be learned and relearned about how to conduct complex, land-based operations far from Australia. Historian and former Army officer Bob Breen identified that there was significant room for improvement in



Lieutenant Colonel David Hurley, Commanding Officer, 1 RAR and Commanding Officer of the 1 RAR Battalion Group, with the Australian contingent to UNITAF in Somalia. (Photo: George Gittoes. AWM P01735.358)



Corporal Kim Felmingham, Base Support Group, 1 RAR, beside an ambulance in which a patient lies on a stretcher bed, Baidoa, Somalia, 29 March 1993. (Photo: George Gittoes. AWM P01735.467)

generic and specific force preparation and deployment, as well as force command, protection and sustainment.⁸⁹

Logistic preparation for the mission to Somalia was a particular weakness – one that subsequent operations would continue to experience throughout the 1990s. Orders to replace broken and worn parts were submitted but not addressed quickly. Stock-holding policy in Australia reflected broader Defence policy: Australia was meant to have warning of significant operations and therefore did not need stocks available at short notice. But policy was butting up against the reality arising from the government's commitments. In light of such constraints, the Army's ability to adapt and learn from its logistic shortcomings would prove to be one of the most difficult and intransigent fields of adaptation. Post-operational reports would continue to flag significant logistic concerns throughout the decade and beyond. Nonetheless, as Mellor observed, logistic shortfalls were 'serious and caused a lot of angst, albeit I don't think they actually impacted seriously on the Battalion Group's ability to conduct their mission. We went close a couple of times and there were some shortfalls, but we had workarounds.'⁹⁰ Hurley agreed.⁹¹

Mellor commented further on the issues of adaptability of the force. He observed, 'The Battalion Group operated in topographic, cultural and operational environments completely different than what they had been training for . . . To find ourselves in Africa chasing bandits and protecting relief convoys and food distribution centres took quite a bit of adapting. Another really good example was the BC's [Battery Commander's] Party from the [Artillery] Field Regiment. Their role as the Civil Military team was outstanding and showed great adaptability.'⁹² Mellor's remarks demonstrate that, at least at unit level and below, the Australian Army was capable of adapting.

Contributing to the challenges faced was the issue of command and control. Beyond the tactical level there was a chain of ADF headquarters, units and organisations, including ships and aircraft that needed to be synchronised, and there was considerable room for improvement. The ADF's journey to effective joint command and control arrangements continued. The question remained whether lessons identified would be applied next time.⁹³ Mellor lent support to this, saying: 'The problems faced by [Land Headquarters] back in Australia in securing the cooperation and support of many HQ and agencies were serious. The other agencies tended to see Op Solace as an "Army gig" and not necessarily attracting the sort of priority that [Land Headquarters] sought. They caused a lot of heat

and anguish at times, but [Australian Force Somalia] still achieved the mission.⁹⁴

There were problems with a mounting headquarters as well. The force deployed with inadequate support at its home (or 'mounting') base, largely because the procedure for deploying such a force for prolonged periods offshore had not been practised for years. Much of this frustration went unnoticed by the Army's political masters because it was of marginal concern to senior Defence officials, given that offshore operations were not seen as part of the 'Defence of Australia' strategy. Frustrations also were discounted as an internal Defence matter, with insufficient domestic political implications to demand the immediate attention of the Minister for Defence, Senator Robert Ray, and the government.

When the 1 RAR Battalion Group returned to Australia in May 1993, the Australian movement-control unit remained behind, working alongside RAAF air traffic controllers. An incident that left 18 American dead, 70 wounded and three thousand Somali casualties in October 1993 (captured in the movie *Black Hawk Down*) eventually led US forces to withdraw by March 1994. The CO of the SAS Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Don Higgins, assigned Major Greg de Somer and 3 SAS Squadron to prepare a ten-man team to protect the Australian Services Contingent (ASC) of about 67 personnel. The team deployed with a range of light weapons and were assigned two UN M113 armoured personnel carriers. The team arrived in mid-April 1994 and were involved in a number of dangerous rescue missions, including retrieving the occupants of a stranded civilian Canadian helicopter – a task nominally the responsibility of other, less responsive UN security forces. A second rotation deployed on this mission as well.⁹⁵ Deployments such as this provided the special forces with invaluable opportunities to refine their skills.

REFINING COMMAND ARRANGEMENTS

In the meantime Major General Peter Arnison was appointed Land Commander from 1994 to June 1996. During that time, he established a Joint Operations Room (JOR) staffed by military officers on a continual basis at Victoria Barracks in Paddington, Sydney. Arnison saw this as essential for him to command and control effectively the deployed forces assigned – and there would be an increasing number of them over the next few years. The Army's experience on operations was driving the need to recognise the importance of working closely with Navy and Air Force counterparts.

The establishment of the JOR as part of Land Headquarters was a significant step towards the eventual establishment of a Joint Control Centre a few years later when the joint command and control machinery of the ADF reached a greater state of maturity.⁹⁶

In Canberra, the VCDF from 1992 to 1995, then CDF from 1995 to 1998, General John Baker, was laying out a plan for improved joint command and control for all of the ADF. Baker wanted to see one command centre that all three services would use, operating from the same database, the same intelligence appreciations and so on. This new command centre would now have three components, each with its own operational centre. In Baker's vision, the headquarters in Canberra would concentrate on the political and the higher-level issues of national defence strategy while another headquarters, separate from the one in Canberra, would look at the operational issues.⁹⁷ That was his concept for the new command headquarters that began to emerge in the mid-1990s. In the meantime, numerous additional operational deployments pointed to the utility of such an arrangement. One such operation was in the Sinai.

OPERATIONS IN THE SINAI

The Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) was established in 1981 in the Sinai following the signing of the 1979 peace agreement between Israel and Egypt brokered by the United States. The MFO was maintained by 11 participating nations, including Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, Fiji and France. Australia contributed a detachment of RAAF Iroquois helicopters from 1982 to 1986, and the primary site for the RAAF and their New Zealand colleagues was at El Gorah. Australia was not directly involved for a few years, but in 1993, with a renewed enthusiasm for peacekeeping and with the irrepressible Gareth Evans as Foreign Minister, the Australian Government decided to recommit to the MFO, sending a contingent of 27 Army staff officers and senior non-commissioned officers. That contribution continued beyond 2007 with Australians performing engineering, security, administrative and medical support functions. In addition, between April 1994 and April 1997 Australian Major General David Ferguson served as Force Commander, having previously been a logistics officer in Malaysia, Borneo and Vietnam. As with the contributors to UNTSO, particularly during the years of low operational tempo, personnel deployed with the MFO gained important operational experience at a time when it was a scarce commodity.⁹⁸

A further opportunity to gain experience on peace operations presented itself following the outbreak of inter-tribal violence in Rwanda.

OPERATION TAMAR, RWANDA

In April 1994 the small and obscure African country of Rwanda became famous as the majority Hutu population turned on the Tutsi populace in an act of genocide. Those Hutus who dared show empathy with the Tutsis were likewise slaughtered. Initially, the Australian Government showed little interest in contributing to a remote and non-English-speaking part of Africa. But following the failure of the initial United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), graphically portrayed on television sets around the world, an international agreement was reached to intervene.⁹⁹ On 25 July 1994 Prime Minister Bob Hawke and Defence Minister Robert Ray committed to the provision of financial aid as well as a tri-service Australian Medical Support Force (AS MSF) to Rwanda as part of UNAMIR II. This Australian effort would be known as Operation Tamar. Two consecutive contingents of 302 personnel deployed for six months each. The initial contingent, under Colonel Wayne Ramsey, set up base in Kigali, the capital, in August. The AS MSF included 293 personnel, with nine additional personnel allocated to Headquarters UNAMIR II as well as a Red Cross representative.

The force was an ad hoc arrangement that exposed some inter-service friction. The force ideally suited for the role was an army field hospital, but competing priorities in Canberra led to the force including members of the other services, thus making it a 'joint' force. Notwithstanding the contention over the initial force structure, the operation did publicly demonstrate the flexibility of the ADF to raise, deploy and sustain such an organisation over significant distances and in challenging circumstances. The force consisted of a headquarters element and three companies: a medical company, a logistic company and an infantry rifle company, which provided security for the force. Although the force deployed primarily to support the UN workforce, there was still opportunity to assist the local population, and many Rwandans are alive today because of the AS MSF.¹⁰⁰

Major Beverley Wright was second in command of the Medical Company during the first rotation. She recalled: 'We treated severe trauma from machete and gunshot wounds, mine injuries and motor vehicle accidents, as well as various infectious diseases not seen in Australia... We treated everyone, from the new born to the very aged.' Captain (later



The Australian barracks. It was the Rwandan military college and was ideal as it was only approximately 700 metres from the Kigali hospital, which was set up by the Australian mission to be the UN hospital but also treated many locals. (Photo: Anthony Stevenson)



Members of A Company, 2nd/4th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, on patrol in a village in Rwanda. (Photo: Anthony Stevenson)



Members of A Company, 2nd/4th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, also helped in the triage room at the Kigali hospital when civilians were admitted for treatment. Typical injuries included blast injuries from stepping on mines; machete wounds; and illness from disease. (Photo: Anthony Stevenson)

Brigadier) John Frewen was a staff officer at the main headquarters at Kigali. Frewen recalled it was during the initial days that they encountered 'the worst conditions and greatest challenges'. But once the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) fought back and took control of the country, they were eager to clear the displaced persons camps to prevent a resurgent Hutu militia from arising.¹⁰¹

A confluence of factors eventually led to the horror of the Kibeho massacre, in April 1995. Australian troops witnessed the slaughter of Hutu displaced persons who sheltered in the Kibeho camp. The sense of frustration was immense, being heavily outnumbered by aggressive Tutsi forces and constrained by tight UN rules of engagement, which prohibited



A typical daily scene when arriving at the camp at Kibeho. The number of orphaned children was hard to imagine. (Photo: Anthony Stevenson)

use of firearms except under direct personal threat – even when others were clearly being attacked. Gradually, the situation in Rwanda settled, and the second rotation began to wind back its operations, handing over much of the medical facilities to Rwandans who had been trained by the Australians. By the end of August 1995 members of the second Australian contingent had returned home having brought some hope to the people of Rwanda. According to Frewen, ‘We also, once again, displayed the great flexibility and professionalism of the ADF in unusual and difficult circumstances – I’m proud of that.’¹⁰²

A number of critical enablers were required to deploy and sustain the medical facility, but the medical mission was the force’s *raison d’être*. As events unfolded, much of the focus was on treating the injured and sick people of Rwanda, with the surgery being the core of the capability and the infantry deployed as the force protection element. This non-combat focus for the mission required a dexterous approach from the infantry, armour, logistics, intelligence and other support elements deployed as part of the AS MSF. Notwithstanding the medical focus of the AS MSF, the security force capability of the AS MSF proved invaluable on a number of occasions, including during the Kibeho massacre.¹⁰³

Despite the frustration of not being able to prevent the massacre, those who deployed returned to Australia with a range of important observations or ‘lessons’ on how to mount and conduct such operations better in future. The prodding to the Army system generated prompted



Kibeho massacre, April 1995. This photo was taken during the final week of the Kibeho incident. The RPA (Rwandan Patriotic Army) shifted to an alternative strategy once the international media became involved. They stopped all food entering the small church at the centre of Kibeho. These UN officials were French interpreters, and through them the Australians attempted to persuade this Rwandan woman and her children to leave the compound. After all the killing, she was terrified and refused. She also had a gunshot wound to her left side. There were mass graves and human excrement literally everywhere. (Photo: Brad Saw)

the Army to seek to regain its operational focus. For instance, although logistic shortfalls were identified and not immediately rectified, at least the logistic system began to recognise shortcomings and to strive to ensure that support from Australia was more responsive and timely. Yet for the logistic system to be optimised, refinement through further operational experiences would be required, and the years ahead would deliver them in abundance. For the entire Army, further challenges would need to be faced before many of the lessons observed in Rwanda and the preceding operations were really absorbed and addressed.

OPERATION LAGOON, BOUGAINVILLE, 1994

Closer to home, the Army faced additional opportunities. A conflict had raged in Papua New Guinea's island province of Bougainville since 1988,



Kibeho from the air, late 1995, photographed from the helicopter as it was about to land. The small church was at the middle of this shanty town of 110 000 refugees. The RPA decided to forcibly close the last Displaced Persons Camp and surrounded this shanty town with five battalions. They ruthlessly vetted the occupants and, when panic rose, so too did the killings. (Photo: Brad Saw)



Ntarama, May 1995 – the aftermath. Some of the decomposing remains of two thousand Tutsis who were hacked to death during the genocide. Many Tutsis took refuge in churches, thinking that they would be safe havens. In fact they just made the slaughter all the easier. The building behind this shot is a church; the pews were still covered with corpses, and the area could be smelled from a distance of about 500 metres. (Photo: Brad Saw)



Successful surgery, Kigali, May 1995. The mission of the Australian contingent in UNAMIR II was to operate the UN hospital. Most surgeons were reservists who deployed for a six-week rotation. Captain Brad Saw recalled: 'This Rwandan woman had stood on a landmine. She lost her right leg, had only one digit of her right hand remaining and received significant wounds to her left leg. She was also 25 weeks pregnant and lost the child. When Australians visited her a few days later, she could not thank those involved enough for saving her life. She had no self-pity, just joy and happiness.' (Photo: Brad Saw)

and in 1994 Prime Minister Julius Chan announced a ceasefire. Chan pressured Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating to deploy a force rapidly in support of his efforts to resolve the conflict. Eager to be seen to support Chan's ground-breaking initiative, Keating complied. Proximity to Australia meant that Bougainville warranted a greater level of commitment and involvement than operations further afield. For an operation so close, Australia saw itself rightfully as having a leadership role. But the ADF faced significant challenges when it sought to mount a South Pacific Peacekeeping Force (SPPKF) to Bougainville.¹⁰⁴

The ADF operation to mount the SPPKF was named Operation Lagoon. This was the first combined South Pacific region peacekeeping operation commanded by the ADF. The mission was to protect a pan-Bougainvillean peace conference between 10 and 14 October. But time was the enemy for this operation. In the absence of clear ministerial direction to proceed with preparations, ADF headquarters kept the operation secret for too long, leaving insufficient time for force elements to conduct reconnaissance, develop plans or build cohesion within the SPPKF.



Caring for orphans at Butare (south-west Rwanda near the border with the Congo), March 1995. The Australian contingent supported three orphanages. One in Kigali, the orphanage (of *Gorillas in the Mist* fame) in north-west Rwanda and the orphanage run by Care Australia and shown in this photo. Brad Saw recalled: 'This was our first visit to this orphanage and the carers (local Rwandan women) were very concerned how these orphans would react to soldiers in uniform as their last experience was with soldiers butchering their parents. We conducted maintenance tasks and sprayed for mosquitoes. This shot is taken after a soccer match with the orphans. They might look young, but they beat us hands down and everyone had a great time!' (Photo: Brad Saw)

Despite the smooth and efficient conduct of the military-controlled aspects of the operation, the mission was also given overly stringent constraints on force size by its political masters. Brigadier Peter Abigail and his commanders and staff from the 3rd Brigade faced enormous challenges. They were given just four weeks to establish a joint headquarters and stock, assemble and load an Australian logistic force. In addition, they had to administer, train and equip a combined force of 390 Fijians, Tongans and ni-Vanuatu, as well as 656 ADF and New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) personnel, then deploy them by sea and air to Bougainville.¹⁰⁵ With only six weeks warning, the force was too rushed to succeed. The force also was undermined by PNGDF troops unwilling to comply with directions that would enable the conference to proceed.¹⁰⁶

There were many frustrations, failures and achievements associated with Operation Lagoon. The Australians discovered they had much to

learn about supporting political processes as well as about concurrent planning at the various command levels and avoiding excessive 'compartmentalisation' of sensitive planning data. Compartmentalisation was meant to minimise embarrassing and politically costly leaks that could narrow the government's options. But it had negative consequences, keeping critical planning information from those who would implement ill-considered plans designed in Canberra by people who lacked intimate knowledge of what was required.¹⁰⁷

Notwithstanding concerns about compartmentalisation, some efforts at sharing information were made. Colonel David Hurley, for instance, was deployed to PNG six to seven weeks beforehand to help pull together the contribution of Pacific island nations. He reported back to the Assistant Chief of Defence Force – Operations (ACOPS), Major General Jim Connolly, on the PNG Government's perspectives.¹⁰⁸

One of the most tangible frustrations of Australia's experience in Bougainville was the unresponsiveness of the logistics system to operational needs. This was a consequence of the dismantling of the Army's base logistics capabilities and reliance instead on civil suppliers for contingencies predicated on directly defending mainland Australia rather than operating abroad. The situation was compounded by Defence policy-makers who argued that contingency plans were no justification for buying equipment. The Bougainville mission demonstrated that little had been learnt from the experience on Operation Solace in Somalia the previous year, in part because such missions still were not considered consistent with strategic guidance. Similar concerns were expressed about the intelligence community, which inadequately foretold of the need for the multinational peacekeeping force and, when it was announced, focused on briefing senior officials in Canberra, offering little direct support to those preparing to deploy from Townsville.¹⁰⁹

As Breen observed, the Bougainville operation, like Somalia the previous year, exposed 'no disastrous consequences or deficiencies in the functions of force projection because there were no military contests or embarrassing incidents to expose the problems the ADF had in despatching forces on time and in good order, and protecting, commanding and sustaining them effectively after arrival. In terms of outcomes, each operation was successful because neither competent opponents nor particularly difficult circumstances tested Australian forces. In terms of process, competent opponents could have taken advantage of force projection deficiencies and more difficult circumstances would have exposed them.'¹¹⁰

Nonetheless, the Bougainville experience, like the Somalia and Rwanda operations, helped to shake the 'cobwebs' out of the Army and the wider ADF, particularly in terms of practising command and control as well as logistics and communications support arrangements. The Army was required to look beyond itself, engage with the other armed services as well as forces from other nations, as well as representatives from other government agencies, to accomplish assigned tasks. The Bougainville operation reconfirmed the Army's tactical proficiency, but also exposed, once again, the higher-level weaknesses in synchronisation and logistic support.¹¹¹ It appears the Army still had not managed to ensure that mechanisms were in place to capture the lessons from the experience and to ensure that the lessons were learned and that force structure and procedural changes were implemented as a result. Experience on further operations would be required by the Army before the internal institutional arrangements matured to capture and disseminate lessons from recent operations effectively and quickly.

In the end, peace in Bougainville had to wait. It would be more than three years before a truce was negotiated. But the Army's experience on Operation Lagoon proved useful for what was to come when a peace agreement was eventually reached. As discussed below, a successful multinational truce monitoring group (with contributions from New Zealand, Australia, Fiji and Vanuatu) would be inserted to help restore peace in Bougainville.

OPERATION CORACLE, MOZAMBIQUE

In the meantime, the United Nations Security Council had established a mission to monitor and verify a ceasefire to end the war in Mozambique, known by its Portuguese acronym, ONUMOZ. With Australia seeking to burnish its cooperative security credentials with the United Nations, the decision was made to offer a very small contribution of two Army engineers. They were tasked to provide instructional support for the demining program associated with ONUMOZ, teaching mine awareness, detection and destruction in Maputo. Australia's two-person contribution to the mission continued with six-monthly rotations from July 1994 until 1995 when the ONUMOZ mandate expired. Thereafter the Australian contribution continued under separate auspices arranged with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) until it was withdrawn in January 2002. Admittedly only a niche contribution, the operation provided

valuable assistance to the people of Mozambique while adding to the Army engineers' depth of skills and experience.

OPERATIONS IN HAITI

Even further away than Mozambique, in the Caribbean, the United States led a UN-mandated mission in 1994, Operation Uphold Democracy, to bring an end to the regime that ousted the country's democratically elected government in 1991 and to ensure the return of President Aristide. Haiti being adequately provided for by the United States and neighbouring countries such as Canada, Australia declined to make a substantial military contribution – although 31 Australian police officers deployed. But three Australian Army personnel ended up there.¹¹²

The US 25th Infantry Division from Hawaii replaced the 10th Mountain Division in December 1994. Scattered among the force were a number of Australians on exchange postings, including the Australian Army's Captains Marcus Fielding and Paul Galea. Fielding, for instance, was assigned to the 65th Engineer Battalion, which deployed to Haiti from Hawaii and remained until March 1995 when the force handed over responsibility to a UN contingent. Fielding said the experience stood him in good stead when, a few years later, he was the brigade major for the 3rd Brigade's deployment to East Timor in September 1999.¹¹³

EXERCISE KANGAROO 95

In the meantime, the Army would continue to conduct exercises based on the concept of the continental defence of Australia. Exercise Kangaroo 95 took place from July to August 1995. The exercise covered an area of more than four million square kilometres across Australia's north and involved more than 17 000 Australians and contributing forces from the United States, Malaysia, Singapore, Papua New Guinea, Britain and Indonesia. It was considered the longest and most complex exercise undertaken by the ADF up to that stage. Still, there were criticisms, particularly concerning the plausibility of the exercise's scenarios.

Notwithstanding the scenario constraints, the Kangaroo exercise series provided important opportunities to work alongside allies and to test the viability of the strategic guidance that spoke about 'low-level conflict' and defending against small incursions of hostile forces in the north-west of Australia. The ADF was enhancing its ability to operate in remote parts of

Australia's north. Junior officers, among others, however, questioned the utility of this approach for an army seeking to maintain high professional standards. The concern was that training should be built around higher-intensity warfighting scenarios, premised on the maxim of 'train hard, fight easy'. Training with a scenario that presented an unsophisticated and poorly equipped 'enemy' left many professionally unsatisfied.¹¹⁴

STRATEGIC REVIEWS AND RESTRUCTURING

In 1996 a new Australian government was sworn in under Liberal Prime Minister John Howard. His Defence Minister, Ian McLachlan, initiated a series of reviews. These had the effect of cutting down full-time ADF personnel numbers by 4700 military personnel to just 50 000 by the year 2000, while ostensibly increasing the combat strength of the force.¹¹⁵ Assessing the strategic landscape as relatively benign, the Howard Government looked to harvest savings from the Defence portfolio and the Army was an easy target. Cutbacks purportedly aimed at improving operational capability were appealing to the government. But the increases were largely symbolic and came at the expense of the Army's base logistic system. In addition, the review identified the need to rebalance and strengthen ADF capabilities, while creating and practising joint force (i.e. tri-service, jointly commanded) operations in peacetime. Although these were shortcomings to be addressed, in essence, the key factor shaping the Army for several years had been the fiscal imperatives of the Department of Finance and the Treasury. The theme of this and earlier Australian reviews in the 1980s and 1990s had been first and foremost greater fiscal efficiency and economic rationalisation, irrespective of the corrosive effects on operational capability.¹¹⁶ This approach seemed warranted as the prevailing view of the strategic outlook was that Australia faced no real imperative to maintain a substantial and highly prepared force. There were no direct or imminent threats to Australia, and conceivable tasks were seen as manageable drawing from extant capabilities.

The year 1996 also witnessed a helicopter accident with two S-70 Black Hawks involving special forces. Some attributed the accident to aviation training deficiencies due to poor aircraft serviceability and availability, combined with an excessive 'can do' attitude despite tight budget constraints.¹¹⁷ Some also attributed at least part of the blame to the emphasis placed by reviews on efficiency at the expense of effectiveness. Others observed that over the previous 12 months the 5th Aviation

Regiment had been restricted in its operations to rebuilding the airmobile capability, culminating in a battalion lift during Exercise Swift Eagle that year at the Shoalwater Bay Training Area. Major General Mike Keating was very strict on the use of the aircraft for training purposes and banned the Black Hawks from participating in activities south of Rockhampton.¹¹⁸

OPERATION FRESIA, GUATEMALA

In the meantime, and with few other operations on the horizon, the Australian Government agreed to participate in a UN-mandated operation in Guatemala. Australia had historically shown little interest militarily in the affairs of Latin America. Australia had no significant historical ties in the region, and there were very few Spanish or Portuguese speakers in uniform. Still, Australia was called upon to contribute to a peacekeeping mission in Guatemala and decided to make a gesture of support. The mission became possible after the internal conflict there came to an end in late December 1996 when the government of Guatemala and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) signed a peace agreement. As part of the United National Verification Mission in Guatemala, Australia sent one observer from February to September 1997.¹¹⁹ But with limited Spanish-language skills and little interest back in Australia, no additional Australian military personnel were deployed on this mission.¹²⁰

RESTRUCTURING THE ARMY AND ARMY-21

Back in Australia, the '*Restructuring the Army*' (RTA) program was initiated. This was part of the government's drive for increased efficiency, but it largely reflected efforts to reconcile strategic policy with the Army's constrained force structures. It was also a result of clear government direction to get on with applying the 'Defence of Australia' strategic guidance to the Army's internal organisation. The Army-21 (A21) study, under Major General Peter Dunn, supported by the Director for Army Research and Analysis (DARA), Colonel Peter Leahy (later Chief of Army), was an in-house study 'to provide a rigorous analytical basis for defining an appropriate force structure for the Army for the future'.¹²¹ The study forced the Army to think about technology and the future. The concept of 'protect-detect-respond' was developed around which the Army would structure its forces. In addition, with the Army facing significant

budgetary pressures, the RTA program appeared to offer a way to focus attention, and thus funding, from Navy and Air Force projects that were more congruent with the rigidly interpreted air-sea gap strategy outlined in the 1987 White Paper. Not surprisingly, the force structure bill for the RTA trial was substantial, but much of the manpower bill was intended to be absorbed by Army Reserve units that would have been mobilised over the ostensible ten-year warning time.¹²² The intention was to reduce hollowness in Army units, thereby reducing the overall number of units and redistributing personnel and equipment so that remaining units could deploy more readily. The shift was to be towards flatter, 'more responsive' task forces 'capable of executing a joint strategy for the defence of Australia or for the conduct of operations offshore'.¹²³

The RTA trial was undertaken based largely on the work conducted for the Army-21 study in 1997-98 under Brigadier Jim Wallace. The trial was an outstanding example of a senior leader (Wallace) and the Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO) engendering a climate in which all, from the lowest ranks upwards, could offer suggestions, 'think beyond corps boxes' and participate in the process of thinking through tactical and operational procedures, doctrine and technology. Soldiers contributed their ideas on how to increase operational effectiveness and efficiency, given the scenario envisaged by the Army-21 construct. They came up with a range of helpful suggested changes to equipment, techniques and procedures. But there was a down side, which would see it demoralise the soldiers involved as the experiment began to lose momentum.

The big problem with the Army-21 plan was that it was based on a White Paper that was soon to be superseded. The problem was compounded by poorly calculated personnel requirements. In addition, the Army-21 study reflected similar flaws to those exposed during the short-lived Australian Pentropic experiment of the early 1960s, including difficulties with allied interoperability. Unfortunately, however, given limited scope within strategic guidance and constrained funding, the Army-21 experiment involved a significant departure from the organisational concepts that had been maintained before and such departures traumatised the Army. Army-21 was seen as an example of the Army learning the wrong lessons from previous experience applied in an artificially constrained strategic context. Conventional wisdom was such that armies were meant to be configured with generic capabilities that could be adapted and reconfigured for whatever scenario might arise. The problem that Army insiders perceived was that the Army-21 program was seen to

have 'situated the appreciation'. In other words, Army-21 was configuring the Army for a single scenario and in so doing was reducing its inherent flexibility to respond to unforeseen events. One officer involved put it this way: 'The horrors of Army-21 and RTA had shattered the Army's morale and crippled its ability to move forward. This attempt at revolutionary change was profoundly destructive.'¹²⁴

STRATEGIC REVIEW, 1997

Fortunately for the Army, another strategic review, released in 1997, reflected a more realistic assessment of prospective military missions and obviated the need to continue pursuing the single-scenario-based RTA force structure. The 1997 strategic review, entitled *Australia's Strategic Policy* (ASP97), ended the status of the defence of Australia as the primary force structure determinant for the ADF. ASP97 told planners to prepare for three broad requirements: defence of Australia, defence of regional interests, and defence of global interests. This remarkably broad statement of requirements led to a complex and growing menu of 'military strategic objectives' and 'military response options'.¹²⁵ Ironically, this proliferation of objectives and options came at a time of considerable personnel cuts, mentioned above; but at least the focus was once again on the real-world requirements to prepare forces for national, regional and international force projection.

HICKLING'S REFORMS

The Army was also fortunate to have a visionary officer, Lieutenant General Frank Hickling, as Chief of Army at this time. Brigadier (Retd) Justin Kelly observed that Hickling wanted to capitalise on the opportunity provided by the strategic review and was eager to avoid a recurrence of the convulsions associated with Army-21 and the RTA programs. Hickling coined the term 'concept-led and capability-based Army', and his tenure saw the consolidation of the Combined Arms Training and Development Centre (CATDC) at Puckapunyal in rural Victoria, which was formed under Brigadier Peter Fitzpatrick when General Sanderson was Chief of Army. The CATDC was later renamed the Land Warfare Development Centre (LWDC). Sanderson had also established the Land Warfare Studies Centre (LWSC) at Duntroon in July 1997 under Colonel David Horner, and Lieutenant Colonel Neil James and Hickling capitalised on this initiative as well.¹²⁶

Hickling's tenure also saw the establishment of a number of additional institutions to underpin Army's concept-led and capability-based development. In practice this meant that considerable effort was focused on reconceptualising the place and role of the Army. Considerable intellectual ferment took place with the newly created Directorate General of Future Land Warfare (DGFLW), the Centre for Army Lessons (CAL) and the Combat Training Centre (CTC). Hickling's view was that the Army had to be constantly adapting to emerging needs while meeting current ones. To this end, lessons from operations, exercises and experiments were intended to be fed back constantly into doctrine and force development.¹²⁷ The creation of these institutions enabled the Army to adopt an institutionalised approach to becoming a learning organisation, although it would take some time and several additional military operations for the Army fully to reap the benefits from the establishment of these institutions. During this period there was a predisposition, in certain circles, to innovate, to question and learn. The consequence of this was an environment wherein people were encouraged to question and challenge established ideas. This laid the foundation for the operational successes that followed in Bougainville, East Timor and Solomon Islands.¹²⁸

A key document to emerge from the intellectual ferment aroused under Hickling's tenure was *Land Warfare Doctrine 1: Fundamentals of Land Warfare*, written by a team from both Future Land Warfare and the Land Warfare Studies Centre and published by the CATDC in 1998. This forward-looking work was intended to provide the keystone doctrine and guide for the development of all Army doctrine.¹²⁹ *Land Warfare Doctrine 1* was recognised by leading Australian military officers, strategists and defence scholars as being a clear and comprehensive guide to the Army's thinking,¹³⁰ setting out the doctrinal and conceptual underpinnings for a new direction in land warfare as it related to Australia.¹³¹

Hickling also was instrumental in facilitating recognition in October 1998 that the Army 'would embrace a maritime *concept* of strategy' – a significant departure from the 25-year-old strategy of continental defence.¹³² Thereafter more emphasis would be given to force projection capabilities for operations beyond Australia's shores.¹³³ These reports coincidentally were released only months before the East Asian economic meltdown in 1997 and 1998 that triggered turbulence throughout the island chain to the north of Australia; turbulence that generated a demand for Army capabilities not used on operations since the Vietnam War era.

OPERATION BEL ISI, BOUGAINVILLE

Coincidentally, diplomatic steps initiated by New Zealand caught Australia off guard, having gained momentum in 1997 to settle the long-running dispute over the fate of the PNG island of Bougainville. Within a short time the Truce Monitoring Group deployed unarmed, under the command of New Zealand Army Brigadier Roger Mortlock, including 250 personnel from Fiji, Vanuatu, New Zealand and Australia. But as Breen observed, militarily, Operation Bel Isi, as the second Bougainville peacekeeping mission was named, 'got off to a shaky and rushed start in late 1997'.

Not having worked with New Zealand taking the lead planning role before, some senior ADF officers were cautious about being drawn into a New Zealand-led, unarmed peace support operation in Bougainville. Concerns revolved around New Zealand's ability to sustain a force on operations there beyond the first few weeks and months. In addition some felt that New Zealand was deliberately trying to upstage Australia, and this left a nigging concern about the New Zealanders' motives and the extent to which the Australian Army should collaborate and work in accordance with New Zealand plans. Australian diplomats, however, realised that there would be no peace process without multilateral steps and therefore it was essential to have the support of New Zealand and regional partners from the Pacific such as Fiji and Vanuatu. The diplomats urged the ADF to recognise the importance of military support in the formation of a Truce Monitoring Group (TMG). In the months leading up to Operation Bel Isi, ADF planners apparently ignored warnings of a likely peace settlement and, following New Zealand diplomatic initiatives undertaken in isolation from ADF planners, were reluctant to engage the New Zealand Defence Force in last-minute contingency planning.

Notwithstanding the apparent foot-dragging, the ADF was undertaking precautionary steps towards understanding the situation by sending an officer to investigate. Colonel Hurley was co-opted again from other employment in the lead-up to Operation Bel Isi. He was a member of the Australia-New Zealand reconnaissance team that went into Bougainville to negotiate the unarmed presence outcome with the Bougainville Revolutionary Army in late October 1997. Hurley observed that while this was happening, the party was reporting back to Canberra and Wellington to allow preparations to develop. 'So in a sense, staff at all levels had planning time. How people in both locations reacted to our reports is another issue.'¹³⁴

Despite the reconnaissance efforts, Australian military planning for the TMG as an unarmed force did not begin in earnest until mid-November, leaving little time for deliberate planning before deployment. This generated considerable friction between ADF and NZDF personnel in Bougainville during the initial weeks of the operation. There were also problems in the integration of civilian Australian Public Service peace monitors. Because the ADF had not engaged the NZDF until two weeks before deployment, civilian monitors were selected quickly, leaving little time for adequate preparation. Several government agencies also contributed Australian Public Service peace monitors to the TMG. These included DFAT, the Department of Defence, AusAID and the Australian Federal Police (AFP). They all deployed with different institutional mindsets, and their differences meant that reconciling the organisational and cultural differences and facilitating coordinated actions were hard work. There were difficulties in the integration of Fijian and ni-Vanuatu military personnel as well. Fijians came with a wealth of experience in peacekeeping in the Middle East but found the adjustment to being unarmed and working in monitoring teams, and in two cases commanding monitoring teams, a real challenge.¹³⁵

One of the most significant benefits for future operations from Operation Bel Isi was the way the mission consolidated diplomatic and military connections between Australia and New Zealand, as well as between the various Australian government departments involved.¹³⁶ This inter-departmental collaboration proved invaluable on subsequent operations. Indeed, the experience was seminal for all involved, forcing the ADF, particularly the Army, and its partner domestic and international organisations to develop a new way of conducting inter-agency operations. This stood the Army and the wider ADF in very good stead for the more complex operations they faced in the years ahead.

With NZDF resource constraints and the signing of a peace agreement, the TMG subsequently transitioned to become the ADF-led Peace Monitoring Group (PMG). In the end, the entire TMG-PMG operation was a valuable learning experience for the ADF and its partners. Fortunately, Operation Bel Isi also was good for Bougainville and the PNG Government. On reflection it was quite remarkable that a four-nation military organisation was able to provide medical care, confidence, presence and friendship to a needy part of the South-West Pacific. Operation Bel Isi demonstrated to Bougainvilleans and to the PNG Government security forces that 'the military can indeed be peacemakers and not always war makers'.¹³⁷

For the ADF, the Bougainville experience also set a remarkable precedent for unarmed military operations. The force that deployed was confident about its role, the goodwill established with the protagonists and the support provided. The combination of these factors meant that the ADF could launch and maintain such a mission, building trust and confidence among warring elements. The focus was on generating 'non-kinetic' effects; that is, effects achieved other than through the use of firepower. This was achieved through public information campaigns that demonstrated an effects-based approach to achieving the mission objective in Bougainville without having to resort to the use of lethal force. The information operations aspects applied included elements of Army's field intelligence, counter-intelligence and psychological operations capabilities. The public information strategy was closely matched by the method of personal engagement with locals to ensure that information was passed back to the force about developments in the community in order to maintain optimal force-protection postures. Major Paul Clark, the Officer Commanding 1st Intelligence Company, observed that specialist intelligence support to deployed forces was a regular feature of operations undertaken in the 1990s, but the capabilities were becoming increasingly honed, with lessons learned being passed back to the Defence Intelligence Training Centre for incorporation in subsequent training courses. The operation in Bougainville provided an opportunity for deploying a Military Information Support Team (or MIST) to facilitate the distribution of specially prepared newspapers with targeted messages in support of the Monitoring Group. As Clark observed, 'The positive public perceptions so created was the background against which all other Truce/Peace Monitoring Group operations were conducted.'¹³⁸ The experience of conducting such a public information and community engagement campaign benefited the Army in preparing for the operations that unfolded thereafter in East Timor, Solomon Islands and the Middle East.

In contrast to the successes with the MIST concept, force sustainment challenges were crippling. Breen observed that there was no coordination between the Australian and New Zealand air movements in and out of Bougainville. In addition, the Australians' logistic system was simply unable to supply spare parts to this offshore operation in a timely manner. The difficulties echoed problems experienced with Operation Lagoon in 1994 and Operation Restore Hope in Somalia in 1993. There was a lack of responsiveness and accountability of the logistic support elements, much of which had been civilianised and had a nine-to-five work mindset that was unresponsive to operational demands. These support elements also



Brigadier Roger Powell with Bougainville separatist leader Sam Kauona and PNGDF Commander Brigadier Jerry Singirok. (Major General [Retd] Roger Powell)

were not under Army's direct control and therefore relied on the goodwill of those in charge. Support for land forces on operations was heavily reliant on air and sea transport outside the control of the land force commander. Still, over time, steady improvements were made in force preparation, rotation and logistics. Command and control arrangements, for instance, were set in place to make the logistic support system more responsive.¹³⁹

Notwithstanding the limitations, the experiences monitoring peace in Bougainville were extraordinary ones. Volunteers worked unarmed on a remote and undeveloped tropical island that had only just emerged from a civil war. This was a unique way for Australia and New Zealand to project power together in the South Pacific; overturning stereotypes of neocolonialism, working alongside Bougainvilleans at their invitation and, in so doing, breaking down barriers of mistrust and misapprehension.¹⁴⁰

After the initial successes and the competing pressures of operations elsewhere, the monitoring group in Bougainville was drawn down, but maintained. The operation continued with a reduced footprint for another five and a half years. The operation was finally concluded on 30 July 2003 when HMAS *Tobruk* departed with the remaining stores from



Brigadier Roger Powell conducting handover discussions with Brigadier Bruce Osborn and Colonel Bob Breen. (Major General [Retd] Roger Powell)

Bougainville's Loloho wharf. With the departure of the Australians and New Zealanders, the long-term success or otherwise of the peace agreement would lie in the hands of the people of Bougainville and the government of Papua New Guinea, aided by a six-member United Nations Political Office in Bougainville.

OPERATIONS SIERRA AND PLES DRAI: PNG AND INDONESIAN DROUGHT RELIEF

In the meantime, as the Bougainville situation was edging towards a resolution, a drought in PNG triggered an ADF operation called Operation Sierra, launched in September 1997 in conjunction with AusAID. The operation used RAAF C-130 Hercules and CC-08 Caribou aircraft, as well as Black Hawk and Chinook helicopters from Army's 5th Aviation Regiment in Townsville and RAN landing craft. The operation cost \$30 million and provided supplies to tens of thousands of drought-affected residents.

Operation Sierra also provided the opportunity to deploy a new level of communications technology support to deployed forces. For the first time a Local Area Network was used operationally, with the planning

for the deployment of elements of the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters having begun 12 months previously when it was tested during the bilateral US–Australian Exercise Tandem Thrust. The Defence Mobile Communications Network was also deployed for the first time in an area of operations, enabling weekly video conferences via Inmarsat to the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters in Brisbane. About \$500 000 worth of equipment was deployed to PNG, including about 20 laptop computers, two servers, two laser printers and a number of bubble jet printers as well as the ‘moveable’ LAN. Major ‘Doc’ Holliday commented, saying: ‘As far as the Commander is concerned, about the only thing that changes is his location. He has the same equipment and support he has in Brisbane, except he’s in Port Moresby.’¹⁴¹

Seven months later, in April 1998, and with Operation Bel Isi in Bougainville in full swing, the ADF deployed 90 personnel on Operation Ples Draï to Irian Jaya, across the border from PNG in Indonesia’s easternmost province. There they conducted similar drought relief operations over three months, distributing supplies using RAAF aircraft and Army helicopters, assisted by engineers who cleared airstrips to facilitate distribution of supplies to remote locations by fixed-wing aircraft. The operation provided relief to approximately 90 000 people.¹⁴² Apart from providing much-needed humanitarian assistance, these operations validated the retention of the ageing but sturdy Caribou short-take-off-and-landing aircraft – the only fixed-wing aircraft capable of operating in many remote places. The drought-relief operations also helped to refine the ADF’s ability to launch and maintain challenging operations based on fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft remote from Australia with tenuous support arrangements and operating in difficult terrain. The experience helped to validate concepts and procedures for projecting and sustaining forces. In so doing the experience also helped to refine the capabilities that would be again required in the years ahead.

EVACUATION CONTINGENCIES

Shortly after the commencement of Operation Ples Draï, rioting broke out in Indonesia in May 1998 triggered by economic problems, including food shortages and mass unemployment. The Australian Government was concerned about the safety of its large expatriate community in such cities as Jakarta. Contingency plans were drawn up for permissive non-combatant evacuation operations to be conducted should the need arise. Elements of the Navy, Air Force and Army were placed on standby to assist if

required, and extensive planning took place within the Townsville-based 3rd Brigade, under the command of Brigadier (later Lieutenant General and Chief of Army) Peter Leahy and 2 RAR, under Lieutenant Colonel (also later Lieutenant General and Chief of Army) David Morrison, as well as elements of the SAS Regiment.¹⁴³ The riots eventually led to the resignation of President Suharto and order was quickly restored, obviating any need for a major evacuation operation. Still, the planning and preparation involved served as a handy precursor to challenges that lay ahead in 1999.

OPERATION SHADDOCK: TSUNAMI ASSISTANCE, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

In the meantime, shortly after deploying forces to Irian Jaya, in May 1998 the ADF responded to the tsunami disaster in Papua New Guinea. Operation Shaddock was the name given to the deployment of a major field medical unit consisting of 58 medical and other support personnel to Vanimo, on the north-western coast of Papua New Guinea. There, hundreds of victims of the tsunami disaster were treated and more than two hundred surgical procedures performed in a 10-day mission. Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier) Rod West, CO of 3rd Combat Engineer Regiment, was appointed commander of the Joint Task Force, JTF 109. Chaplain Glynn Murphy was seconded from 2 RAR as the padre for the operation, and performed a role that turned out to be invaluable on such a difficult mission, given the requirement for handling funerals, burials and bereavement on a massive scale.¹⁴⁴

In retrospect, Operation Shaddock was like a foretelling of challenges the Army, as part of the ADF team, would face on operations not far from Australia's shores. After the operation, West prepared a detailed report that identified a number of shortcomings for the ADF to address in case of further such calamities.¹⁴⁵ Fortunately, the report was well considered and prompted some important rectifications, including improving stock holdings for emergency supplies.

EXERCISES WITH THAILAND

Apart from responding to such contingencies, troops still deployed on exercises with regional partners. One popular activity was the month-long Exercise Temple Jade and Chapel Gold with the Royal Thai Army.

Exercises with Thailand also included the Dawn Panther and Night Panther exercises and Wyvern Sun between Special Operations Command and Thailand's Counter Terrorist Operations Center, accompanied by attachments from special forces units belonging to the various Thai armed services.¹⁴⁶

Superficially, the investment in the relationship with Thailand arguably could be considered of secondary importance to Australia, being more distant than higher-order commitments with Malaysia and Singapore through the FPDA. But Thailand was a key member of ASEAN and was strategically located. Furthermore, it was not accidental that Australia's investment in its relationship with Thailand resulted in Thailand being the first ASEAN country to agree to support Australia's efforts in East Timor in the dark days of early September 1999. Only after Thailand had committed forces and a deputy force commander, Major General Songkitli Jaggabatra, did other ASEAN countries agree to participate. Indeed, the Royal Thai Army infantry battalion that exercised alongside a company from 2 RAR in Thailand in July 1999, as part of Exercise Chapel Gold, was the same battalion that joined 2 RAR for the mission in East Timor a few months later. Such exercises were beneficial for honing the tactical proficiency and regional cultural awareness of the Australian Army. But they also enhanced Australia's ability to harness regional partners in support of Australian regional security and stability initiatives.

REFLECTIONS

The Army's experience from 1989 to 1999 on operations in the Middle East, Namibia, Iran, Pakistan, Western Sahara, Somalia, Cambodia, Rwanda, Mozambique, Bougainville and Irian Jaya were all essentially operations of choice – whereby the commitment of Australian forces was discretionary. But the closer to Australia the operation occurred, the greater the perceived significance to Australia's direct security interests. Not surprisingly, therefore, Australia took a lead role in operations in Irian Jaya and Bougainville. Elsewhere Australia was prepared to commit forces, but usually on strictly limited terms. The prominent role of Australia under Foreign Minister Gareth Evans goes a long way to explain the exceptional case of Cambodia, where Australia's contribution was the most significant. The deployment of an infantry battalion group to Somalia was couched in humanitarian terms and intended to bolster US internationalist inclinations, but even this was for a short period. The

decision to end the commitment was a political one with little reflection on the longer-term consequences on the ground. The mission had restored order and 'a little bit of hope', but the force was not deployed for long enough to consolidate the gains and ensure transition to viable local successors. Instead, the bandits took over when the Australians left.

Notwithstanding the varying commitments during these years, they were consistent with a long-term pattern of such deployments. As Bob Breen observed, Australian military history since 1885 testifies to the choices Australians make in response to regional and international events requiring military intervention. 'This is Australia's military strategic culture.'¹⁴⁷ The period of the 1990s remained, however, in the mould of the previous decade, whereby the government, ever conscious of the need to avoid the political difficulties that arose as a result of the Vietnam War, sought to make contributions only so far as necessary. Large-scale commitments were to be avoided if possible. This meant that niche and calibrated military contributions remained the norm throughout the decade.

Still, the commitments made on the operations covered in this chapter provided important opportunities to develop, validate and test the Army's capabilities. These experiences also prompted the acquisition of some necessary additional items, such as night-fighting equipment. In addition, these operations provided renewed exposure to critical force-enabling capabilities required to complement a standard infantry force on complex peace support operations, such as networked logistic support, civil-military affairs, psychological operations and human intelligence teams.

The increasing operational tempo helped overcome some of the institutional inertia and resistance to adaptation within the wider Army and the Defence organisation, but there was still scope for improvement. Much of what the Army was involved in continued to be discounted by policy officials as not central to Australia's defence strategy, which centred on continental defence. Not being central to that strategy therefore meant that the Army's operational experience did not appear to warrant much scrutiny and reflection. Much of this was because of funding constraints and the perception that Australia still faced a benign strategic setting that did not justify greater expenditure.

In the meantime, the practical effect of the growing number of operational commitments was that the Army and the wider ADF came to see its role in a different light. The surge in operations in Australia's region, including Fiji, Bougainville, Irian Jaya and eventually East Timor,

led towards what Breen called 'regional neighbourhood watch'.¹⁴⁸ It was only in hindsight, however, that this observation could be made convincingly. The ad hoc processes that exposed weaknesses in command and control and logistics demonstrated that Australia was still struggling for self-reliance.¹⁴⁹

Criticism was also made about the tardiness of the other services to recognise the resurgence of land-centric operations in the post-Cold War years. As Leahy observed, apart from the transport assets of the RAAF, the other services were largely unable to actually make a contribution to the operations the Army was called upon to grapple with.¹⁵⁰

By the late 1990s considerable informal conceptual development was taking place within Army circles. To most thinkers within the Army, that understanding was encapsulated in a 'manoeuvre warfare' framework – avoiding hard spots and attacking through soft spots or 'gaps', to achieve a mission – where speedy and informed decision-making was considered critical to maximise fighting power and minimise casualties. A number of US writers influenced the thinking of junior Army officers in Australia.¹⁵¹ Their thought-provoking books helped stimulate conceptual development at a formative time.¹⁵² In essence, reflection on these works helped the Australian Army to think beyond its Vietnam experience, which had influenced even those who had joined the Army after that war. This was because, with almost all instructors being Vietnam veterans, much of the training during the 1970s and 1980s was based on the Army's Vietnam experience.

Such conceptual development prompted organisational change as well, with the creation of the Land Warfare Studies Centre, the Land Warfare Development Centre and the Centre for Army Lessons being prime examples. The notion of manoeuvre in warfare is essentially an age-old concept. But in its modern manifestation it proved useful in addressing many of the challenges that were being faced.

To others, however, the outlook was less sanguine. As Major General (Retd) Jim Molan put it, 'We were in a period of strategic drift and resource cutting, and at no stage could I detect any real desire to produce a military force that was capable of real fighting. The Army was furiously trying to hold on to its combat capability but I detected no desire at the political level to really invest in the military.'¹⁵³

Notwithstanding these perceived constraints, the experience on operations during the 1990s before the operations in East Timor provided the Army with opportunities to learn, test and adjust. Nonetheless, a significant portion of these opportunities were not properly grasped. In a

downbeat summation of the span of operations conducted during this period, Breen candidly observed that for Australia:

Morris Dance was amateur hour. Namibia was an all-engineer show. The Gulf war was [primarily] a Navy show. Cambodia was a signals show. Western Sahara was a signals show. Somalia was 'Exhibit A' for change that was ignored. Rwanda was a mixed-up medical show revealing that tri-service ad hoc force elements were not cohesive. . . . Op Lagoon exposed all the same problems that were evident for Somalia. Australia's strategic and operational levels of command were not synchronising well. Operation Bel Isi showed that New Zealanders could out manoeuvre the ADF. Thankfully Bel Isi allowed the ADF to practise sustained resupply – most important when it came to East Timor in 1999. Overall, it was the march of history and events that saw the ADF gain operational experience, mostly at the tactical level. The command and control story, the intelligence story, logistics story and pre-deployment stories of training, administration and ship-loading are stories of an ADF struggling to be self-reliant.¹⁵⁴

These hard-nosed observations provide an accurate but downbeat assessment of the cumulative effects of the operations of the 1990s on the operational focus of the Australian Army and the wider ADF: a focus epitomised by the improvements in HQ ADF operational control mechanisms implemented in the early 1990s.

Each operation, when viewed in isolation, offered only fractional progress for an army with a need to learn and adapt. But cumulatively, since the operations in Namibia and the subsequent surge in tempo, with unit-sized task-force deployments to Somalia, Rwanda, Cambodia, Irian Jaya and Bougainville, the momentum was growing throughout the 1990s for considerable change. The Army was approaching the critical mass, the tipping point, beyond which organisational reform to better support operations offshore was inevitable. That tipping point would be reached following the events of 1999 in East Timor. For it was there, in East Timor, that the cumulative effects of the experiences gained on operations in the 1990s would bear real fruit for the Army and the wider ADF. Moreover, it was only after Australia had the opportunity to perform the role of lead nation in a military operation involving a multinational coalition that sufficient internal momentum was generated for the Army to strive more fully to become a learning organisation.

The five reasons for prowess are a useful point of reference to consider some of the significant developments experienced within the Army during this period. In terms of individual training, common individual officer training became firmly linked with the establishment of ADFA as its graduates worked their way towards becoming staff officers and company commanders with an unrivalled joint perspective that contributed to the effective deployment and accomplishment of the assigned missions and safe return to Australia on completion. The period also saw the creation of the tri-service Australian Command and Staff College at Weston Creek in Canberra. This college brought together the Army, Navy and Air Force staff colleges and helped spur consolidation of the joint ethos of the ADF. Events in subsequent years reinforced this trend, particularly as ADFA graduates rose in rank and as the operational tempo increased.

While collective field training exercises (the second reason for prowess) continued to emphasise 'Defence of Australia' scenarios, the real-world imperatives of preparing forces for missions not otherwise catered for drove an increase in what became 'mission rehearsal exercises' and battlefield evaluation. This emphasis slowly but steadily reinforced the emergence of adaptive operating procedures and cohesive teams with a 'joint' and inter-agency perspective, at the tactical level at least.

For composite teams tasked with deploying at short notice far from Australia's shores, the regimental or corps identity and the focus on combined-arms battle groups facilitated interaction and integration of complementary capabilities of a wide range of the Army's specialist components – its 'arms and services'. The successful deployment and safe return, for instance, of a disparate range of engineering, communications, medical and combat arms contingents to such places as Cambodia, Rwanda, Somalia and Bougainville bore testimony to this fact, notwithstanding that the composition of the contingents was predominantly of non-combat force elements.

Operations in the South Pacific reinforced the significance of ties with close allies and regional partners. For instance, working alongside New Zealand was critical to the safe execution of successive missions in Bougainville. Elsewhere, in the Sinai and Somalia, the links with the United States not only contributed to Australia's participation in the missions but also significantly influenced the shape of the Australian contribution. Ties with regional partners also proved instrumental in the success of operations in Indonesia, Cambodia and Papua New Guinea. That experience, in turn, helped to ensure that contingents that deployed further afield did so with recognition of the significance of being attuned

to local cultural sensitivities – all of which was key to Australia's understated but remarkably successful approach to a broad range of military operations.

In terms of the Army's links with society (the fifth reason for prowess) the missions launched under United Nations mandates reflected the government's sense of international civic duty – albeit constrained by its preference for calibrated force contributions. This reflected Australian society's desire to render meaningful assistance to those in need remote from Australia's shores; something described at the time as the 'CNN effect'. Following the deployment to Somalia in 1993, a popular Army recruiting theme involved the link between soldiers' roles as peacekeepers and ambassadors for Australia. This helped spur the recruitment of the next generation of soldiers, many of whom were inspired, in part at least, by the notion of joining the Army to make a contribution to society and the world. The contribution to these missions, such as the UN missions to Cambodia, also had a generally positive effect on Australia's foreign standing. They contributed to an increased acceptance within South-East Asia of Australia as a responsible and generous regional partner that recognised its role and responsibilities. That sense of regional engagement and acceptance of responsibilities increased further following the onset of the crisis in East Timor in 1999: the subject of the following chapters.

PART | 2

LAND FORCE
OPERATIONS IN
EAST TIMOR AND
SOLOMON
ISLANDS

The year 1999 marked a turning point for the Australian Army and the ADF. For the first time since the Vietnam War Australia deployed a brigade-sized force of more than five thousand troops. But Australia's contribution in Vietnam had been in support of the United States' efforts there. Australia deployed larger forces at the height of the two world wars, but it did not lead a multinational intervention force with contingents from 22 countries. The experience challenged the Army from the lowliest private soldier tasked with avoiding unduly escalating tensions on the streets of Dili; to those at the highest level, managing the competing

priorities and expectations of international contingents; and ensuring that the force was sustained in a place bereft of infrastructure.

Australia remained engaged to varying degrees in East Timor to a level unmatched elsewhere for more than a decade. For this reason, and to best encapsulate the significance of and the lessons drawn from these operations, the Australian Army's experience in East Timor and Solomon Islands is given its own part in this book.

In the eight years from 1999 to 2007 the Army experienced a period of operational activity unmatched since the Second World War. Units and subunits deployed, often with little notice, to places around the globe, including East Timor, Solomon Islands, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon. Chapters 3 to 6 attest that the Army's ethos underwent significant change as the critical mass of operational experience passed the tipping point beyond which resistance to adaptation and institutional inertia was outweighed by the imperative for change. All Army members now expected to be deployed on operations at some stage in their service. The adversary usually was a 'low-tech' one, with no air support and no coordination of indirect fire (artillery, rockets and mortars) directed at Australian forces. So the experience was not necessarily reflective of a fight against an advanced nation state. But more operations led to a greater operational focus. In turn, that focus generated a heightened awareness of the need to learn and adapt to challenges. Key to successful adaptation was the five reasons for prowess, which enabled the Army to turn operational crises into opportunities for improvement.

The period from 1999 to 2007 also witnessed considerable organisational change within the Army, particularly with the creation of a predominantly full-time commando unit, a surveillance and target acquisition regiment, an intelligence battalion, an incident response regiment (IRR) and the Special Operations Command. These changes were largely a consequence of the increased tempo and the advent of the 'war on terror' (although the IRR was based largely on components of the Joint Incident Response Unit raised initially for the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games).

Organisational change was also spurred by the introduction into service of additional high-tech equipment, which enabled the Army to deploy with enhanced capabilities. Although events after the onset of the 'war on terror' had a significant influence, the most significant event to shape the Army in this regard was the commitment of a brigade-sized force to East Timor, commencing in September 1999.

EAST TIMOR, 1999–2000

In 1999 the Indonesian Government under President B.J. Habibie agreed to let the United Nations supervise a ballot on the future of East Timor: an Indonesian-controlled territory annexed following the cessation of Portuguese control and the declaration of independence by the East Timorese in 1974. The decision was prompted by the Australian Prime Minister John Howard, who wrote to Habibie inviting a reconsideration of Indonesia's approach to managing East Timor. The letter was not intended to mark a significant departure from previous policy towards Indonesia. Howard was eager for Indonesia to continue to govern East Timor but to do so free of the acrimony that had marred the previous quarter-century of Indonesian rule. Habibie took the letter as a call for a drastic re-evaluation of Indonesia's position and in response proposed a referendum on self-determination in September 1999. That story has largely been told elsewhere.¹ As events unravelled, Howard's actions led to a significant departure from the post-Vietnam War approach of providing niche and calibrated military contributions for operations offshore.

OPERATION FABER

The United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) was sent unarmed to East Timor in June 1999, tasked to organise, conduct and supervise a referendum to allow the people to choose between autonomy within Indonesia or independence. As part of Operation Faber, Australia sent six military liaison officers and several unarmed police,

most of whom had previous experience on peacekeeping operations and some with Indonesian-language skills.² Most of them had a gruelling experience, with the UNAMET mandate butting up against the aspirations of the aggressive, government-supported militias.

Following the overwhelming vote for independence, on 30 August 1999, the militias raised to ensure a favourable outcome for Indonesia began attempting to disrupt the election result. Eventually Australia's contingent either left the country or sought refuge in the Australian diplomatic compound in Dili. This situation triggered an Australian-led evacuation operation, known as Operation Spitfire, from 6 to 14 September using mostly RAAF C-130 Hercules aircraft to evacuate hundreds fleeing militia terror. But a far larger operation was about to present itself to the international community, particularly Australia. By 12 September, under intense international pressure, Indonesia agreed to accept a UN-mandated international force to restore order in the territory.

Facing domestic outrage over events in East Timor, the Australian Government agreed to lead the multinational force. This was a drastic departure from the more constrained approach to expeditionary commitments that Australian governments had followed since the end of Australia's military commitment to the Vietnam War. Australia's experience in Bougainville had helped to prime the ADF for this event, but that was on a far smaller scale, with only a handful of countries participating and involving only unarmed monitors.

Unlike other more remote deployments, the East Timor crisis was on Australia's doorstep and involved challenging issues concerning its biggest and most important neighbour, Indonesia. There was strong popular support for an active military role for Australia. So the niche and calibrated approach applied to more remote contingencies could not work this time. Consequently, for Australia, East Timor involved the deployment of a brigade-sized force with a considerable special forces element – a force larger than was committed in Vietnam at the peak of Australia's commitment in 1967.

OPERATIONS WITH INTERFET

The Australian command element that deployed was based around the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters (also retaining its title for its dual role as Headquarters 1st Division) commanded by Major General Peter Cosgrove. At its peak, the East Timor mission involved more than 7500

ADF personnel (5300 Army personnel) in East Timor or providing support from the Australian base.³

This was out of an international force of 11 500 personnel. As Operation Warden, the International Force in East Timor (INTERFET) commenced deploying on 20 September, with contingents from 22 nations including Australia, Thailand, New Zealand, the Philippines, Britain, the United States, Canada, France, Italy and Brazil. Other followed afterwards.

One of the key reasons for needing to muster such a large number of countries in support was the limitations of the Australian Army. As the senior Defence official Hugh White observed shortly afterwards, ‘The biggest lesson I learned from East Timor was that we quickly ran out of infantry.’⁴ Still, Australia led, provided the advance guard, and took most of the risks of escalation of conflict had the situation deteriorated further. Indeed, most other contingents came later and when many of the risks were already minimised.⁵

Key to the success in East Timor was a unified and robust command structure and the deployment of balanced forces from all three armed services alongside coalition forces. Brigade-level collective training and the high level of individual soldier skills were important factors. Just a few months before the operation, a command-post exercise was conducted based around the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters using a scenario not unlike East Timor. That exercise involved members of the armies of the ABCA countries: America, Britain, Canada and Australia. The exercise helped to ensure that techniques and procedures were well understood and practised in advance.⁶

In an operational environment short of war, like in East Timor in 1999, Cosgrove operated with what could be described as a manoeuvrist mindset attuned to the information era: he made best use of the gathered international media to shape and influence views of all the significant players in the unfolding drama.⁷ The media featured prominently and, being favourably disposed, effectively value-added to the traditional combat power of the military forces deployed. Cosgrove communicated with the media and, in so doing, helped to shape and influence events in a non-kinetic way to contain collateral damage – both physical and political in nature. Cosgrove masterfully employed his forces with restraint and resolve, and ensured that the messages passed through the media reinforced his objectives.

But given the challenges, reviews and cutbacks experienced in the years preceding the operation, Cosgrove justifiably observed that the mission

proceeded smoothly despite the ADF's shortcomings, saying, 'We were lucky and we were good.'⁸

What follows is an outline of how that operation was conducted at the tactical and operational level, illustrating how the elements of the Army and ADF team, when combined under good leadership, proved so effective.

PREPARATIONS

As the situation in East Timor became increasingly ominous, a few days before the commencement of evacuation operations the 'on-line' (i.e. ready to deploy) parachute company, Sydney-based B Company 3 RAR, under Major Stephen Grace, was ordered to prepare to deploy to an unannounced destination. Pre-positioned at RAAF Base Tindal, south of Darwin, and away from the media spotlight, the company joined 3 Squadron SAS from Perth under Major James (Jim) McMahon to form Joint Task Force 504, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Tim McOwan, CO of the SAS Regiment. Also in Tindal was McOwan's Special Operations Command and Control Element (SOCCE) as well as his logistics support element, including the unit medical officer, Major Carol Vaughan-Evans.⁹ There they prepared for a potential services protected, or assisted, evacuation.

Preparation included squadron-level exercises, using C-130 Hercules aircraft and Black Hawk helicopters, and drawing together 3 Squadron's three troops (water operations, free fall, and mobility) each consisting of four 5-man patrols as well as elements of the SAS Regiment's integral communications element, 152 Signal Squadron.¹⁰ The evacuation plan, named Operation Spitfire, was not well known to the public at the time as the media remained focused on developments at Robertson Barracks on the outskirts of Darwin where earlier announcements had been made to reduce the 1st Brigade's notice-to-move in anticipation of having to assist in East Timor.¹¹

EVACUATION

The ballot results were announced on 4 September, with 78.5 per cent of those who voted refusing Indonesia's offer of special autonomy. The outcome seemed to lay the path to East Timorese independence but, within hours, militia gangs started a rampage, killing hundreds in the process. Within the next few days the overwhelming majority of international observers, journalists and civilian personnel of UNAMET fled from the

territory. On 6 September the RAAF C-130s began their flights with SAS parties on board tasked to provide security for the aircraft on the ground, marshalling the UN staff and refugees at the airport, checking they were unarmed and escorting them onto the aircraft. McOwan had 46 SAS soldiers working with him, and he was on the first of five C-130 flights into Dili. Over the next seven days the flights evacuated 2700 personnel. As Horner observed, 'The SAS brought particular skills to this task including weapons discipline, training as medics, an ability to speak Bahasa and Tetum, excellent radio and satellite communications, and experience in operating in small groups.' These qualities led to them being described as the 'force of choice'.¹²

By 7 September a seaborne evacuation option was also being considered, and half of B Company 3 RAR, accompanied by a Special Forces Liaison Team and an intelligence detachment, moved to Darwin to board the high-speed catamaran HMAS *Jervis Bay*, which had been commissioned a few months before the plebiscite in June 1999. The half-company group sailed in *Jervis Bay* three times, each time approaching the territorial waters of East Timor before being ordered back to Darwin.¹³ Their movements reflected the stop-start and complicated, strategic-level debate over what to do, how to do it and when.

In the meantime, further stop-start disruptions occurred elsewhere. The 3rd Brigade's Ready Battalion Group, for instance, with 1 RAR as its nucleus (under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Mark Bornholt), had been conducting extensive force preparation in case of a short-notice requirement to deploy to East Timor. Its Ready Company Group, B Company (under Major Jim Ryan), was one of the first elements called for under Operation Spitfire, and it prepared to deploy to Dili on 7 September to provide security to the Australian Consulate, only to be held at Tindal, like B Company 3 RAR, awaiting further clearances that were dependent on the outcome of the higher-level political machinations in Canberra, Jakarta, New York and elsewhere. The wait at Tindal turned from days into weeks as the company was allocated different missions that never eventuated.¹⁴

While they waited, Australia's Defence attaché to Indonesia, Brigadier Jim Molan, evacuated East Timor's Bishop Belo from Baucau after a tense stand-off with 30 militiamen and 40 Indonesian soldiers at the airfield.¹⁵ McMahan recalled that the specific small task force he was responsible for in those early days was another fine example of jointery at work. The team he was running around with had a multitude of assets all responding to his direction until they 'cut over' (i.e. reverted to being commanded and controlled by higher headquarters) when the rest of the

force arrived. Reflecting on the significance of this example of jointery, McMahon observed: 'We shouldn't shy away from giving the commander on the ground all the assets he needs to get the job done, with assets above water, under water for periods of time also attached. We didn't just turn up on the day – there was interplay with a range of components.'¹⁶

On 8 September Indonesia placed East Timor under martial law and the United Nations announced a total withdrawal from the territory. Under intense international pressure, the Indonesian Government announced on 12 September that Indonesia would accept an international peacekeeping force. Then, on 15 September, the UN Security Council authorised the deployment of a peace enforcement mission under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. INTERFET was authorised to deploy with the intention of being replaced as soon as practicable by a United Nations peacekeeping mission.

Meanwhile, in Townsville a dejected 1 RAR transferred responsibilities for being the Ready Deployment Force's ready battalion to 2 RAR on 13 September as per the brigade commander's pre-determined hand-over date for ready-battalion responsibilities.¹⁷

INTERFET'S DEPLOYMENT

2 RAR under the command of Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Mick Slater and the remainder of 3 RAR, as well as their combat support and service support elements from the brigade, were soon warned for deployment to East Timor. On 20 September the special forces Response Force, based around McMahon's SAS Squadron, deployed to secure Dili's Comoro airfield. They were followed by A Company 2 RAR (under the command of Major Dick Parker), the battalion tactical headquarters, and two APCs from B Squadron 3/4 Cavalry Regiment, flying direct from Townsville. The remainder of the battalion followed in additional flights of C-130 Hercules aircraft, as did 3rd Brigade Headquarters. This was the first time an Australian brigade headquarters had deployed on operations since the Vietnam War.

Shortly afterwards, C Company 2 RAR (under the command of Major Jim Bryant), deployed from the airport, under Indonesian military (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia* – TNI) escort, to the landing point for 3 RAR, the port facilities in central Dili. 3 RAR (under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Nick Welch) arrived in HMAS *Jervis Bay* on 21 September having been pre-positioned in Darwin as a battalion by 17 September, partly

in case their parachute capability was required. 3 RAR relieved 2 RAR of the task at Dili Harbour pier, INTERFET's sea entry point, before expanding into the town to occupy its Area of Operations (AO). The AO was named 'Faithful' – in recognition of 3 RAR's nickname, 'Old Faithful', earned for having been deployed on operations for the duration of the Korean War, from 1950 to 1953. In the meantime, elements of 5th Aviation Regiment, with extended-range fuel tanks, flew across from Darwin to Dili.

The deployment of the two battalions (with a field artillery battery operating as an infantry company as part of 3 RAR), supplemented by a reinforced British Gurkha company group from Brunei, and RAAF airfield defence guards, enabled INTERFET to begin the process of restoring law and order. This involved conducting patrolling, establishing vehicle checkpoints, apprehending members of the militia and disarming them. Sporadic gunfire continued and smoke still billowed from gutted buildings as patrols uncovered bodies, some of them mutilated, around the Dili area. With news of violence continuing in the eastern end of East Timor on 22 September, A Company 2 RAR conducted an airmobile operation to secure Baucau airfield, deploying on 5th Aviation Regiment Black Hawk helicopters and demonstrating INTERFET's ability to move swiftly and decisively. Three days later the company handed over the airfield to a Filipino infantry company and returned to Dili.

SPECIAL FORCES ACTIONS

McOwan, commanding officer of the SAS Regiment, had been appointed commander of the INTERFET Response Force, the same force that had assisted with the evacuation operations that preceded the deployment of INTERFET on 20 September as part of Operation Spitfire. Once INTERFET was launched, Response Force played an important role liaising with elements of the National Armed Forces for the Liberation of East Timor (known by their Portuguese acronym, FALINTIL) and conducting reconnaissance missions. These missions provided crucial information for the planning and launching of operations beyond Dili, initially to the east, to Com and Baucau, and subsequently to the border with West Timor.¹⁸

In one instance, McMahan was tasked to deploy troops to the eastern port of Com, where there had been reports of militia fighting. McMahan's force was supported by Black Hawk helicopters and HMAS *Adelaide* as well as a company of infantry on short notice to move in case there was a need for additional troops. Moving on foot at last light, McMahan's force

identified about 2500 East Timorese interspersed with militia guards. McMahan gave the militia an ultimatum to surrender or face arrest. Later that night a group of 24 armed men sought to leave the compound on a truck, but McMahan quickly deployed his forces to surround the truck and, on order, had his troops shine torches on the armed group and called for them to drop their weapons. The shock of surprise led to their quick surrender. The raid to Com was an exceptional performance by McMahan and members of his force.¹⁹

The raid also demonstrated the utility of specially trained soldiers being able to deploy over considerable distances to achieve a task against an armed adversary without having to resort to lethal force. Instances such as this and subsequent contacts that occurred during the first half of October demonstrated how effective the Australian forces were. Such instances also confirmed the convenience of using small but highly trained special forces teams for high-risk ventures. Others, however, noted that such tasks closely paralleled the kinds that standard light infantry patrols were expected to undertake during Confrontation in Borneo as part of Operation Claret in 1964. According to this view, the focus on and growth of the special forces' capabilities had been at the expense of the conventional forces. The debate within the Army over this division of responsibilities would continue over successive operations.

NAVAL AND AIR COMPONENTS

While events on land were unfolding, the naval and air components played key supporting roles, demonstrating the multiplying effect of interservice teamwork and the benefits of training and operating together beforehand. The maritime forces deployed with INTERFET were assigned the 'mission to act as an air-defence screen and to provide backup if the lodgement did not go according to plan or was opposed'.²⁰ Naval elements also helped to sustain the troops ashore, providing the confidence required to enable merchant shipping to dock and deliver 90 per cent of all the cargo landed in the early days of the operation. Naval communication support and helicopters also were very useful in the early days. The presence and contribution of the RAN helped to shape the operational climate, bolster INTERFET's confidence and influence outcomes positively, especially in the first critical days of the operation.

Also crucial for the lodgement and sustainment of the force was air support, particularly with regard to surveillance, including early reconnaissance missions flown with RAAF F111 aircraft until the Army

Aviation Corps' King Air aircraft could take over. The RAAF also was instrumental in the provision of airfield services in Dili and at East Timor's second airport, Baucau. Fortunately, in the end, the land forces did not have to call on air or naval gunfire support.²¹

UNITED STATES SUPPORT

In addition, the United States played a significant but low-profile role in the developing events. The United States applied critical moral, political and financial pressure at the APEC Forum in New Zealand in early September that helped to persuade Indonesia to accede to the international intervention.²² The United States went on to provide civil affairs, intelligence and communications support to INTERFET, as well as unique heavy-lift and combat-support capabilities, which were in short supply in the ADF. The offshore presence of major components from a US Navy-Marine Amphibious Ready Group, with about 2500 Marines embarked, in addition to the presence of the US Navy's Aegis cruiser *USS Mobile Bay*, were an additional important demonstration of US interest and resolve as well as of alliance solidarity. Their pressure also shaped perceptions and helped to influence the opinions of key stakeholders, persuading wavering minds in the militia and among Indonesian local commanders not to confront INTERFET directly, particularly in the vulnerable first few days of the deployment.

OTHER COALITION SUPPORT

Ground-force capabilities also were significantly enhanced by contributions from Canada, Italy, Ireland, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Thailand and the United Kingdom. Troops from coalition countries came with their own professional skills and heritage, complementing the force with their unique strengths that contributed to the successful outcome of the mission. Thai troops, for instance, were familiar with techniques for winning hearts and minds from their long and successful fight against communists in the remote parts of their country. They operated in the more benign eastern sectors of East Timor, away from the border with Indonesian West Timor – where militia elements had regrouped. Many countries provided military lift assets, which were critical for the lodgement phase of the operation.

It was no mean feat to enlist and then maintain the support from so many diverse countries with different cultures, languages and religions.

Meeting the demands that arose challenged the ADF's ability to supply interpreters and liaison officers for the various contingents. But the fact that the Army had held exercises with many of them in the past helped considerably in facilitating their integration into the coalition.

LOGISTIC SHORTFALLS

The requirement for support from the United States reflected considerable challenges experienced within the ADF's logistic support elements. The deployment to East Timor stretched the ADF's ability to project and sustain more than five thousand Australian troops and to support the thousands of coalition forces as well. This reflected significant cutbacks made progressively after the end of the Vietnam War. The *Defence Efficiency Review* was seen as one of the most significant examples of the kinds of cutbacks that emasculated the ADF's logistic support facilities. In essence, because the mission was so successful in the end, the force deployment belied the difficulties experienced with the resupply system. But supplies ordered by deployed elements took much longer to deliver than the regulations stipulated and often did not reach intended recipients. Troops in the infantry battalions, for instance, had cause to grumble that their maintenance and resupply requests went apparently unanswered. There was clear scope for improved automation and accountability to ensure that support was provided where it was most needed.²³

COMPLEXITY

The fact that the allied components as well as the Australian air and maritime components were able to operate so closely and effectively with their land-based partners and that the land components could adjust to new tasking at short notice could be dismissed as a reflection of the relatively benign threat environment. After all, no conventional military force opposed the deployment and subsequent actions of INTERFET. But as the events described below further illustrate, there was a remarkable degree of complexity involved in deploying the force rapidly, safely and effectively while drawing together and coordinating the deployment of coalition partners as well. The complex situation was handled well in large part because of the effective training undertaken before the operation. The training included a number of exercises that drew on the lessons from previous operational commitments undertaken in the decade before INTERFET. Experience of being told to 'hurry up and wait' would prove



Brigadier Mark Evans, Commander 3rd Brigade, with unit commanders at a border coordination meeting with local Indonesian senior officers. Photo includes INTERFET members (left to right): Major Marcus Fielding, S3 (BM) 3rd Brigade; Lieutenant Colonel Kevin Burnett, CO 1 RNZIR; Lieutenant Colonel Peter Sing, CO 3 RAR; Lieutenant Simon Moore-Wilton; Brigadier Evans; Major Dan Weadon S2 (intelligence officer who replaced the author). (Lieutenant General [Retd] Mark Evans)

to be an important primer for some, such as the members of B Company 1 RAR.

On 23 September, B Company 1 RAR returned disappointed to Townsville having spent 'almost four fruitless weeks' in Tindal on standby for three different operations, including two weeks as the INTERFET reserve.²⁴

FORMATION-LEVEL MANOEUVRE

In the meantime in Dili, on 24 September, Commander 3rd Brigade, Brigadier Mark Evans, became concerned that his forces did not have the initiative and organised a brigade-level sweep of Dili involving 2 RAR, 3 RAR and the Gurkhas, in conjunction with tracked armoured personnel carriers and wheeled Australian light armoured vehicles (ASLAVs)

and available helicopters. The sweep, conducted despite the continued TNI presence inside the cordoned area, imprinted INTERFET's authority across Dili without a shot being fired in anger. As a result TNI road-blocks were removed and considerable numbers of militia weapons were recovered. As Evans' brigade major, Marcus Fielding, observed, 'The previous night there were trucks, rifle fire and arson. 24 hrs later, nothing – beautiful! It was a real watershed.'²⁵

REDEPLOYMENT TO THE BORDER

Following the success of the sweep, and the steady inflow of coalition troops from Thailand, the Philippines and elsewhere, Cosgrove felt confident to commence planning to redeploy elements from Dili: both to the east, where Thai and Philippine troops deployed, and to the western border region of East Timor adjoining the Indonesian province. For Brigadier Evans the concept of operations on the border was to cascade battalions from north to south.²⁶ West Timor was where the militia were known to have fled, along with tens of thousands of East Timorese who were forcibly removed between the time of the ballot and the arrival of INTERFET. On 27 September, D Company 2 RAR (under the command of Major Terry Dewhurst) deployed by air to the border region, supported by a road move through the coastal village of Liquiçá.

On 30 September, 2 RAR handed over their remaining responsibilities in Dili to 3 RAR and prepared to relocate to the border area. In the meantime, brigade and force-level logistic elements were being established in the Dili area. For the move to the border, 2 RAR was supported by Black Hawk helicopters from 5th Aviation Regiment. Operation Lavarack took place on 1 October with the insertion of 2 RAR battalion headquarters and the remaining three rifle companies into the largely deserted Balibo region. The headquarters was established in the 400-year-old Portuguese fort at Balibo overlooking the coastal border strip between East and West Timor, and adjacent to the site where five Australian journalists had been killed in 1975.

BORDER INCIDENTS

On 6 October the first incident occurred at Suai, in the south-west corner of East Timor, near the border with West Timor. The Response Force group under McMahan was dispatched by road with ASLAVs and supporting helicopters to clear routes and report on militia activity.

McMahon's group was tipped off by locals and conducted a rapid sweep that caught the militia by surprise and enabled him to apprehend a hundred militia members. In the process of being back-loaded for questioning in Dili, the group was fired upon by another group of militia, hitting two Australians, one in the neck and one in the leg. The aggressive response by the Response Force group resulted in the militia being routed with two killed and a further two who escaped but died of wounds. The wounded soldiers and detainees were evacuated, but elements of McMahon's group remained in the Suai area to deter militia groups from returning.²⁷

In the meantime, as part of the 3rd Brigade's deployment to the border areas, B Company 2 RAR (under the command of Major Bob Hamilton) moved by road from Dili to Batugade, a town that had suffered much devastation during the post-ballot period. The next objective, under Operation Chermside, was the deployment of A Company 2 RAR to the deserted town of Maliana. Shortly afterwards, on 15 October, 3 RAR conducted an airmobile insertion to relieve A Company 2 RAR in Maliana with the rifle companies of 3 RAR deploying into dispersed areas of responsibility.

Before the relief in place by 3 RAR, however, elements of 2 RAR became involved in a border incident. On 10 October, C Company (under the command of Major Jim Bryant) conducted a patrol, following reports of Indonesian military and militia activity in the village of Mota'ain, adjacent to the border with West Timor. Lieutenant Peter Halleday's 8 Platoon was tasked to patrol along the main road, with linguists in support, and secure the entrance to the village. The linguists were then to ascertain whether reports of ill treatment of villagers were accurate. As the platoon approached the village the militia fired upon it from its front and right, as well as sporadically from the rear. The platoon returned fire, prompting the militia to withdraw from the village by truck. As a result of the contact an Indonesian police sergeant was killed and two others seriously wounded. The lead Australian section commander, Corporal Paul Teong, was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for his leadership under fire.

Shortly afterwards, on 16 October, a Response Force patrol was fired upon in 2 RAR's area of operations near the village of Aidabasalala, north-east of Balibo. The incident has been portrayed as involving much bravery on the part of the SAS soldiers involved, but it also undermined an imminent battalion operation planned by 2 RAR aimed at not only stirring but also capturing the remaining active militia in the area.²⁸ Notably, the action involved the reconnaissance role frequently used by the special forces during the Vietnam War. But the lack of coordination with

2 RAR left many frustrated that an opportunity to capture a significant militia element had been missed. Indeed the Response Force's tendency for moving through other units' areas without apparent clearance or permission, with its inherent potential for fratricide, was a source of considerable concern for the infantry battalions. From the INTERFET HQ perspective, the mix-up was perplexing as Cosgrove had authorised the deployment of the Response Force and understood that the message had been passed on.²⁹ In reality, the message had not reached brigade or battalion headquarters. The incident demonstrated the lack of practice at handling demarcation and deconfliction, and pointed to the need for closer collaboration between the 'special' and 'conventional' forces. It also demonstrated just how close the nature of the roles of the special and conventional forces had become.

A few days later, on 21 October, C Company 3 RAR, under Major David Rose, set out on Operation Strand. This operation was conceived as a show of force in an area allocated to the 1st Battalion, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment (1 RNZIR), which was not yet in place except for one company in Suai, supported by soldiers from Headquarters 3rd Brigade. The Australian brigade headquarters had been deployed alongside the New Zealanders as a stop-gap use of scarce resources to cover an important area as an interim measure until additional forces could deploy.

Deploying to Belulik Leten by Black Hawk helicopters, C Company 3 RAR came under fire from militia heading from West Timor into East Timor wearing dark-coloured uniforms and carrying M-16 and AK-47 rifles. Rose ordered one of his platoons to flank the militia using dead ground, but the militia withdrew back into West Timor, firing at the Australians and using civilians as shields from return fire. Due to restrictions on INTERFET movement up to and beyond the border, there could be no pursuit, and no militia were captured or killed. Nonetheless, the operation did demonstrate that the militia groups were no longer free to roam with impunity. The incident also involved the first shot fired in anger by 3 RAR since the Vietnam War.³⁰

The remaining time in East Timor for 2 RAR and 3 RAR saw the companies conduct extensive patrols in their respective border areas before their return to Australia early in 2000. For the officers and soldiers of these units and their combat-support and combat-service support teams, the INTERFET deployment was a watershed. The deployment was a proving ground for equipment and operational concepts and procedures, including the deployment of integral force-support battalions for logistics

support. The operation also was an important capability-enhancing event that would prove beneficial for the challenges the Army would encounter in the years to follow.

Incidentally, the WESTFOR group, under the Townsville-based Headquarters 3rd Brigade, which included forces from Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand and even a small element from the United States, was the first time since the Korean War that the forces of all these nations had served on operations in the same formation. It provided ample illustration of the utility of the ABCA Armies Standardisation program.

NEW ZEALAND'S ROLE

The suggestion that New Zealand responded slowly with its deployment of 1 RNZIR should be caveated. The 1 RNZIR Battalion Group conducted a two-stage deployment. A lead subunit, V Company, 1 RNZIR, was warned for deployment on 9 September and was on operations in Dili on 29 September – a period of 20 days. Similarly, 1 RNZIR was warned for deployment on 20 September, after having completed security operations at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum held in New Zealand, at which diplomatic exchanges took place that paved the way for the deployment of INTERFET. 1 RNZIR had deployed and commenced operations by 25 October. This was the first unit-level operational deployment since the unit's inception and its service in Malaya and Borneo from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s. (Previously 1 RNZIR had made company-sized contributions to predominantly Australian (rebadged 'Anzac') battalions during the Vietnam War, so the event was very significant for the New Zealand Army.)³¹

Reflecting on the event afterwards, Colonel Kevin Burnett, the CO at the time, argued that this was very quick considering the unit's official readiness levels and commitment to the APEC security operation. Burnett observed that there was considerable value for 1 RNZIR having deployed as a battalion with the 3rd Brigade on exercise in northern Australia two years previously. That exercise was an opportunity to renew the close relationship with the 3rd Brigade and the units with which 1 RNZIR had had close ties since the Vietnam War. Burnett observed: 'Working within the brigade framework and operating alongside a full range of capabilities was a useful education.' Once deployed, the unit quickly adapted to local circumstances. Constant patrolling was the key, said Burnett. These patrols took many forms: reconnaissance, fighting, standing, presence, civil affairs, security and engagement.³²

OECUSSI

A couple of weeks after 1 RNZIR commenced operations, on 10 November, 2 RAR was reassigned responsibility for Maliana to allow B Company 3 RAR under Major Stephen Grace to participate in Operation Respite, a two-phased airmobile insertion into the Oecussi enclave. 3 RAR was to relieve the British Gurkha company, which had deployed there in the first instance in part to enable the confident, assertive and highly capable Gurkhas to operate within their own discrete, yet prominent area of operations rather than as a subelement of another Australian battalion. This allowed the British to have a more prominent role – in part in acknowledgement for their forthright contribution to INTERFET. 3 RAR was accompanied by an enclave headquarters element based on Headquarters 4th Field Regiment commanded by Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Mick Crane. The redeployment to the enclave required a handover of 3 RAR's AO to 2 RAR and elements of 1 RNZIR. Incidents occurred on the border of the Oecussi enclave over subsequent weeks, but the Australians gradually asserted greater control over the border areas and checked the occasional militia incursions.³³

The important work and quick deployment out of Dili to the border areas including Oecussi by the force elements under the command of Brigadier Evans could not have been possible without the prompt and capable support and relief of duties in the Dili area provided by the follow-on forces, including 5/7 RAR.

5/7 RAR BATTALION GROUP IN EAST TIMOR, 1999–2000

The first few months of 1999 saw 5/7 RAR, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier) Simon Gould, completing its move from its home of 26 years in Holsworthy to new, purpose-built lines in Robertson Barracks, in the Darwin suburb of Palmerston. The potential crisis looming in East Timor had demanded that the 1st Brigade train and be resourced to be part of the Ready Deployment Force. This meant additional work for the soldiers of 5/7 RAR, already under some pressure to settle quickly into their new home.³⁴ That readiness process stood the battalion in good stead for what lay ahead because 5/7 RAR was warned for service in East Timor with 21 days notice to move in September.

The battalion reached East Timor 14 days after the soldiers of 2 RAR and 3 RAR, with the advance party arriving on 7 October and the first companies landing on 9 October.

Within hours of arrival the first of 5/7 RAR's M113 APCs started patrolling around Dili. The vehicles moved slowly and deliberately, generating a rumble that left a distinct impression. With its mechanised rifle companies, 5/7 RAR dominated an area that previously took several light infantry battalions not equipped with armoured vehicles to control.³⁵ This was the first time an Australian Army mechanised infantry battalion had deployed on operations. Armoured personnel carriers had previously deployed in support of light infantry in Somalia and Vietnam, but this experience provided more opportunities to see how things worked for mechanised infantry 'for real'. The experience helped endorse and update mechanised operational concepts and was used to validate requirements for significant vehicle upgrades.

With the 3rd Brigade deployed to the border region as WESTFOR, the brigade's engineer force, 3rd Combat Engineer Regiment (or 3 CER) under Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Steve Day, worked furiously to repair the road route across the island from Dili to the south-eastern town of Suai, which WESTFOR required for logistic sustainment. This involved prepositioning heavy engineer plant across difficult terrain, then rapidly repairing a series of culverts and bridges.

In the meantime, an ad hoc formation, Dili Command, under the command of New Zealand Brigadier (later Major General and High Commissioner to Canberra) Martyn Dunne, was established to provide security to the capital and surrounds. 5/7 RAR was allocated to Dili Command as its only infantry battalion and therefore carried the bulk of the required work. On 23 October 5/7 RAR was tasked to provide the coordination and security for the return of East Timorese independence leader Xanana Gusmão to Dili, together with specialist elements of the Response Force commanded by McOwan.

A week later, the 5/7 RAR Group was fully occupied with ensuring that the last remaining elements of the TNI were ushered away from Dili without destroying prominent buildings, barracks and, potentially, the evidence of previous activities. Having lost the ability to provide for their own safety, the Indonesians needed a secure environment to enable them to depart unmolested. As arrangements constantly changed, the flexibility of the mechanised companies proved critical. There was a sense of relief as the last of the Indonesians departed East Timor in the early hours of 31 October.



Xanana Gusmão visiting Headquarters 3rd Brigade staff in Suai. Left to right: Captain C. Andersen, Major David Stevens, Brigadier Mark Evans, Warrant Officer 1 Kevin Woods, Xanana Gusmão, Major Marcus Fielding, Major Frank Kellaway, Major Rowan Martin, Major George O'Kane. (Lieutenant General [Retd] Mark Evans)



Brigadier Mark Evans briefing Xanana Gusmão. In the background is the Indonesian interpreter, Captain Ben Farinazo. Lieutenant Colonel Mick Slater, Commanding Officer 2 RAR, faces the camera. (Lieutenant General [Retd] Mark Evans)

In January 2000, 5/7 RAR moved into the northern sector of the border area with West Timor, the primary tasks being to control passage across the 57-kilometre length of border assigned to the battalion and to maintain security in the area. Their predecessors, 2 RAR, had approached the task essentially as a counter-insurgency operation, using an 'ink spot' method of deploying stealthy company and platoon patrols. But once it was assessed that neither the militia nor the TNI posed a serious threat, and buoyed by the success of their approach of the last three months under Dili Command, 5/7 RAR took a different approach. This involved taking steps otherwise considered tactically unsound but intended to build confidence among the locals, such as using white light at guard posts at night.³⁶ Conscious of the challenges 2 RAR had encountered in coordinating events with Response Force, Gould invited the collocation of a Response Force headquarters element with him in Balibo to enhance coordination. It was accepted as marking the beginning of a closer working relationship between conventional and special forces.³⁷

Highlighting the benefits of deploying mechanised infantry in such operations, Gould observed that 'the mechanised battalion is more capable in a peace-support environment than a standard battalion'. He argued that 'we have our own organic mobility and we use that mobility, in this AO particularly, to be everywhere all the time'. Coupled with the range of communications and the new Battlefield Command Support System fitted to the M113, the '40 very strong rifle-section commanders' in the unit provided the 'flexibility, adaptability and good sense to respond proportionately'.³⁸

Gould's assertions were endorsed as subsequent battalion rotations were provided with nearly 30 armoured vehicles (ASLAVs and M113 APCs) in support, as well as a ten-man detachment to operate the Coyote surveillance suite loaned by Canada. That group provided the successive Australian battalions (AUSBATTs) with a range of options and reliable assets capable of reacting to incidents across the majority of the AO, regardless of weather conditions.

TRANSITION TO UNTAET

Australia handed over command of administering the transition to independence on 21 February 2000 when the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) took over from INTERFET. With the handover, 5/7 RAR became part of UNTAET, donning blue berets and UN sleeve badges. The force came under the command of Thai

Lieutenant General Boonsrang Niumpradit. Australia still maintained the largest force contribution and filled key appointments such as the Deputy Force Commander UNTAET, Major General Mike Smith, followed by Major General Roger Powell, who had earlier commanded the Place Monitoring Group in Bougainville.³⁹

During this period, in an apparent attempt to test the UN's mettle, a spate of provocations took place, with returning refugees being intimidated and shots deliberately fired over the heads of troops and refugees at a pre-planned border checkpoint 'family reunion'. Gould, his operations officer, Major Shane Gabriel, and the RSM, WO1 Rod Speter, boldly strode forward towards the Indonesians, calling for them to cease fire – which they did after expending more than 600 rounds over the crowd's heads. In another instance, in early March, harassing fire was directed from about 300 metres at a section from B Company near Batugade. Fire was not returned as the soldiers could not see the muzzle flashes through the thick forest. Several small groups of the militia also infiltrated across the border, prompting Gould to dispatch patrols in pursuit, although the militia managed to elude them.⁴⁰ The instance reinforced the need for mechanised infantry to be prepared to operate dismounted, away from their vehicles.

Recognising the ongoing potential for volatility, Australia continued to play a prominent role with forces deployed along the Indonesian border. A key appointment Australia would continue to fill was Commander of the Western Forces (WESTFOR). Incumbents included Brigadier Duncan Lewis (subsequently Commander Special Operations Command, Deputy Secretary in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, National Security Adviser, then Secretary of the Department of Defence), Brigadier Ken Gillespie (later promoted lieutenant general and appointed VCDF, then Chief of Army) and Richard Wilson (later promoted major general and appointed to command Army's Training Command, the 1st Division and subsequently the Defence Intelligence Organisation). Such appointments, in effect, provided the Army with an operational proving ground for up-and-coming senior officers, and the Army benefited greatly as a result.

Reflecting some of the challenges experienced during this time, Gillespie observed: 'My time in Timor was about dealing with the [Indonesian] relationship while it was under stress. The CDF kept telling me that I was a UN commander, not an Australian commander . . . The Indonesians saw me as an Australian, not as a UN person. The UN sat on the fence. I learned a lot about national interests, national command and about how

hard the ADF was to work with from an external perspective.⁴¹ A short while later, Gillespie's experience informed his approach to managing operations in the Middle East when appointed Chief of Strategic Operations Division during the war in Iraq in 2003.

REFLECTIONS

A key observation about the INTERFET experience is that, although in hindsight the operation appeared relatively benign, it did not appear so at the outset and it could easily have turned out far worse than it did. The proximity of East Timor to Darwin was also a major factor in enabling Australia to project force, despite years of atrophy in terms of expeditionary force projection capabilities.

The INTERFET experience demonstrated the merits of force projection capabilities, including air and maritime assets, to support and sustain land force operations abroad. These capabilities were infrequently tested and even disparaged by some in peacetime because of cost and apparent inactivity, but they were critical on this operation. Thankfully, the Indonesians chose to respect the UN mandate and not to oppose the international force, leaving the Australian logistic, ammunition and medical evacuation systems largely untested. However, the mission did expose unprecedented logistic shortfalls and capability limitations. Put simply, the ADF's support infrastructure had atrophied to the point where the force of more than five thousand tested the ADF's ability to deliver rations, fuel, equipment and repair parts to almost breaking point. Had there been a surge in requirements – such as might have arisen if there were a significant firefight (requiring ammunition resupply) or if there had been significant casualties (requiring extensive medical support and casualty evacuations) or significant equipment breakdowns, the logistic supply system would not have coped. To many this was not surprising, after years of commercialisation of administrative support programs and cutbacks flowing from Defence 'efficiency' reviews.⁴² During the previous decade, the ADF was 'neither as proficient as it believed it was, nor as competent as it should have been. Operation Stabilise once again exposed persistent weaknesses in the enabling functions of force projection.'⁴³

What is noteworthy about the INTERFET experience is that, unlike observations made during earlier missions, the logistic shortfalls identified were closely scrutinised through an Australian National Audit Office Report and broad-based corrective action was recommended. Although the problems were not rectified immediately, a concerted effort involving

the various logistic components was initiated to overcome many of the challenges flagged repeatedly before.⁴⁴

One of the many lessons of INTERFET related to individual training. There were a large number of 'unauthorised discharges' or 'UDs'; that is, the inappropriate and mistaken firing of a weapon, usually by accident. The problem was that soldiers were not adequately trained to carry loaded weapons. For most units before deployment, weapons were usually kept in the armoury. On the field-firing range the normal strict controls were used but, for many, East Timor was the first time they carried a loaded weapon without a safety officer beside them.⁴⁵ Until that point, the emphasis on peacetime safety regulations and the limited opportunities for realistic training in a funding-constrained force had left many soldiers without exposure to prolonged periods with their weapons with live ammunition.

The INTERFET mission validated the emphasis on regimental or corps identities and the focus on combined-arms battle groups and brigades. Critical to Australia being able to take the lead in INTERFET was the nurturing of the combined-arms team up to brigade level, capitalising on the combined effects of the various components of the regimental system. In the 3rd Brigade, the Army had the necessary organisational sophistication to command and control brigade-level tactical operations with naval and air assets in support, which were particularly important in the opening days of the operation.

To be sure, the major impediment to effective joint operations was the fact that Australian contingents from the three services had, for the preceding century, operated primarily as separate contingents alongside allies. This approach worked while Australia was a junior coalition partner in an operation managed by an ally. The services tended to cling to their preferred mode of operating separately and resisting joint arrangements for their command, employment and provisioning.⁴⁶ But this approach was unsustainable in circumstances where Australia was in charge and when the Australian components had to support each other, without relying heavily on allies.

The INTERFET mission also exposed the limitations of requiring naval and air force assets (at the expense of land forces) to address the air-sea gap to Australia's north. After all, only with the publication of the 1997 Defence strategy paper, ASP97, had the strategy of continental defence (with its emphasis on air and naval forces) been effectively superseded and priority on land forces increased, as part of a holistic ADF team. The East Timor experience confirmed the shift in military strategy and exposed

areas where improvements were needed, particularly with logistics and communications and information systems support.

The East Timor mission also occurred when efforts to improve joint training and education were starting to bear fruit. ADFA had opened in Canberra in 1986 and its graduates were reaching the middle ranks of the officer corps of the respective services (i.e. they were majors, lieutenant commanders and squadron leaders).

ADFA offered degrees in the liberal arts and sciences. It likewise also offered an opportunity for officer cadets from the three armed services to become friends more so than interservice rivals. Critics have argued that ADFA is an expensive and wasteful institution, but it was designed to be cheaper than running three separate institutions for each service. Also, such reckoning overlooks the profound benefits in terms of improved teamwork and effectiveness, even at the junior officer level, demonstrated in East Timor. What otherwise could be a slow and tedious bureaucratic process for air support, for instance, was partly facilitated by familiarity and mutual friendship and respect.⁴⁷

Still, there was scope for improved interservice cooperation and mutual understanding. For INTERFET, Major General Cosgrove placed air support, including the Army's Black Hawk helicopters, under control of the Air Component Commander (INTERFET's RAAF element) largely because the air component had little to do otherwise. For the RAAF, however, this seemed to vindicate its view that the control of the Army's helicopters should be returned to the RAAF, which had been forced to cede control of the helicopters to the Army in 1988. That decision, taken when General Sir Phillip Bennett was Chief of the Defence Force in 1987, was influenced by Bennett's experience in the Vietnam War where, he claimed, the RAAF proved insufficiently responsive to support requests from ground troops. For the battalions affected, the established procedures for requesting helicopter support had to be changed to a less flexible RAAF system. This was in part because the RAAF headquarters element had to be given something to do beyond simply coordinating sustainment cargo flights from Darwin.⁴⁸ But on balance, Cosgrove appreciated the need to be inclusive and collegial with his component commanders with a view to further enhancing interservice cooperation, or jointery. Having ADFA graduates involved in the process helped.

The East Timor operation, particularly the deployment of ship-borne forces to Dili, then Suai on the south coast and the western enclave of Oecussi, illustrated that amphibious capabilities remained significant for Australia. The lodgement at Suai, for instance, involved the

redeployment of Headquarters 3rd Brigade and attachments by an amphibious move from Dili to Suai on board HMAS *Tobruk*. East Timor lacked the infrastructure to support a move overland, leaving an amphibious lodgement on the south coast at Suai as the only practical option.

Major General John Caligari wrote that, like the United States Marine Corps and the United Kingdom's armed forces, the Australian Army has recognised that forces are required for operations in the littorals (i.e. the land, air and sea spaces that adjoin a coastal area of a land mass) and such commitments might include air and sea deployments. Consequently, such forces must be joint to take maximum advantage of the capabilities of each service in order to ensure success.⁴⁹ The requirement for mission success was reinforced in the minds of Australian force structure planners, particularly following the deployment to East Timor.

Shortly after the East Timor mission began, the Australian Department of Defence underwent another review, culminating in a White Paper released in 2000, entitled *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, which reversed the contraction of defence spending of the previous two and a half decades.⁵⁰ Reflecting the implications of the East Timor operation, the role of the Army was broadened to cater for a wider range of security contingencies, including an explicit capacity to conduct expeditionary operations; to deploy and sustain land forces away from home bases – be it in remote parts of Australia's north, in the region or further abroad. Experience in East Timor and a succession of operations in the littorals of the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, added impetus to the White Paper and led to the development of Australian doctrine for Manoeuvre Operations in the Littoral Environment. MOLE envisaged land forces achieving strategic reach through entry from the air or sea with decisive action, followed by a transition to peacekeeping or support operations. As Leahy observed, 'The lesson is clear: the Army cannot work alone. In the future the ADF will need to be able to deploy and sustain itself as a joint force wherever it is directed to operate by the Government.'⁵¹

The Australian Army's MOLE doctrine was complemented at the operational level by reference to allied doctrine. 'To a certain extent', as Alan Ryan observed, 'the need for operational-level coalition doctrine is filled by the ABCA *Coalition Operations Handbook*, which is widely consulted in ADF operational-level headquarters.'⁵² Ryan's observations validated the significance of the Army's links with like-minded counterpart armies. The INTERFET experience reinforced the significance of this. For the first time since the Korean War, Australian, New Zealand, British, Canadian and US forces were on operations together, even for a time in the same

formation, as part of WESTFOR. This arrangement capitalised on the ABCA exercise conducted in Brisbane a few months before and validated the effort expended in working towards increased interoperability.

Being able to compare notes, thoughts, experiences, as well as concepts and procedures was invaluable. The Canadians, for instance, had their own lessons to share, notably in terms of force sustainment. As one Australian Army officer put it, 'They arrived with a supply ship, so they effectively had a big grey Q [supply] Store sitting out in the bay. They showed what real experience of overseas deployments looks like.'⁵³

Equally important, if not more so, were Australia's links with regional security partners. The long but modest investment in the relationship with Thailand was symptomatic of the significance of maintaining strong working relations with South-East Asian countries. Even the investment in the relationship with Indonesia over a number of years helped to avert far worse an outcome if officers such as the then Defence attaché, Brigadier Jim Molan, had not had the confidence and ear of senior Indonesian military officers. The investment in the relationship with Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines similarly paid significant dividends as they committed to support the mission in East Timor. The Australian Army and the wider ADF derived inestimable benefit from these regional relationships.

As a consequence of the INTERFET experience, the ADF was able to operate on the psychological as well as the physical dimension of conflict. This approach had much in common with theories of manoeuvre warfare and the 'indirect approach' – concepts that the Australian Army grappled with in theory and in practice. INTERFET also saw many government agencies working towards the one objective, harnessing a spectrum of capabilities that made up national power in part to ensure that national popular support for the operation at home was maintained and to influence the minds of adversaries. Admittedly, at the time there remained considerable scope for improved intra-departmental cooperation within Defence as well as with other government agencies, particularly in Canberra.⁵⁴ The following years would provide plenty of opportunities to further practise interdepartmental cooperation and coordination.

For Australia, INTERFET provided the necessary invigorating experience to generate an improved learning culture within the Army. But it is important not to forget that INTERFET was not an opposed operation. The Army gained priceless experience in deploying and supporting operations, but the situation conceivably could have turned out far worse. The prospect of fighting breaking out between INTERFET force elements and their opponents was a real one, and the fact that a general outbreak of

further violence did not occur upon the arrival of the force was not simply due to good fortune. While the implications were being considered, the operational commitments in East Timor continued, presenting the Army with a range of operational challenges that prompted further learning and adaptation.

CHAPTER | 4

OPERATIONS WITH THE UN IN EAST TIMOR, 2000-04

The tour of the 5/7 RAR Battalion Group in East Timor straddled the change-over from INTERFET to UNTAET. Between April 2000, when it returned to Australia, and June 2004 when the UNTAET mandate expired, there were eight force rotations, each of six to seven months duration and each including supporting attachments from the Army's various corps.

Once deployments settled into a routine, preparing battalions participated in Exercise Timor Prelude (to practise AUSBATT standard operating procedures), Exercise Timor Dawn (a battalion and company headquarters exercise) and Timor Dusk (the mission rehearsal exercise).¹ These exercises echoed the pre-deployment training familiar to those who went to Vietnam a generation earlier. Exercises were refined with repeated rotations, incorporating lessons from those preceding.

Instrumental in this process was one of Lieutenant General Hickling's pet projects, the Combat Training Centre (CTC) established in 1999 under Lieutenant Colonel Keith Schollum and first trialled with 1 RAR that year. The CTC was prominent in preparing subsequent troop rotations, drawing on recent lessons captured and learned by those in East Timor. In addition, operational analysis and evaluation teams ensured that the training was realistic, up to date and relevant. Post-operational reports also contributed to the processes of refining and adjusting. In essence, the critical mass was being reached for the Army to become truly a learning organisation.

What follows is an account of the force rotations, highlighting key features and adaptations of each deployment, including facets of the combat support and combat services support elements – the regiments and corps of the Army – deployed as part of the force. Operating with an array of capabilities as part of a battalion group was the most formative experience for the Army in a generation. It enabled increased adaptation, learning from successive rotations and from repeated exposure to the capabilities offered by the varied specialist corps.

AUSBATT II: 6 RAR BATTALION GROUP, APRIL–OCTOBER 2000

The 6 RAR Battalion Group deployed as AUSBATT II, under Lieutenant Colonel Mick Moon, taking over 5/7 RAR's area of operations (AO) on 25 April 2000. In preparing for deployment, AUSBATT II was supplemented with two hundred General Reserve soldiers on 15 months full-time service from several Reserve battalions. Moon had four months to prepare for what took his predecessor, Lieutenant Colonel Colin Townsend, 12 months to achieve before deploying to Vietnam (for admittedly more intense combat operations) in 1966.²

Following a quiet period during the tail end of 5/7 RAR's tour of duty, another quiet period was anticipated. But Moon's rigorous training regime proved invaluable. Moon implemented an active patrolling program, following the practice of his former CO in Somalia, Lieutenant Colonel David Hurley, whose mantra was 'When in doubt, patrol'.³ As it turned out, AUSBATT II saw the greatest number of contacts and militia activity of any battalion under UNTAET. Conscious of the tight rules of engagement for UNTAET's forces, the Timorese militia developed tactics to exploit the constraints imposed, such as using grenades and small-arms fire at night and having the lead man in a militia patrol travel unarmed, with the remainder following behind being armed in order to deceive UNTAET troops.

Several incidents stand out during this period. The first was a grenade attack at Nunura Bridge on 28 May 2000, resulting in Lance Corporal Wayne Harwood being injured from the grenade explosion.

The second incident took place in June, in Major John McCaffery's AO, shortly after his B Company had taken over responsibility for the area from D Company. This incident involved a night-time militia attack on Corporal David Hawkins' section post at Aidabasalala. Hawkins, a veteran of Somalia and Rwanda, had hastily sandbagged and screened

his post under McCaffery's instructions only hours before. Hawkins led his section of mostly reservist soldiers with restraint in the face of a surprise attack that included six grenades thrown at the post (one of which exploded in the empty sleeping bag of a man on piquet) and several magazines of small-arms ammunition fired from a second firing point before the militia withdrew. In recognition of his fortitude and discipline under fire, Hawkins was awarded a Distinguished Service Medal.

The third incident occurred close to the border near Suai on 23 July when militiamen opened fire and killed a soldier of a New Zealand tracking team, Private Leonard Manning. His body was recovered the next day, having been mutilated. This incident caused feelings of anger, apprehension and revulsion, and attitudes hardened against the militia.

The fourth incident occurred on 2 August, involving five to six militiamen walking into an Australian patrol that had halted for lunch. The militia group was engaged with machine-gun fire from Private Rodney McLennan, who had been watching their advance towards his position. Lance Corporal Brad Wilkins then opened fire with his rifle. The machine-gun fire killed two militiamen, and the platoon commander, Lieutenant Michael Humphreys, aggressively pursued the fleeing militia. Humphreys and Wilkins were later awarded a Distinguished Service Medal for their action.

Immediately after the contact, Private Rosenthal received a snake bite and required evacuation. UN-contracted helicopters were reluctant to fly into an area now considered to be 'hot' and, with no Australian Black Hawk helicopters then available in East Timor, Rosenthal was evacuated by foot for several kilometres before being safely evacuated by a New Zealand Iroquois helicopter.

A few days later, a tragic accident occurred in the battalion's AO, when Corporal Stuart Jones died from gunshot wounds when his rifle accidentally discharged while he was riding in an ASLAV (light armoured vehicle). On 11 August an explosion in a rubbish fire seriously injured four more soldiers; Lance Corporal Wilkins and Privates Lyons, Caruthers and Marsh required immediate evacuation. Such incidents prompted procedure reviews to improve safety and prevent a recurrence.⁴

By the time AUSBATT II completed its tour, members had killed or wounded seven infiltrators. They had also deterred many others from infiltrating into, and through, the Bobonaro District. In addition, they had experienced some close calls.⁵ Their experience reminded those preparing to deploy with the next rotation of the need for rigour in training and vigilance on operations; it also helped to ensure that force preparations back

in Australia were realistic and thorough. Those deploying on subsequent rotations were eager to learn, so there was a ready audience for lessons observed and passed. Those in training facilities in Australia paid close attention to the suggestions from those recently returned. The operational focus added impetus to learn and adapt to ensure success.

AUSBATT III: 1 RAR BATTALION GROUP, OCTOBER 2000 – APRIL 2001

On 25 October the 6 RAR Battalion Group handed over responsibility for an area of 1138 square kilometres along the northern border region of East Timor known as AO Matilda to AUSBATT III, centred on 1 RAR. Having missed deploying with INTERFET in 1999, 1 RAR's soldiers were eager to compensate for the lost experience. Conscious of the challenges faced by AUSBATT II, the CO of AUSBATT III, Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) John Caligari, also adopted a robust patrolling posture to deny militia access across the Tactical Coordination Line (TCL) into East Timor. This was the correct posture. In December, for instance, a station established near Balibo to prevent infiltration and exfiltration was fired upon by militia. Operation Valiant was launched in response using Major Jamie Patten-Richens' A Company to establish a concealed stationary blocking force and overt patrols to drive the militia towards the blocking force. The tactic worked, resulting in the death of a militia member with no loss or injury to the platoon involved, Lieutenant Steve Thorpe's 3 Platoon. The section commander concerned, Corporal Jonathan Griffiths, was a veteran of 1 RAR's Somalia deployment seven years earlier. Caligari praised Griffiths for acting decisively and engaging effectively. Notwithstanding their fine performance, Thorpe and Griffiths faced a thorough and unsettling investigation by Dili-based staff officers, which, in the end, validated the actions they had taken.⁶

Dispersed actions were common as the size of the AO and the nature of the tasks meant that the battalion group was spread widely. To command such a group effectively, Caligari avoided being anchored to headquarters and delegated responsibility for running it to his second in command (2IC), Major Steve Ferndale. Like Moon before him, Caligari's approach was influenced by his working for Hurley in Somalia in 1993. Hurley, lacking integral aviation support and burdened with many administrative, governance and reporting tasks, was effectively prevented from visiting his troops. With Ferndale performing many of the administrative functions, Caligari was free to be in the field on operations.⁷

AUSBATT III's largest event was Operation Diamantina, a battalion cordon and search conducted on 15 April 2001. To the delight of such people as the battalion operations officer, Major Mick Mumford, the battalion tactical headquarters deployed for the first time, controlling more than three hundred soldiers, two Kiowa reconnaissance helicopters, 27 armoured vehicles, 23 civilian police and other UNTAET agencies operating in and around the village of Tonobibi.⁸ Hand in hand with such operations, the civil-military affairs team were employed as part of 'WHAM' patrols, aimed at winning hearts and minds. The end result was the confiscation of contraband as well as some minor weapons and military equipment. When the search was complete, the Commander, Sector West, Brigadier Ken Gillespie, wrote to Caligari saying: 'The operation was successful by any measure and I was very happy with the attitude and professionalism displayed by your officers and men.'⁹ There were other memorable aspects as well. For instance, the malaria trial conducted (tafenoquine) resulted in zero malaria in the battalion group. Caligari recalled the special relationship with his Indonesian counterpart CO across the border, which was facilitated by his good English and his friendship with Major Glen Babington, who had graduated from the Indonesian Army Staff College as the Australian exchange officer.¹⁰ Personal ties like this made a difference.

AUSBATT IV: 4 RAR BATTALION GROUP, APRIL-OCTOBER 2001

When notified to replace the 1 RAR Battalion Group, 4 RAR was in the process of converting from a light infantry battalion to a commando regiment, developing special forces capabilities to supplement those of the SAS Regiment. With the commitment to East Timor continuing, however, 4 RAR reverted to a light infantry battalion to deploy as AUSBATT IV. This involved reorganising from the two commando companies structure to a light infantry model with four companies and a growth in the unit from 220 to 670 personnel. With attachments, that number grew to 1100. Under Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Jeff Sengelman, AUSBATT IV took control of AO Matilda on Anzac Day 2001 in the presence of the Governor General, Sir William Deane.¹¹

The first task was to establish a genuine security partnership with the East Timorese and the battalion emphasised language skills, maintaining relationships established by previous AUSBATTs as well as using new

technologies. This intelligence-led but people-focused approach saw the battalion group conduct the majority of its operations in close proximity to the Tactical Control Line, or TCL. This was in contrast to earlier AUSBATT rotations that contended with challenges further inside East Timor. The focus on the border itself was warranted by the number of incidents there. These included a TCL violation on 5 May intercepted by Corporal J.C. Whitebread and his section from D Company. Another involved a militia grenade attack at the Maubasa markets on 29 May resulting in several fatalities and about 50 people wounded. Shallow cross-border militia raids occurred in June, including an attack on an A Company patrol led by Corporal K.T. Campbell.¹²

The focused approach, based on good intelligence and enhanced cooperation with the East Timorese, enabled timely responses to impending incidents. With Timorese elections scheduled, several operations were launched to prevent militia disruption in the lead-up period. Operation Fullback was launched as an area of operations-wide deployment from 27 August to 9 September. Troops were pre-positioned in key locations, including polling booths across the AO, supplemented with standby forces ready to support the police. The efforts helped to ensure that the election took place without security concerns and with more than 95 per cent of the registered electorate participating. By the end of AUSBATT IV's tour there were clear signs that stability was returning, not the least of which was the peaceful resettlement of more than five thousand refugees and more than seven hundred former militia in AO Matilda.¹³ Addressing the battalion, Sengelman observed: 'When they see us, they smile. When we drive by, they wave and despite our rifles, the children run to be near us when we enter their villages. It's this sincere and heartfelt trust in who you are, what you have done and ultimately represented which draws them so willingly in friendship.'¹⁴

In pursuing this approach, a particularly useful adjunct was the four-man Military Information Support Team, or MIST, which was tasked with providing public information and 'information operations' support. The team provided weekly news sheets, posters, leaflets, loudspeaker broadcasts, novelty products and personal interaction with locals, much as was done in Bougainville and as occurred during the Vietnam War. The MIST had deployed with INTERFET and remained an important component of the AUSBATTs for subsequent rotations. Increased recognition of the place of the Military Information Support Team led to this niche capability gradually expanding. The experience of successive battalion groups also led to the capability being more widely understood and

accepted as an integral part of the combined arms and services team. A lesson from the Vietnam War was relearnt in East Timor.

'SPECIAL' ROLE FOR 4 RAR (Cdo)

On return from East Timor in late 2001, 4 RAR (Cdo) returned to being a commando unit, to complement and augment the SAS Regiment's special operations capability. The rationale for raising 4 RAR had emerged, in part, due to difficulties experienced on Operation Morris Dance following the Fiji coup of 1987 (discussed in [chapter 1](#)). The unit was designed to be a self-contained flexible and rapidly deployable force. The unit was structured for both domestic counter-terrorism and other special operations, with battalion headquarters, with six subcomponents: Tactical Assault Group (TAG) East, two commando companies, a logistic support company, an operational support company and a signal squadron.¹⁵ Within a short period, 4 RAR (Cdo) became an indispensable component of Special Operations Command, and its forces featured in a range of counter-terrorism exercises in support of state and federal law enforcement agencies, and on a range of operational deployments in East Timor and further afield in the Middle East (discussed in later chapters).

AUSBATT V: 2 RAR BATTALION GROUP'S RETURN, 2001-02

As AUSBATT V, the 2 RAR Battalion Group deployed to the Bobonaro District of East Timor from October 2001 to April 2002. AUSBATT V benefited from a well-developed pre-deployment training program and a significant amount of experience among members from previous rotations. The CO, Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Angus Campbell, noted that in terms of the number of troops deployed, his battalion group's tour of duty 'was the high water mark of Australia's contribution' to UNTAET. In providing a synopsis of activities, Campbell stated that AUSBATT V continued conducting 'ongoing and arduous patrol operations'. In addition, it 'overcame challenges of the wet season, moved the headquarters from Balibo to Moleana, guaranteed the safety of reconciliation and refugee operations, facilitated development assistance to local and isolated communities, rebuilt most of AUSBATT's forward operating bases, maintained the road system and provided security and logistic support to the presidential elections – to mention only some of our tasks'.

Campbell later commented, 'Upon our handover to the 3rd Battalion Group, AUSBATT VI, some two years since the successful INTERFET operation and the creation of UNTAET, the staged drawdown of forces commenced.'¹⁶

One returning soldier, Sergeant Paul Smedley, captured the feelings of many who also served with INTERFET: 'We all soon realised just how things had changed. We now had new buildings, showers, flushing toilets, air con and much, much more. The job seemed so much easier from peace enforcement to peacekeeping.' Living conditions had improved, but some things remained: 'the large and heavy packs, big hills, ration packs, a lack of resources and a great deal more'.¹⁷

Given the circumstances, the battalion's support company was rerolled as the 'Reconnaissance and Surveillance Company', incorporating the Mortar Platoon as the Aviation Security Platoon, the Signals Platoon, as well as the Reconnaissance Platoon with its four patrols. Additionally the Sniper Platoon provided the immediate reaction force that could be transported by Black Hawk, wheeled light armoured vehicle or tracked armoured personnel carrier. The company also worked closely with the radar and thermal imagery capabilities from 131 Locating Battery, as well as the tracker dogs from the military police and RAAF dog sections.¹⁸ These capabilities gained immensely from the experience of operating 'for real' rather than just on exercises in Australia. Their experience brought out a number of equipment and procedural limitations that were addressed, incrementally providing improved capabilities with subsequent rotations. The same capabilities were also available to AUSBATT V's successor battalion, 3 RAR.

AUSBATT VI: 3 RAR BATTALION GROUP'S RETURN, 2002

The 3 RAR Battalion Group, under Lieutenant Colonel Quentin Flowers, returned to East Timor as AUSBATT VI, taking over during the dry season in April 2002. East Timor became self-governing during this period. The transition to the UN Mission in Support of East Timor (UNMISET) occurred during AUSBATT VI's tour, on 23 May 2002, reflecting the changed circumstances. This was an event that saw widespread celebrations and a sense of achievement for AUSBATT members. During the six-month deployment, the four companies of the battalion worked within two different AOs, enabling members to broaden their experiences.¹⁹

The repetitive nature of tasks meant that the vernacular term ‘groundhog day’ described the experiences of all AUSBATT members.²⁰ But for AUSBATT VI’s relatively quiet tour of duty, distractions featured prominently. These included billycart races, playing ‘Gameboy’, teaching locals some English, attending the ever-popular ‘Tour de Force’ concerts arranged by the Forces Advisory Committee on Entertainment, occasionally having a swim at the beach, inter-unit sports matches, and playing harmless pranks on each other. With the establishment of telephone services and internet terminals, contact with loved ones at home also became easier.²¹ Welfare support for deployed forces was refined and institutionalised, resulting in support arrangements that would have been the envy of those who deployed on earlier missions.

AUSBATT VII: 5/7 RAR BATTALION GROUP’S RETURN, 2002-03

The 5/7 RAR Battalion Group, under Lieutenant Colonel Mick Tucker, deployed for the second time in October 2002: this time as AUSBATT VII and once again following 3 RAR, and under the new UNMISSET mandate. Their assigned area remained AO Matilda in the north-western corner of the country. A company-strength General Reserve force deployed as part of the battalion group. The selection process followed a 90-day selection phase involving volunteer soldiers from 8/7th and 5/6th Battalions, the Royal Victorian Regiment, as well as from 2/17th and 41st Battalions, the Royal New South Wales Regiment. On completion, the soldiers were rebadged with RAR badges at a beret parade with the Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Peter Leahy, in attendance. Army reservists had also served in significant numbers in previous rotations, most notably with the first 6 RAR Battalion Group rotation in 2000. Their participation helped validate the ‘total-force’ concept, treating reservists and Regular forces as equally deployable for such operations.²² The AUSBATT VII experience set a precedent for subsequent operations using Army Reserve forces in such places as the Solomon Islands (see [chapter 5](#)). The Army, largely out of operational necessity, had learned to capitalise on its personnel resources, no matter what component of the Army they came from. For reservists, however, managing the demands and expectations of the full-time force would prove to be an ongoing challenge.

AUSBATT VII included the usual range of attached elements, including the battalion engineer group with its field engineer troop (with trade and plant sections), support troop and a forward repair team. Given the

tasks and the engineers' semi-permanent association with the infantry battalion, the infantry assault pioneer platoon also was grouped with the engineers.²³ The engineers were fundamental to the effectiveness of successive AUSBATTs. Sappers, as the engineers were called, were instrumental in improving living standards at operating bases, improving physical security through the construction of protective works and road maintenance to enable freedom of movement.²⁴ The experience helped to identify engineer equipment shortfalls while also helping to keep capabilities honed. The experience stood them in good stead for tasks awaiting them in Australia and abroad.

The situation in East Timor became routine and relatively benign, but there were still sporadic incidents. For instance, AUSBATT VII had to respond when a militia group crossed in to East Timor and attacked civilians. During the operation the attached Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) infantry company captured the militia group – an incident that caused Australian and United Nations planners to defer their plan to reduce the size of the next troop rotation. The experience also reinforced the need for thorough training in individual soldiers' skills as well as the utility of maintaining close and effective relations with regional partner armies.

AUSBATT VIII: 1 RAR BATTALION GROUP'S RETURN, 2003

Under these circumstances, the 1 RAR Battalion Group, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Stuart Smith, redeployed to East Timor taking over as AUSBATT VIII between 7 and 17 May 2003. Smith's force was built around three infantry rifle companies and a range of attachments from the 3rd Brigade. The force spent the next six months watching, patrolling, liaising, building and sustaining. During Operation Marson,²⁵ for instance, the battalion established patrol bases in the major district population centres and conducted regular vehicle and foot patrols in the local villages and along the tactical control line. During Operation Badcoe,²⁶ the civil–military cooperation (CIMIC) teams established border agencies coordination meetings and provided training, liaison and support to the Timor Police border patrol unit. Operation Cosgrove,²⁷ a combined armoured personnel carrier and infantry operation in June, provided liaison and security along the tactical control line for a joint Indonesian–Timor-Leste government survey team to map the official border. Operation MacGregor,²⁸ in August, involved

CIMIC teams and engineers promoting community aid projects, constructing schools, repairing roadways and refurbishing market buildings. In October, AUSBATT VIII also assumed responsibility for the Oecussi district.²⁹

According to Smith, the battalion group benefited greatly from the fact that many of the corporals and sergeants had deployed previously to Timor as junior soldiers. Their experience aided the battalion's success in dealing with increased civil and military interaction. On any day a corporal patrol commander was expected to deal with civilians, aid agencies and a variety of security forces. On 19 September, for instance, a rifle section from C Company responded to an incident on the tactical control line where a West Timorese was shot dead by East Timorese police. The section commander adjudicated a tense stand-off between angry civilians, aggressive Indonesian police and military personnel, East Timorese police and UN observers. He relied on his experience and training to deal with this sensitive matter objectively. His timely actions were recognised by a UNMISSET Force Commander's Commendation.³⁰

Such opportunities were invaluable as they reinforced lessons and provided an excellent opportunity to build on individual soldiers' skills. The consequence of this cumulative effect was that the Army, on an individual and corporate level, became increasingly experienced and capable.

AUSBATT IX: 6 RAR BATTALION GROUP'S RETURN

Following AUSBATT VIII, the 6 RAR Battalion Group returned in November 2003 as the last AUSBATT. Initially under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Glen Babington, from early 2004 it was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier) Shane Caughey. The threat was less than previously, but a two-thirds reduction in the number of troops deployed, combined with a three-fold expansion of the area of operations, kept the task challenging for the battalion group. In addition to AO Matilda (the Bobonaro district), the Australian AO encompassed the Liquiçá, Ermera, Ainaro, Cova Lima and Oecussi districts, which had a population of approximately 403 000. This area covered the entire length of the tactical control line delineating the border between East Timor and Indonesia. In other words, two rifle companies were required to cover an area that had previously been covered by three full battalions. In addition, this was to be the longest rotation of Operation Citadel, with the first troops arriving in October 2003 and the last to leave in June 2004.³¹

Caughey observed: 'The challenges of maintaining operational capability versus the administrative pressure to draw down early to meet end of mission time-lines required careful management.'³² To maximise operational experience and share the load, rifle companies were rotated on a three-month basis. D Company deployed first, followed by C Company, then A Company. Other force elements followed similar rotation plans, with some remaining for the duration of the AUSBATT's term. The draw-down in numbers also led to the incorporation of the neighbouring Fijian infantry company into the battalion group, leading to the redesignation of the battalion group from AUSBATT to WESTBATT.

With its expanded AO, three forward operating bases were specially constructed: a permanent one at Moleana, and temporary locations at Aidabaleten and Gleno. These bases were used for 'green hat' patrols (associated with stealthier surveillance tasks) and 'blue hat' patrols (involving 'friendly peacekeeper' chats with locals). The span of responsibilities and the array of potential threats meant that soldiers were required to be just as perceptive, responsive and flexible as those deployed on other operations. The emphasis for these patrols was supporting local security agencies. The Border Patrol Unit and the East Timor Police Force were the primary focus as they became responsible for security in the western region once WESTBATT departed. WESTBATT also provided training advice to the Timor-Leste Defence Force while working closely with UN police and military observers.

To maintain coverage of such a large area while also providing support to the East Timor security forces, the standard attached elements from other corps and regiments remained crucial. For AUSBATT IX, these included an APC troop from 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment (Queensland Mounted Infantry), an S-70 Black Hawk troop from 5th Aviation Regiment, an engineering troop from 2nd Combat Engineer Regiment, a Civil Military Cooperation Team provided by 1st Field Regiment and a fully equipped surgical team from 2nd Health Support Battalion.³³

The experience of repeatedly task-organising the battalion groups with attachments from the various corps – that is, the arms and services from across the Army – proved a tremendous bonus for team cohesion and mutual respect across all deployable components. Units that in barracks engaged with each other far less frequently, mostly during major field exercises, found themselves gaining a greater appreciation of and respect for each other's roles in the group. The experience of habitually working with each other's complementary skills generated innovation and helped to accelerate the introduction and modification of equipment and

procedures at a rate that was not possible without the operational context as a prime incentive.

In the end, some of the hardest work involved preparing to extract the force from an area where Australians had been working for nearly five years.³⁴

5TH AVIATION REGIMENT IN TIMOR-LESTE

Detachments from the 5th Aviation Regiment deployed to Timor-Leste for much of the time since the lodgement of INTERFET in September 1999. Originally based at the Dili Heliport, the detachment relocated to Balibo in July 2000 and finally to Moleana in April 2002. By 2004 the detachment, under Major Robyn Johnston, included 43 personnel tasked with providing a 24-hour aeromedical evacuation capability as well as insertion and extraction of immediate reaction force personnel. The aircrew were maintained on 30 minutes notice-to-move, although a typical medical evacuation launch took less than 20 minutes from the initial notice. The day crew, night crew and 'spare crew' (to maintain guaranteed 24-hour coverage) worked closely with their Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineer (RAEME) tradesmen to maintain aircraft serviceability as well as 'hot-refuelling' and communications support.³⁵

HANDOVER

Eventually, a ceremonial parade marked the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste's official assumption of responsibility in policing and external security. UNMISET's mandate expired at 11.59 p.m. on Wednesday 19 May 2004, with the follow-on mission taking up responsibility for a new UN mandate from midnight on 20 May.³⁶

With the drawdown of Australian troops, a small contingent (Support Company) continued to serve under the United Nations banner under Operation Spire and through the provision of direct support to the Timorese Defence Force under the auspices of Australia's Defence Cooperation Program.

OVERVIEW

Operations in East Timor from 1999 to 2004 undoubtedly had a significant influence on the Australian Army. For the first time since the Vietnam War, all the active infantry battalions, with attached combat support and

combat services support elements (from the spectrum of the Army's corps and regiments), rotated through an operational deployment – albeit considerably more benign than experienced by their antecedents in Vietnam, where close combat was a more routine feature of operations. In addition, while for many the experiences were mostly of routine activity, cumulatively, the wealth of experience gained gave the Army a new lease on life, with the soldiers happy with their 'money, medals and mateship'.

With dispersed operations, a wide range of tasks were undertaken that continued to challenge and refine individual and collective skills. As a result, the Army was increasingly resourced with experienced officers and non-commissioned officers. The training provided at the Army's basic training schools, including, for officers, the Royal Military College Duntroon (which managed military training of cadets from ADFA), provided a sound basis for the additional experience-based learning on exercises and on operational deployments. The Army's sound training, coupled with the experience of officers studying alongside their Navy and Air Force colleagues at ADFA, then working alongside on operations, helped reinforce the sense of 'jointery'.

There were also great opportunities to exercise 'mission command' – a concept of providing thoroughly trained subordinate commanders with clear guidance and entrusting them with the authority to undertake tasks with little direct oversight yet with an obligation to keep authorities informed. The solid performance of these dispersed combat teams is testament not only to the relatively benign circumstances but also to the effectiveness of the training and of the practice of mission command – down to the level of the individual soldier. The fact that relations with Indonesia did not deteriorate following the September 1999 nadir in relations and in fact recovered remarkably quickly is in part a testament to the excellence of the Australian forces that deployed there.

The organisational grouping that became the norm during this period was the battalion group. Unlike the usual in-barracks arrangements, each time an infantry battalion deployed, it took with it a complement of combat support and combat services support elements from across the Army's respective corps required for semi-independent operations. The experience of working as a combined-arms-and-services team, in itself, helped to refine capabilities. The regimental or corps identity was reinforced and reinvigorated by this approach.

The capability limitations identified and the operational imperatives at work resulted in the accelerated procurement and introduction into service of critical new equipment, including night-fighting equipment, and

body armour (albeit with its trade-off of protection at the expense of agility due to additional weight). Such equipment enhanced the capabilities of individual soldiers and the Army's combined-arms teams.

The period also saw improved welfare arrangements for deployed forces. Earlier deployments had suffered from poor provision of basic services such as mail delivery and family welfare support. In East Timor, however, the ongoing management of 'rear details' responsibilities at home resulted in considerable effort to ensure that support was available. That support increasingly was delivered as part of a joint ADF team, from a range of support elements in Australia.

The ongoing management of force preparation training and mission rehearsal exercises resulted in the maturation of the Combat Training Centre as well as the Deployed Forces Support Unit. Before East Timor, the DFSU experienced tempo peaks and troughs. With East Timor, however, the unit firmly established its role, assisting pre-deployment preparation of forces. Training and exercises were validated and reinforced by this experience.

Benefit was gained from working with otherwise rarely deployed assets such as the Military Information Support Teams, the geomatic, special communications, human intelligence, media and civil affairs teams, as well as the medical, aviation and engineer elements. This experience revisited many of the lessons from the Vietnam War, helping to refine tactics, techniques and procedures. It also highlighted the challenges of maintaining a battalion group on operations when the Defence White Paper called for the Army to be able to maintain and deploy a brigade-sized force.

Reflecting the significance of ties with close allies, working alongside the New Zealand Defence Force became routine business for the ADF in large part as a consequence of the East Timor experience. The Anzac tradition was called upon in Bougainville in the 1990s, but the East Timor experience validated more forcefully the utility of maintaining combined Australian and New Zealand exercises and reinforced the need for interoperability.

Beyond the close relationship with New Zealand, the Australian Army and the wider ADF benefited from engagement with other like-minded nations. The UN mandate for the mission was important for Australia, to ensure international legal coverage and to ensure that the mission was not seen as an Australian neocolonialist land grab. Deployed forces benefited from the investment over decades in bilateral relationships with partners from the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), notably Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore. The investment in the

relationship with Indonesia similarly paid dividends, with a smattering of Bahasa speakers able to assist in engaging with Indonesian forces in cross-border coordination and 'de-confliction'.

The UN mandate also was important for domestic political and psychological reasons, linked to the fifth reason for prowess. Over decades Australians were attracted to internationally mandated operations, preferably under the United Nations. Maintaining popular support for the troops in East Timor and support for the government's efforts there were helped by the international recognition provided through the UN mandate.

Some would argue that the East Timor experience was of marginal value for the Army's fighting capability because of the very limited extent of combat experienced. Some have suggested that there are parallels with the British Army's interwar experience of 'imperial policing' security operations, which left the Army taking one to two years before it reached comparable standards with the Germans, who were focused on training for conventional war. Such views would suggest that not too much should be deduced from the Australians' performance on security operations in East Timor.³⁷ Still, most participants saw it as a professionally invigorating opportunity. The Army fielded, tested and adapted equipment and procedures, generating conceptual and organisational renewal. To be sure, the numbers of actual firefights were relatively few. But the prospect of more was ever present. The tactics and procedures employed reflected this possibility.

Critics downplay the operational value of such experience when compared to the more intense operations undertaken in Vietnam (arguing for instance that certain combat functions, notably artillery, were not exercised) and those undertaken, for instance, by US forces in Iraq between 2004 and 2007. They argue also that this relatively benign experience led to undue over-confidence of being capable of handling more challenging tasks. Those are valid concerns, but not so powerful as to discount the considerable plusses from the experience. After all, the Army gained prized practical operational experience, regardless of the shortage in number of incoming rounds. That experience proved invaluable on other operations far afield in the Middle East and closer to home in Solomon Islands (the focus of [chapter 5](#)) and again in East Timor in 2006 ([chapter 6](#)).

CHAPTER | 5

OPERATIONS IN SOLOMON ISLANDS FROM 2000

East Timor stole the regional operational limelight in 1999 and 2000, but as the security situation in Solomon Islands deteriorated, developments drew increased attention. Tensions between the people from the islands of Malaita and Guadalcanal stretched back generations but, in the face of weak government, economic collapse and endemic corruption, they came to a boil in the late 1990s.¹

INITIAL OPERATIONS

OPERATION PLUMBOB

In June 2000 the situation boiled over, and the ADF was called to evacuate foreign nationals under Operation Plumbob. The ADF contingent revolved around 1 RAR under Lieutenant Colonel John Caligari (who later commanded 1 RAR as AUSBAT III in East Timor). Caligari's operations officer, Major Andrew Gallaway (who commanded 1 RAR in Timor-Leste in 2007) recalled: 'On that trip we sailed on HMAS *Manoora* for its first operational voyage. Major Pete Connolly was Officer Commanding C Company (the Ready Company Group, or RCG). The RSM, WO1 Steve Ward, also accompanied the CO on this trip.' Caligari recalled, 'It took us out of our battalion exercise and offshore for 3 weeks.' He noted approvingly the rationale for the 1 RAR Group being left behind as the Ready Battalion Group when 3rd Brigade deployed to East Timor in late 1999.² The combined Army and Navy capabilities deployed also stood in

contrast to those mustered for Operation Morris Dance off the coast of Fiji in 1987, this time with more capable amphibious ships and better-prepared ground troops.

OPERATION TREK

Following the evacuations the Australian Government engaged in seeking a resolution, seeing a breakdown of civil society so close to Australia's shores as too significant and too close to ignore. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer engaged in seeking an agreement at a conference in October 2000. The signing of the Townsville Peace Agreement that month led to the deployment of a carefully calibrated force contribution intended to meet a specific objective, then leave. The contingent that deployed was an unarmed and ostensibly neutral International Peace Monitoring Team (IPMT) of 50 people, including 14 New Zealanders and 35 Australians, including 25 ADF personnel. The deployment, known as Operation Trek, lasted between October 2000 and June 2002.

The team operated at five team sites (three on Guadalcanal and two on Malaita) with a headquarters at Henderson airfield on the outskirts of Honiara. The team's role was to support the indigenous Solomon Islands Peace Monitoring Council (PMC). The team worked closely with the council on confidence-building programs in towns and villages affected by the 1998–2000 ethnic conflict. The IPMT sought to monitor the containment of surrendered arms and report on the implementation of the agreement. Included in the team were Australian representatives of the ADF, DFAT, AusAID and the AFP, as well as New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Police and Defence forces. A number of police from Cook Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu and several Commonwealth members also participated.³

REGIONAL ASSISTANCE MISSION TO SOLOMON ISLANDS

By early 2003 the situation had again deteriorated, with the former Police Commissioner, Sir Fred Soaki, being assassinated in February. Solomon Islands were in a weak and vulnerable condition by mid-2003, when pressure mounted again for outside assistance. By July the Solomon Islands' Prime Minister Allan Kemakeza requested a 'strengthened assistance' mission from the Australian Prime Minister. By this time, Howard felt differently about Australia getting involved, having been influenced by events in

the United States on 11 September 2001 and on 12 October 2002 in Bali. As the earlier intervention did not have the desired effect, a more substantial and involved contribution was proposed. Howard decided on an activist course to help stabilise the 'arc of instability' around Australia.⁴

In July 2003 the 'on-line' battalion of the Ready Deployment Force, 2 RAR, under Lieutenant Colonel John Frewen, was warned for service. The response by Australia and its regional partners was called the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), the military support of which was Operation Anode. Howard and Downer agreed to 'go in with a new spirit of state building until the job was done, without any exit timetable'.⁵ This was a departure from earlier, more constrained force contributions for missions further afield and from force postures that preceded the onset of the 'war on terror'.

In the meantime, the Perth-based SAS Regiment was left out of the operation. According to the then CO of the SAS Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Rick Burr, the Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Peter Leahy, visited in 2003 and explained to him that he would not be sending special forces into the Solomon Islands. With the SAS having featured so prominently in Afghanistan in 2001 and 2002 and in Iraq in 2003, there was scope for those outside the special forces community again to feel overlooked. Burr recognised that, in the circumstances, this was 'a very considered and very deliberate choice of force'.⁶

FORCE COMPOSITION AND PROFILE

On 24 July 2003 more than half of 2 RAR deployed as the nucleus of Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) 635. The CJTF was a unique organisation with 1800 military personnel from five nations. Patrol elements were organised into four rifle companies, one each from Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, and a composite company from Australia, with platoons from Tonga and PNG. Frewen also had most of 2 RAR's Support and Admin Companies there at various stages. The CJTF also included maritime and air elements, including the entire New Zealand contribution under full operational control from the outset. Ironically, Australian air and maritime forces were initially only loosely allocated 'in support', although they were eventually placed under operational control as well.⁷

RAMSI, otherwise known as Operation Helpem Fren, was exceptional in that it was preventive, breaking new ground in lowering the threshold for intervention in the internal affairs of a sovereign state to a degree not



Senior officials of RAMSI and local people, on the verandah of the new police post at Isuna, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, during an official opening ceremony, November 2003. Left to right: unidentified local man; Assistant Commissioner Mark Johnsen (AFP); Ben McDevitt, Assistant Commissioner of the AFP; Deputy Commissioner of the Royal Solomon Islands Police, and Commander of RAMSI PPF; an unidentified man; Inspector Allan Sutherland (AFP); an unidentified man; Lieutenant Colonel John Frewen, Commander of the Coalition Task Force; and three unidentified men. (Photo: Stephen Dupont. AWM P04223.732)



Police and military personnel arrive for the official opening of Isuna police post, November 2003. Left to right: Inspector Allan Sutherland of the AFP; Lieutenant Colonel John Frewen, Commander of the Coalition Task Force and Commanding Officer of 2RAR; and Lieutenant Eccleston, Platoon Commander of 8 Platoon, C Company, 2RAR. (Photo: Stephen Dupont. AWM P04223.746)

witnessed in international peacekeeping.⁸ Arguably, such a task would have been the preserve of the special forces, but the scale of the challenge and the suitability of the Townsville-based troops meant otherwise in this instance. RAMSI was created as a police-led mission, but one of the reasons that the Participating Police Force was able to do its work

effectively (arresting some 6300 Solomon Islanders) was the cover provided by the large military force deployed with the police.⁹ As Special Coordinator, the diplomat (and later Secretary of the Australian Department of Defence) Nick Warner observed, 'We came in with a very large potent military force. . . We did that quite deliberately so that we didn't have to use military force during this operation, and it worked.'¹⁰

The military force adopted a fairly low profile. They arrived in Solomon Islands at dawn, deploying onto the infamous Second World War battle sites of Henderson Airfield by C-130 Hercules aircraft, and on nearby Red Beach by landing craft and Sea King helicopters from HMAS *Manoora*.¹¹ Once deployed, the forces remained mostly located on an old resort near the airport, unobservable from the road. This placement was in contrast to the buildings at the centre of town occupied, for instance, by the United Nations in Dili.¹² Nevertheless, the deployment sent an 'unambiguous message of resolve' to criminals and 'rendered resistance futile', Frewen argued. 'The use of military force in this instance was about messages that required subtle application. The substantial military presence, including land, air and sea assets, signalled to criminals and law-abiding citizens alike that the intervention in Solomon Islands was to be taken seriously.'¹³

TECHNOLOGICAL EDGE

A key part of the mission was reducing the prospect of further armed violence. There followed a three-week gun amnesty that drew in almost four thousand mostly vintage and home-made firearms, including seven hundred high-powered military weapons. Visiting police made more than 360 arrests for serious crimes, and 16 police outposts were also established in all provinces. Essentially, a small war was taken off the streets without the use of financial inducements or force. The high point, however, came with the celebrated arrest of ringleader Harold Keke, on 13 August, three weeks after the intervention commenced. Open days also proved effective. Through these events, noted Frewen, 'we promoted awareness of our technological edge over potential adversaries'. This included the demonstration of night vision goggles, ground sensors and tactical unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), which 'were a potent psychological tool that clearly played on people's minds'.¹⁴

The technological edge Frewen referred to consisted of technology that, in most part, was available only in limited quantities to the forces that deployed to East Timor in 1999. In the case of the UAVs, this was new

technology previously untried by the Army on operations. The Defence Minister, Senator Robert Hill, ensured that the UAVs were included as part of the force, against initial protestations from the land force commander.¹⁵ Notwithstanding the initial reluctance, the equipment was rapidly introduced and incorporated on the run.

SPAN OF COMMAND

In some ways the task force was operating in uncharted waters, and some aspects of it were fraught with potential difficulties. Frewen's span of command, for instance, was extraordinary. He had an array of majors directly subordinate to him, many of whom had not worked routinely with his battalion beforehand. Organisational cultural differences also led to some misunderstandings and friction between the cultures of the police, military, diplomatic and aid organisations that usually remained below the surface. RAMSI highlighted the need for improved inter-agency planning, both in Canberra and in Solomon Islands. Interoperability between the police and the military proved problematic. There were differences in jargon and meaning. Organisations simply were not prepared to work in an integrated manner, and 'work-arounds' were needed. Fortunately, the team included intelligent, resourceful and level-headed people who found the work-arounds.

SCALED-BACK FORCES

The main elements of the 2 RAR Battalion Group departed Solomon Islands in December 2003, leaving behind B Company. RAMSI was as popular as it had been when it arrived. This was testament, argued Frewen, to the skilful and balanced execution of operations throughout the deployment. Until April 2004 all of 2 RAR's companies participated on Operation Anode. Then a platoon from 5/7 RAR formed the Australian contribution to the Pacific Islands Company alongside soldiers from Tonga, PNG, Fiji and New Zealand. Together, they formed the RAMSI quick response force.¹⁶

In March 2004, 9 Platoon, C Company 5/7 RAR deployed to Solomon Islands and formed part of a five-platoon Response Force (RESFOR), commanded by Major Lachlan MacDonald, alongside platoons from New Zealand, PNG, Tonga and Fiji. The RESFOR core mission was to provide security to the police-led mission. This involved security tasks at the international airport, the Guadalcanal Beach resort where RAMSI

was stationed, at Rove Prison, Honiara's principal detention facility, and on the island of Malaita. Tasks included arrests and patrols alongside police elements, deploying by helicopter or Caribou aircraft.¹⁷

REINFORCEMENTS

By late 2004 the situation seemed sufficiently calm for a reduced military presence, and CTF 635 was reduced to a platoon of infantry from New Zealand working alongside an 11-nation Participating Police Force. On 22 December, however, an AFP Protective Services officer, Adam Dunning, was shot and killed while conducting a vehicle patrol with RAMSI. The 3rd Brigade Ready Company Group was A Company 1 RAR in Townsville, and it was put on alert on the same day. The Australian Government quickly decided to support the reinforcement of Operation Anode with the Ready Company Group, and within 18 hours of the government's decision, a hundred men, vehicles and equipment arrived in Solomon Islands by air.¹⁸ The rapid response demonstrated the results of more than two decades of investment in readiness preparation by the ADF since the raising of the Operational Deployment Force in Townsville in the early 1980s.

With 1 RAR's CO, Lieutenant Colonel Chris Field, appointed Commander CTF 635, A Company 1 RAR stayed in Solomon Islands just over a month, until 25 January 2005, operating on the basis of three premises: first, to reinforce RAMSI; second, to enhance the security environment; and third, to employ an effects-based approach. Enhancing security involved conducting more than three hundred tasks supporting the Participating Police Force, including foot and mobile patrols, supporting special response and investigative operations, conducting provincial patrols and providing a quick response force to assist with any high-value search operations.¹⁹ Field's emphasis on managing a wide range of non-kinetic tasks to generate the desired effects matched the approach Frewen had taken earlier. This reflected the ADF's maturing understanding of effects-based operations and 'Multidimensional Manoeuvre' (described in [chapter 12](#)). The Solomon Islands experience reinforced the relevance of that approach for the Army and the wider ADF.

FURTHER FORCE ROTATIONS

With RAMSI leaders wanting to maintain a visible presence in Solomon Islands, 3 RAR deployed B Company, under Major Dick Holloway, to



Members of RAMSI talk with local people at Rufoki village in northern Malaita, November 2003. Left to right: Private Rubens of 12 Platoon, D Company, 2 RAR; an unidentified Royal Solomon Islands police officer; an unidentified senior sergeant of the New Zealand Police; and eight local people. (Photo: Stephen Dupont. AWM P04225.270)

replace the soldiers from 1 RAR. 3 RAR's successful deployment, however, was marred by the death of Private Jamie Clark, who died when he fell down an abandoned mine shaft while searching for possible weapons caches.²⁰

Other battalions also took their turn in Solomon Islands, which allowed many junior leaders to gain additional experience. By late 2004 the security element of the task force had shrunk to an augmented platoon. A composite platoon of reservists, drawn from the 9th Battalion, the Royal Queensland Regiment (9 RQR) and 25/49 RQR of the Brisbane-based 7th Brigade, deployed for three months from November 2005 to February 2006.²¹

RIOTS IN 2006

By April 2006 with the Australian Government and the ADF distracted by operational commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan, RAMSI could not muster the attention required to address persistent and deep-seated

challenges. Growing unrest reflecting enduring problems with police reform, and governmental corruption beyond the remit of the Army's contribution, indicated that the military presence was becoming too small.²² Then, on 18 April, following riots in Honiara, the Ready Company Group deployed: this time it was D Company 1 RAR under Major Simon Moore-Wilton, who subsequently deployed with his company to Afghanistan in early 2007. The CO of 1 RAR, Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Gallaway, convened a planning conference one hour after being warned for a possible deployment. His battalion was called in from a well-deserved stand-down after having assisted with cleaning up Innisfail after Cyclone Larry (discussed in [chapter 11](#)). With support from the brigade commander, Brigadier Mick Slater, and dedicated headquarters staff (who themselves deployed to Timor-Leste only a few weeks later), pre-deployment preparations continued through the night, and the force was ready to deploy by 7.30 a.m. the next day.

Gallaway took command of CTF 635 (the following year he commanded 1 RAR on operations again in East Timor). More soldiers from 3 RAR, as well as two Iroquois helicopters from the 5th Aviation Regiment, soon joined the 1 RAR soldiers. Once on the ground, choke points, key points and the most dangerous trouble spots were patrolled and controlled in support of the Participating Police Force. The faces of Australian soldiers were 'a reassuring sight to the residents who just wanted the violence to stop'.²³ Lance Corporal Charles Boag, second in command of 7 Section, captured the feelings of many: he enjoyed deploying, even at short notice, and the locals 'were so happy to have us here'.²⁴ One participant observed that after several years of frustration over various aspects of the RAMSI mission, 'the Australian Army uniform still commands respect in the South-West Pacific'.²⁵

RESERVE FORCE ROTATIONS

A composite company, once again drawn from 9 RQR and 25/49 RQR (part of the 7th Brigade), replaced a company of artillery soldiers drawn from 8/12th Medium Regiment in December 2006. The CO of 25/49 RQR, Lieutenant Colonel Rowan Martin, took over as Commander CTF 635 at that time, commanding a 130-strong contingent.

In April 2007 a force of 140 reservists deployed to Solomon Islands. According to Major General Ian Flawith, Commander 2nd Division, this was the largest group of reservists from New South Wales to be deployed as a formed body since the Second World War. The soldiers, commanded

by Lieutenant Colonel Peter Connor, were drawn mainly from 8th and 5th Brigades. The contingent included a headquarters and an infantry company, along with signallers, armoured corps personnel, engineers, drivers and medics.²⁶ Their arrival coincided with an earthquake, which triggered a tsunami that obliterated several remote villages on outlying islands. Operation Tsunami Assist, involving primarily the coordination and delivery of aid by air to remote villages, was their first major task, and the reservists responded admirably to the challenge. The next group to deploy in early December was Army Reserve soldiers from Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania.

During this phase of the operation, the Army's High-Readiness Reserve forces demonstrated their ability and commitment to service. Their employment reflected that Regular forces were very busy with operations elsewhere and demonstrated the improved integration and common standards of training. The Army Reserve experienced a transformation following the change of focus from conventional warfighting to more low-level scenarios that soldiers could expect to encounter in a regional operational setting.²⁷

With the Army Reserve able to raise and deploy forces on rotation in the generally benign Solomon Islands, other Regular forces could focus on sustaining operations in East Timor and further afield in Iraq and Afghanistan. The smooth handling of responsibilities by Lieutenant Colonel Connor and his team, and their integration into a police-led mission, demonstrated the flexibility of the modern Australian soldier. Their experience capitalised on the experience Reserve forces had gained with the AUSBATTs in East Timor and demonstrated the ease with which high-readiness Reserve forces could be utilised effectively.

REFLECTIONS

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) saw the mission launched in 2003 as an example of 'good practice' in a 'whole-of-government' approach, but subsequent analysis pointed to a more mixed result as RAMSI's efforts barely began to tackle the structural societal weaknesses and sources of the original conflict.²⁸

Post-operational reports from Operation Anode suggested the ADF also had more work to do to demonstrate that it was a learning organisation. Senior Defence committees and successive governments concluded that the ADF performed very well on operations during the late 1980s and 1990s, but there was a 'lamentable pattern' of not using warning

time effectively to enable forces to prepare adequately.²⁹ Numerous challenges and issues remained. Notably, there was a residual unwillingness in some quarters to consider these 'other-than-war' operations as worthy of attention. They saw such operations as not worthy of much reflection as lessons to be learned and fed into the Army's training and equipment procurement systems. Such officers saw a focus on training and exercising for conventional warfighting skills as sufficient. This reluctance meant that frequent short-notice deployments would repeat the mistakes of previous short-notice deployments.

In spite of this apparent operational blind spot, Australia's experience in Solomon Islands provided another example of the five reasons for the Army's prowess at work. The common training standards applied to the Army's Regular and Reserve components facilitated the employment of both components. The emphasis on joint (tri-service) and inter-agency work was reinforced by the experience in Solomon Islands, as was the need to continue maintaining close ties with the New Zealand Defence Force and other Pacific Island forces. The Solomon Islands experience also reinforced the utility of training for operations with combined-arms battle groups, particularly training that emphasised interaction and integration of complementary capabilities of all the Army's regiments and corps as well as other civil organisations and the AFP.

Operations in Solomon Islands also reflected the ongoing significance of the Army's links with society. Unlike other operational deployments earmarked for Regular Army units, Solomon Islands provided an excellent opportunity for reservists to contribute as well. These links enabled the Army to attract a high calibre of volunteer reservists for a number of troop deployment rotations. Deployments to Solomon Islands also invigorated reservists who were prepared to commit the time. This invigoration had a leavening effect as it helped with personnel retention in several Army Reserve units.

Australia's sense of obligation to and concern over the South Pacific region and Solomon Islands in particular led the Australian Government to maintain its military presence there. This was despite, at times, local pressure for a reduction in the role of Australia's police and military forces. The Australian Government, having made a high-profile commitment to peace and stability in Solomon Islands, and fearing the potential ill effects of walking away, could not readily back out of Solomon Islands.

Despite soldiers working well with the Participating Police Force in Solomon Islands, there remained organisational and cultural obstacles to smooth police-military interaction. For instance, police had a more

reactive outlook to situations than their military counterparts. As one contingent commander, Colonel John Hutcheson, observed, this translated into compartmentalised, task-specific planning. The difference was then exacerbated by different threat assessment methodologies, which resulted in contrasting Army and Police interpretations of events. Recognising the difficulty, an inter-agency working group helped develop common procedures to better utilise limited resources.³⁰ Another development arising was the establishment of Australian Federal Police Liaison Officers (AFPLOs) working regularly alongside the ADF. In addition, an Army lieutenant colonel secondment to the Australian Institute of Police Management was established, in recognition of the significance of the ADF deploying alongside the AFP.

Notwithstanding the efforts of many, Solomon Islands would remain a place of enduring concern, requiring continued Australian attention. Solomon Islands also proved to be a lasting example of the shift in emphasis from joint-services to combined (i.e. international) and multi-agency operations. The tasks faced were considerably removed from the 'conventional' training scenarios taught at Army training schools and exercised on earlier field manoeuvres (i.e. field exercises). The contrast assisted in driving further change in the curricula of the Army's training institutions: it also reinforced the multiskilled nature of the Army. The effect of this change could be seen by contrasting the Army's performance with previous operations in the South-West Pacific in the 1980s and 1990s. On the other hand, with the emphasis on peace-support operations, some remained concerned over the Army's ability to maintain its high-end warfighting skills.

The Army's contribution to RAMSI also reflected a reluctance to rely exclusively on police for what had become a para-police function. In spite of the limited military utility, the enduring calls for the Army to remain in RAMSI reflected the sense of security that the Participating Police Forces felt thanks to the military presence. But with competing demands and an enduring low threat risk in Solomon Islands, the continued call for an Army presence proved increasingly challenging to support.

Notwithstanding the challenges in maintaining troop contributions, operations in Solomon Islands represented a significant change for the Army. For the first time on an operation overseas, Army was the 'supporting' and not the 'supported' government agency. This required a change of mindset, especially when other agencies were reticent to lead. Operations in Solomon Islands required the ADF and the Army in particular to show great adaptability in the way it nurtured, shaped and educated

other agencies in order to enable the directed agency, like the police, to lead.³¹

The responsiveness and capability of the units involved stood in stark contrast to the limited capability demonstrated on Operation Morris Dance in 1987. Indeed, other parts of the Pacific would again feature prominently in the ADF's consciousness, particularly in 2006.

CHAPTER | 6

OPERATION ASTUTE IN TIMOR-LESTE, 2006 AND BEYOND

Nearly two years after the withdrawal of the last Australian battalion group from East Timor (or ‘Timor-Leste’ in Portuguese) under the UN mandate, the security situation deteriorated dramatically following the sacking of several hundred soldiers from the East Timorese Army: part of the Falintil – East Timor Defence Force (known by its Portuguese acronym, F-FDTL). The factors leading to the outbreak of violence pointed to what in hindsight was a premature departure two years earlier. Yet despite years of experience of working in the newly independent country, the ADF and the Australian Government found themselves with little understanding of what prompted the return of international security forces.¹ Nevertheless the Army recognised its role as part of an inter-agency approach to a complicated incident and sought to come to grips with the opaque internecine disputes that led to the breakdown in law and order. Noting its complexity, the ADF, with the Army prominent, remained the government’s force of first resort to insert into the chaos in Dili in mid-May 2006. ADF units were pre-positioned for a rapid response as law and order broke down. Elements of the Australian Army were once again tasked to deploy at short notice to Dili as the main part of an international force assembled for Operation Astute.

The Australian deployment to East Timor followed the receipt of a formal request for military assistance to the Australian Government late on 24 May. Prime Minister Howard approved it immediately, and the VCDF, Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, travelled to Timor-Leste the next day to negotiate the terms and conditions of the deployment.

The ADF's mission was 'to assist the Government of Timor-Leste to facilitate the evacuation of Australian and other foreign nationals as is appropriate and necessary; stabilise the situation and facilitate the concentration of the various conflicting groups into safe and secure locations; and create a secure environment for the conduct of a successful dialogue to resolve the current crisis'.² Brigadier (later Major General) Michael Slater, Commander 3rd Brigade, was appointed commander of all Australian forces in Timor-Leste.

As the negotiations for the mission were taking place and before the arrival of Slater's force or any of the Special Forces under Lieutenant Colonel James McMahan, Lieutenant Colonel Grant Sanderson, the Australian Defence Cooperation Program manager in Timor-Leste, played a crucial role in containing the situation. Before the arrival of the forward elements of the Australian force, Sanderson and his team assisted the F-FDTL in cantoning themselves. Sanderson was the son of former Australian Army Chief and UN commander in Cambodia, Lieutenant General John Sanderson. Sanderson also commandeered F-FDTL trucks to deploy the force into their initial locations. Sanderson's team facilitated initial liaison between Slater's 3rd Brigade team and the government of Timor-Leste. According to Sanderson, 'it was my guys stuck in the real firefights' between clashing Timorese elements, and this occurred mostly before the arrival of the force from Australia.³ Sanderson and his team played a crucial role in facilitating the arrival of the Australian force and in preventing the situation from escalating even further.

ESTABLISHING A PRESENCE

Thereafter, the initial elements to deploy secured the Comoro airfield in order to enable the follow-on force to establish a presence in Dili before fanning out across the city. Slater, who had commanded 2 RAR during the initial INTERFET deployment, faced some challenges. This time the threat was harder to identify and contain as local police and soldiers had taken to fighting each other. Even when they were contained, armed gangs roamed the streets, making it particularly challenging for the Australian and other coalition forces to restore security without the use of lethal force. The problem was compounded by murky local political wrangling of which the Australians, at first at least, had only a limited understanding. Reflecting on these circumstances afterwards, Slater observed:

The first 10 to 14 days of [Operation] *ASTUTE* in 2006 were far more complex and dangerous than the situation I faced in 1999. In 2006 there had been a total breakdown of the rule of law and Timor-Leste was on the brink of civil war. There were approximately a dozen different groups and factions all struggling for control of the country and as a result the Australian Forces had NO allies in Dili until the arrival of the other international forces.

In 1999 most if not all Timorese in Dili were united in their objectives of gaining independence and developing a democratic society. Rallying the locals to work towards a unified vision was far more achievable in 1999 than it was in 2006. During 1999 there was potential for a miscalculation between ourselves and the TNI, but because of the high levels of discipline within 3rd Brigade and strong leadership within the [Indonesian military] the potential for miscalculation never eventuated. The presence in Dili of the [Indonesian military] assisted the deployment of the ADF in a number of ways in 1999.

This was far from the situation in 2006 when all groups and factions in Dili were generally hostile towards the presence of Australian soldiers for several weeks. The threat of the hostile population was further complicated by the number of high-powered weapons, numbering in the hundreds, that were spread throughout the population. The JTF [Joint Task Force] was confronted at times by crowds in excess of 15 000 hostile protesters. This was all within a looming humanitarian disaster involving a reported 170 000 internally displaced people. Atop of all of this, the F-FDTL was being cantoned against their will in two main locations and its members were constantly agitating to take to the streets and play an armed active role in internal security. Restraining this force required strength, diplomacy, understanding and cunning on the part of the [JTF].⁴

Sanderson was more critical than this. According to him, Timor-Leste political leaders Taur Matan Ruak and Xanana Gusmão ‘played’ Slater and Australia ‘like a fiddle’, and at no stage was Slater in control of what was happening.⁵ But to be fair to Slater, it was hard to find anyone in or out of Timor-Leste who had a clear understanding of what was going on. Arguably, this was an indictment on the Australians for having ‘dropped the ball’ on Timor while distracted by other priorities further afield. This also reflected on Australians’ understanding of Melanesian culture and politics. There was clear room for improvement.

The force at Slater's disposal had to be able to handle this level of complexity and uncertainty. His force included a strong Australian presence in and around Dili with around 1300 ground troops conducting security operations, supported by five hundred Malaysian troops and a company of New Zealand infantry.

FORCE COMPOSITION

The Australian contribution centred on the 3 RAR infantry battalion group, under Lieutenant Colonel Mick Mumford, who had served as the 1 RAR operations officer with UNTAET in 2000–01. Owing to extensive commitments elsewhere, the force deployed with a disparate group of subelements brought together at short notice especially for the operation. Mumford's operations officer, Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) Gavin Keating, recalled that the 3 RAR-based group included one infantry rifle company from 3 RAR, two rifle companies from 2 RAR and one from 1 RAR. The group also included 3 RAR's Admin Company and a composite Support Company drawn from 2 RAR and 3 RAR along with G Company, a rerolled artillery battery from Townsville. A commando company group from 4 RAR (Cdo) operated alongside the SAS elements inside the Special Forces Component.⁶ Support was provided by Black Hawks from 5th Aviation Regiment as well as the RAAF (including Airfield Defence Guards), and naval support from the fleet's amphibious ships (HMA Ships *Manoora*, *Kanimbla* and *Tobruk*).⁷

A key tactic employed during this period was to deploy small teams across Dili with an Armoured Personnel Carrier-mounted mobile force and a company-sized airmobile force. Eventually these patrols also included members of the UN Police Force (UNPOL). The goal was to use the small teams to 'dislocate' (i.e. to cause delay and unsettle) an adversary, then dispatch a larger force to deal more comprehensively with the situation. Working closely with the police at the tactical level proved crucial in enabling arrests to be made, detainees appropriately handled and processed and legally held to account for their actions.⁸

Slater later claimed: 'The May 2006 deployment was our first truly [Combined Joint Inter-agency Task Force] involving coalition partners, AFP, DFAT, and working with a range of other Australian and foreign [non-government organisations] including the UN. The deployment was at very short notice and characterised by the diversity within its composition, the speed at which the force was concentrated and deployed, with some tri-service contributions being made on the run.'⁹ In some

ways, Slater benefited from the experience with the similarly structured force that deployed to Solomon Islands in 2003. In essence the ADF had learned important lessons from earlier experience and adapted accordingly.

LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

The breakdown in law and order faced by Slater's force indicated deep-seated problems within the fledgling nation that would not be addressed in one six-month deployment. In fact there was widespread recognition, in Timor-Leste, Canberra and in UN Headquarters in New York, that Australian military engagement would be required for an extended period. With a longer-term commitment in mind, the Australian Government committed the ADF to maintaining a 'green helmet' force, under direct Australian rather than UN control, to strive to assist more directly the East Timorese to restore stability. Colonel Mal Rerden was selected as the officer to command the follow-on force and initially deployed as Slater's deputy commander, replacing Colonel Don Roach, who was due for rotation back to Australia.

FORCE ROTATION

On completion of Slater's term, and as the Australian force was being drawn down to nearly eight hundred personnel in late 2006, Rerden was promoted to brigadier and tasked to command the residual force, based around Lieutenant Colonel Scott Goddard's 6 RAR Battalion Group. Goddard was the 5/7 RAR operations officer with INTERFET in 1999 and early 2000 so, like Slater, he had his own experiences to draw upon. Goddard's group included a rifle company from 1 RAR and G Company, which was a rerolled air defence battery from Adelaide's 16th Air Defence Regiment.

The unusual mix of forces reflected the large number of operations elsewhere, which left the Army with little choice. But the choice of 16th Air Defence Regiment also indicated that not just infantry soldiers could perform many of the roles of infantry. Particularly with some additional infantry-centric training, artillerymen could perform several roles otherwise performed by infantrymen. Admittedly, the infantry's central and arguably most challenging role (i.e. to close with and to kill or capture the enemy regardless of weather, season or terrain) was not tested in this

instance. Still, the flexibility displayed by the soldiers of 16th Air Defence Regiment reflected well on them and the ethos of the Army that made it possible. In selecting these soldiers, the Army was demonstrating just how tightly resourced it was, with numerous operations running concurrently (in Solomon Islands, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere). The Army also was demonstrating the influence of the regimental or corps identities. This underscored the age-old need for excellent all-arms training for soldiers and officers alike. In addition, the Army was showing how flexible and responsive it had become in the years since the 1999 East Timor intervention.

By the end of 2006, the 6 RAR Battalion Group was working more and more closely with the UN Police to facilitate a handover of responsibilities to the F-FDTL and the Timorese Police Force. But with elections scheduled by mid-2007, and several outstanding issues contributing to the May breakdown left unresolved, the force's work remained incomplete and Goddard's troops were replaced by yet another battalion group in 2007, this time based around 1 RAR commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Gallaway. His command included W Company from the Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment, so his command was renamed the Anzac Battle Group.

Gallaway's troops had a challenging role to play, providing security support for the presidential elections in April and May as well as the parliamentary elections at the end of June. Gallaway attributed the smooth running of the elections to a combined effort. 'I would be presumptuous to say that we deserve all the credit. There are a lot of players involved here – UNPOL and the UN in general did an outstanding job in running the elections ... and the people of Timor-Leste deserve credit for their excellent approach to exercising their democratic right to vote.'¹⁰ Gallaway's response was appropriate for the occasion, but he understated the significance of the small yet disproportionately influential Australian forces in ensuring that the elections went smoothly.

SPECIALISED SUPPORT

In the background through much of this period, Special Operations Command forces had rapidly mounted and deployed the Apprehension Task Group to Timor-Leste. The rapid deployment and excellent work of the Task Group early in 2007, coupled with the ongoing deployment of a Commando Company Group, demonstrated the ongoing responsiveness and versatility of Special Operations Command at a time when they also

were heavily committed on operations in the Middle East. Of note, more than a hundred fully qualified Reserve commandos deployed on operations in Timor-Leste during this period. Special Operations Command's contribution once again demonstrated the utility of having such highly trained and resourced troops available for contingencies.¹¹

Another key element was the composite ANZAC Aviation Task Group, under the command of Major Andrew Johnstone. The Task Group had elements drawn from 5th Aviation Regiment and 1st Aviation Regiment as well as the Royal New Zealand Air Force, with six Black Hawk helicopters, four Kiowa light observation helicopters and two New Zealand Iroquois utility helicopters. The task group performed aeromedical evacuations, reconnaissance and surveillance, air mobility operations, general passenger and stores movement and imagery collection. They also delivered ballot boxes to remote communities during the mid-year elections in 2007. Johnstone observed that the three-squadron task group provided 'a new dimension in achieving our mission of responsive aviation support to Joint Task Force 631'.¹²

A key component of the ANZAC Battle Group was the engineers from the 3rd Combat Engineer Regiment (3 CER). The 3 CER 'sappers' worked on a range of reconstruction projects around Timor-Leste to help rebuild rundown structures. In Los Palos, for instance, near the eastern tip of Timor-Leste, one project also involved the Timorese Police and Timorese Army. Sapper Tim War explained: 'They come around to see what is happening and we get them on the tools. We have showed them drop saws and got them measuring and cutting.' In another instance, the sappers constructed equipment for a children's playground. Sergeant Matthew Hill commented: 'When [they] found out it was for the kids, the guys came in and built a seesaw, monkey bars, swings and a cubby house. They also built some tables and furniture as well.' The project took eleven soldiers three days to complete.¹³ But the best way to quantify the results was in the goodwill generated.

The focus on reconstruction and infrastructure development reflected the emphasis placed on ensuring that the Australians cemented friendships and built confidence in government institutions. In an address to Australian troops on 29 October 2007, President José Ramos-Horta thanked the Australians and New Zealanders for their efforts since the crisis in May 2006, saying, 'I thank you all again for coming and rest assured that your presence is extremely important for Timor.'¹⁴ Indeed, Australia's contribution provided a leavening effect for East Timor's stability and security. With a delicately balanced political and security



Brigadier John Hutcheson with locals at 'Beach Blue'. (John Hutcheson)

situation enduring, and with the Timorese president backing ongoing participation, Australia's military presence endured for some time beyond 2007. This was a credit to the men and women of the Australian Army, but it also pointed to the need to continue finding ways to adapt and adjust as circumstances changed.

FURTHER FORCE ROTATIONS

With the Timor-Leste parliamentary and presidential elections completed relatively uneventfully, Brigadier Mal Rerden completed his deployment and was replaced by Brigadier John Hutcheson in mid-2007. Gallaway's battalion, 1 RAR, was also replaced as the third Timor-Leste Battle Group by 2 RAR, under Lieutenant Colonel Ben James. The 2 RAR Battalion Group's mission rehearsal exercise took place in early September 2007 at Townsville's High Range Training Area, with more than 30 units contributing troops from all the Army's various specialist corps from around Australia, although the majority were from the Townsville-based 3rd Brigade. The exercise demonstrated the benefits of a mature system for force preparation. In Timor-Leste, Lieutenant Colonel James's unit was



Brigadier John Hutcheson stands behind East Timorese President José Ramos-Horta addressing the troops in the Combined Task Force in Dili in 2007. (John Hutcheson)

joined by elements of the New Zealand Defence Force and became the next rotation of the ANZAC Battle Group.¹⁵ The close working relationship with New Zealand elements spoke to the significance of ties with close allies.

REFLECTIONS

On reflection, Operation Astute stands as a useful contrast to the forces deployed to East Timor in 1999. By 2006, even with forces heavily committed on operations elsewhere, the ADF could muster significant naval, air and ground forces to undertake a mission arguably as complex as that faced by INTERFET in 1999. The INTERFET mission consumed the overwhelming majority of focus and effort of the ADF whereas, by 2006, the ADF undertook the task with relative ease – admittedly the deployment was on a smaller scale and to what had become familiar territory. Indeed, with better resourcing and closer government interest in events, the Army's experience was a more positive one than previously. Troops who deployed did so with a considerably greater baseline of experience and general competence, particularly in the range of enabling skills that

the peacetime Army of the 1980s and early 1990s had neglected, including key logistic and intelligence enablers that had withered before INTERFET but which had been revitalised subsequently.

While the deployment was on a smaller scale than previously, the complexity and ambiguity of the situation on the ground placed considerable demands on the soldiers involved. With little to indicate who was in the right and who was not, or who was supportive, each and every soldier had to be confident about what was and was not permissible. Here the benefits of the common individual training and combined field training bore real fruit. Indeed, the opaque and highly tense political problems behind the outbreak of violence in May 2006 meant there was a requirement for soldiers to display high levels of initiative and critical decision-making skills. Soldiers simply had little indication of who was 'friendly' and who was not. They had to exercise remarkable restraint and initiative in a murky situation. The fact that the situation was brought under control so quickly is a reflection of how the Australian Army had progressed. Soldiers with less finesse or skill easily could have exacerbated the situation. The Australians' performance echoed the delicate work done with RAMSI in Solomon Islands.

The strong working relationship with New Zealand bore testimony to the fourth reason for prowess. Similarly, engagement through the FPDA validated training undertaken with Malaysia as a means to engage regional partners and call on them for support when in need.

Notwithstanding the utility of ties with close allies and regional partners, the East Timor crisis in 2006 revealed Australia's embarrassingly casual disregard for East Timor as an enduring strategic priority. After having gained a wealth of goodwill in 1999 and beyond, the Australian Government, with the ADF in tow, had largely walked away from East Timor, squandering much of that goodwill while it focused on priorities further afield. The 2006 experience demonstrated the need to maintain an enduring focus on Australia's immediate region.

In the meantime, the Australian Government was being distracted by calls for military commitments in the Middle East. Problems there, however, had been exercising Australian military minds for some time.

PART | 3

THE MIDDLE EAST AREA OF OPERATIONS

Following the events in New York, Washington DC and Pennsylvania on 11 September 2001, Australia readily agreed to support the US-led efforts to oust Al Qaeda and the Taliban from Afghanistan. Prime Minister Howard committed Australian forces, from all three services, to operations in the Middle East that ended up being for a longer period than either world war of the twentieth century. But this time they did so while avoiding the politically contentious issues of conscription and heavy casualties by making niche and calibrated force contributions and by utilising only a professional, all-volunteer force.¹

Operations in the Middle East provided continuities and discontinuities with what was envisaged for the defence of Australia. The rubric that had been central to Australia's defence strategy since the withdrawal from Vietnam essentially was superseded by one that synthesised 'forward defence' and 'defence of Australia'. That synthesis reflected the changes driven by the events of 11 September 2001 and their aftermath.

For instance, through the establishment of bare bases across the north of Australia, Fleet Base West in Western Australia and the increased Army presence in the north, the objectives of the 1987 White Paper were accomplished. This left scope for a reconciliation with the contrasting priorities of 'defence of Australia' and 'forward defence'. Arguably, the East Timor experience both reinforced the utility of the defence of Australia model (with northern bases and infrastructure critical for the lodgement in East Timor) and stressed the need for a strategic repositioning, with more of a 'forward defence' mindset. The facilities established at Darwin were instrumental in the success of the INTERFET operation, yet the limited ability to project and sustain a force away from Australian shores (or from the sea, around the coast of Australia itself) exposed a significant capability shortfall that would be addressed in the years that followed.

Operations in the Middle East, however, exposed a historically deep-seated impulse to remain active far beyond Australia's shores. Since 1885 Australians had felt compelled to be engaged in distant military operations, sending a contingent to support British forces in the Sudan. Thereafter Australians fought in the Middle East during both world wars and maintained a peacekeeping presence there for most of the years since. Little emphasis was given, however, to the historically consistent imperative to remain engaged with affairs in the Middle East, particularly given the ongoing reliance of industrialised societies like Australia on Middle Eastern oil and trade routes. After all, until well after the Second World War Britain was Australia's main trade partner, and the main trade route was via the Suez Canal. This was vital ground for Australia.

Events after 11 September 2001 would see the Middle East return to centre stage. Government policy shifted in part in recognition of the need to protect and advance Australia's national interests further from Australian shores than was envisaged in the preceding two decades. Yet the Middle East commitments happened while operations were underway around Australia as well as in Timor-Leste, Solomon Islands and elsewhere.

In contrast to the commitments in the major wars in the Middle East in the early to mid-twentieth century, Australia did not rely on mass mobilisation of troops. Instead, it chose to make small contributions to generate carefully considered strategic effects – notably in support of Australia's major alliance partner, the United States. There were compelling reasons beyond the alliance relationship for Australia to engage on these security issues, as did many other powers. But the government had an eye to minimising the domestic political risk from an open-ended commitment

along the lines of Australia's war in Vietnam. Each decision to commit forces, therefore, was carefully evaluated for the tactical, operational and strategic effects likely to be generated and the political bow waves likely to be stirred back home. When Howard invoked the ANZUS Alliance, little did he realise that his commitment of troops would continue beyond the end of his term in office.

Notwithstanding these overarching constraints, operations in the Middle East would provide a wide range of unique additional challenges and opportunities to learn and adapt. These are the subject of chapters 7, 8 and 9.

CHAPTER | 7

OPERATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN, 2001–02

On 11 September 2001 John Howard was in Washington DC, having celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the ANZUS Alliance the day before at Washington's Navy Yard.¹ The experience of being in Washington at that time left a very strong impression on him, and within three days he invoked the mutual defence clauses of the ANZUS Treaty, for the first time. The United States quickly identified Afghanistan as the primary target, being the state ruled by the Taliban and closely associated with the terrorist group Al Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden. The Taliban's refusal to expel Al Qaeda triggered the allied attacks aimed at their overthrow. The attacks began on 7 October, and by 12 November the capital, Kabul, had fallen to the Northern Alliance, the US-led coalition's principal Afghan allies against the Taliban.²

OPERATIONS BASTILLE, SLIPPER AND FALCONER

Despite still having considerable forces on operations elsewhere, the Australian Government decided to support US-led combat operations in Afghanistan under Operation Slipper. But with troops in East Timor, Solomon Islands and other potential hot spots being watched in Australia's region, the government was reluctant to make large commitments to a far-away conflict that might have left it unable to respond appropriately to regional contingencies.³ Recognising the imperative to make a meaningful contribution, Howard sought to keep the initial

contribution contained and time-constrained. In keeping with the approach taken since Whitlam's military disengagement from Singapore and Vietnam in the mid-1970s, Howard wanted to avoid being embroiled in longer-term fighting, reconstruction or 'messy nation building', preferring instead 'a surgical operation with a finite duration'.⁴ That ultimately meant the special forces were the only viable option.

On 4 October Howard announced the military commitment to Afghanistan.⁵ The initial contingent despatched to prepare planning options for Australia's involvement had Brigadier Ken Gillespie as National Commander, Brigadier Andrew Nikolic as Deputy Commander and Chief of Staff and Lieutenant Colonel Roger Noble as Chief Staff Officer Operations (J3). This was a team that was to come together again in the first rotation in southern Iraq in early 2005 (as discussed in [chapter 8](#)).⁶ Gillespie's team established itself in the 'trailer park' of 52 national contingents hastily set up outside US Central Command (CENTCOM) Headquarters in Tampa, Florida. Gillespie installed liaison officers in key components of the headquarters. His proactive approach quickly helped to build relationships and trust, earning Australia a place within the CENTCOM command group.⁷ Major Jim McMahon was the Special Forces Liaison Officer assigned. McMahon was the quintessential accomplished special forces officer, having featured prominently in East Timor. He would do so again in Afghanistan in 2005 (discussed in [chapter 9](#)).

To provide overall command of Australian force elements deployed to the Middle East, Brigadier (later Major General) Maurie McNarn was appointed national commander of the Australian forces, with a headquarters of about 60 personnel. In that capacity he oversaw Operations Slipper, Bastille and Falconer. Operation Slipper was Australia's contribution to the war on terrorism that was conducted after the invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001 (discussed below). Operation Bastille involved the deployment of two thousand personnel for possible operations in Iraq, including RAAF F/A-18 fighter aircraft, Navy frigates and amphibious transport, as well as Army landing craft and special forces. The third operation, Falconer, was Australia's contribution to coalition operations to disarm Iraq, which employed the forces mustered in the Middle East as part of Operation Bastille (discussed in [chapter 8](#)). These deployments occurred while Australia remained on operations in Solomon Islands and East Timor.

In the meantime, US paramilitary elements had been inside Afghanistan since late September. The next phase involved US Marine Corps and special forces elements deploying to establish a base in the

south of Afghanistan. Thanks to the work of Gillespie's team in networking, the 1st SAS Squadron was committed to the operations in November 2001 as part of a US Marine Expeditionary Unit. This unit was based at the former Soviet airbase near Kandahar in southern Afghanistan known as Forward Operating Base (FOB) Rhino.⁸ Australians had last served in Afghanistan with the UN Mine Clearance Training Team from 1989 to 1993, and the Australian engineers' experience was tapped to inform planning for this additional deployment.⁹

SAS Regiment CO Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Peter 'Gus' Gilmore led the advance team to FOB Rhino. The SAS team deployed as a self-sufficient group with their own equipment and vehicles. Gilmore spoke of it as like wading through ankle-deep talcum powder (because of the dust) in a place that 'looked like Mars'.¹⁰ From Kandahar, the SAS team conducted further reconnaissance and surveillance operations across much of southern Afghanistan. Two further rotations of 150 troops served in Afghanistan through to December 2002, based at Rhino, adjacent to an airfield on the border between Kandahar and Helmand provinces, as well as at Bagram airfield north of Kabul. The forces used long-wheel-base Land Rovers and helicopters. Donkeys were available for administrative tasks, too.¹¹

On 16 February 2002 the first Australian soldier, SAS Sergeant Andrew Russell, was killed in Afghanistan. His vehicle drove over a landmine near Kandahar, ominously pointing to the source of future casualties.¹² Despite the efforts of a US medical rescue team parachuted in to stabilise him in preparation for evacuation by helicopter, he was pronounced dead on arrival at Kandahar. Reflecting the close ties between allies, Russell's colleagues carried his flag-draped coffin onto an awaiting US Air Force C-130 Hercules aircraft while pipers from Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry played bagpipes in his honour.¹³

Howard was aware of the human dimension of sending Australians into danger and mindful of the influence of casualties on public opinion. But he knew there were political consequences from making this commitment. US former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage dismissed suggestions that Australia did not deserve to have a strong sense of the importance of its contributions to US military endeavours. To Armitage, the political implications of Australian support were of 'enormous import'. Australia had committed to doing some of the dirty and dangerous work that was 'very important to us politically'.¹⁴

Shortly after Russell's death, the SAS task group were reassigned from the Marines to work with the US Army's 10th Mountain Division based

to the north at Bagram Airfield.¹⁵ From late February 2002 the SAS contingent was involved in Operation Anaconda, along the Afghanistan–Pakistan border, fighting alongside US, Canadian, British and other coalition troops.¹⁶ Anaconda was a 16-day operation that involved a hundred Australians participating in a ‘hammer and anvil’ operation with two thousand coalition troops against Taliban and Al Qaeda elements. Australians had gone into the Shah-i-Kot valley to conduct reconnaissance in support of the 10th Mountain Division and quickly gained the Americans’ confidence.¹⁷

The Battle of Takur Ghar occurred during this period when a US Chinook helicopter sought to land US troops on a mountaintop occupied by Al Qaeda troops. According to the Australian contingent commander, Lieutenant Colonel Rowan Tink, the savage battle that ensued resulted in the death of a ‘very large number of enemy fighters’.¹⁸ An Australian SAS patrol was in a position overlooking the helicopter landing site and provided crucial support, engaging the enemy with sniper fire and calling in air strikes onto the surrounding area to prevent the US troops from being overrun. Their efforts were instrumental in facilitating the US soldiers’ eventual rescue. Commander Special Operations Command Major General Duncan Lewis described this as ‘the most substantial firefight that the Australian Army had been in since Vietnam at that stage’.¹⁹ Sergeant Matthew Bouillaut was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his outstanding leadership of the patrol involved in this action.²⁰ An Australian signaller also was awarded the Medal for Gallantry, having called in air support at a crucial stage in the battle.²¹

Gilmore was later awarded an Australian Distinguished Service Cross for his leadership and the US Bronze Star in recognition of the task group’s efforts. In mid-December 2002 Gilmore mused to himself, ‘I won’t be back here again . . .’²² After 13 months of operations, optimistic assessments indicated that the Taliban appeared routed and that their remnants had withdrawn into Pakistan.²³

The utility of special forces for such operations appeared overwhelmingly vindicated by the success of this operation. In the face of considerable challenges the Australian special forces performed outstandingly well, operating remotely in small, network-enabled groups delivering disproportionate effects on their adversaries. Howard appeared vindicated for selecting the special forces for this dangerous mission. Compared to previous combat operations, the casualties had been surprisingly few. The government’s approach appeared consistent with that taken by other post–Vietnam War governments: casualty avoidance and modest but

Carefully placed contributions generated a not-inconsequential military effect. But the military effect was geared towards the desired political effect. In this case, the military helped rout the Taliban, bolster the coalition's reputation as an international force and strengthen Australia's ties with the United States.

Incidentally, the contribution also led to a reinvigoration of military ties with Britain. Since Britain's withdrawal from 'east of Suez' in the early 1970s, Australia's engagement with Britain had been gradually eroding. To be sure, bilateral military exchanges such as Exercise Long Look continued, and other exercises also were conducted occasionally. But Britain's focus on Europe and the Atlantic had left little for engagement with the FPDA countries. However, with a resurgence of Middle East operations, there was fresh impetus for collaboration. Likewise, with Canadian forces operating in Afghanistan, there was justifiable reason for considering closely each other's experiences. In a similar manner, Australia commenced engagement with participating NATO European countries. Little did they realise how they would need to collaborate with one another even further in the years ahead.

Thereafter, when calls were made for contributions for a possible invasion of Iraq, the Australian Government felt confident that, without undue risk, it could make a contribution to generate commensurate 'political and military effects'. Being eager once again to keep casualties to a minimum and to maximise the government political capital, Howard turned again to the most trusted and highly capable ground force military option: the special forces.

CHAPTER | 8

WAR IN IRAQ, 2003–07

Australia's contribution to the war in Iraq in 2003 was carefully calibrated and followed a series of incremental commitments that preceded the actual invasion in 2003. As the junior coalition partner, Australia formulated its own strategic objectives, notably to support the United States and strengthen the bilateral security relationship. On Iraq, the government acted with unanimity, and the CDF, General Cosgrove, tightly controlled Australia's military mission from the outset. This approach reflected remarkable continuity in the form of Australian engagement on military operations far from Australia's shores on 'wars of choice' in the post-Vietnam War years. In essence, Cosgrove closely followed Howard's direction to keep Australia's objectives limited.¹

OPERATION POLLARD

While Australian forces played a prominent role in the war in 2003, their involvement in the region dated back several years. In 1998 Australia's commitment of an SAS combat search-and-rescue force to Kuwait, as part of Operation Pollard, showed support for the United States' increasingly tough stance against Iraq's President Saddam Hussein. A squadron of SAS troops deployed in mid-February under the command of Major (later Brigadier) Mark Smethurst and soon integrated New Zealand's troop-sized SAS contribution, D Troop into the squadron. The CO of the SAS, Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Mike Hindmarsh, and his logistics officer, Major Brad Rickerby, deployed the Special Operations

Command and Control Element (SOCCE), and Hindmarsh became commander of the Anzac Special Operations Force (ANZAC SOF).² Hindmarsh acknowledged later that this was a relatively small but strategically important contribution, which enabled the government quickly to demonstrate commitment to the coalition without overextending itself.³ Not surprisingly, therefore, the nucleus of the ADF's force option for the Iraq war in 2003 was an SAS squadron group deployed as a Special Forces Task Group to the Iraqi western desert. This approach reflected Howard's preference for a 'quick and clean' intervention that was 'in at the pointy end and then out fast'. Such an approach would satisfy American desires for an Australian contribution while conveniently limiting its size and scope.⁴

OPERATIONS BASTILLE AND FALCONER

The Australian national commander, Brigadier McNarn, observed that the Army's original proposal was to deploy Darwin-based 2nd Cavalry Regiment with a company of mounted infantry, with special forces assigned to conduct deeper reconnaissance, as well as a number of US-enabling capabilities. This proposal envisaged Australia undertaking most of the clearance operations in western Iraq. For a variety of political and logistical reasons the decision was made to omit the infantry and cavalry components and rely on the special forces instead.⁵ One retired senior officer was critical of the decision. For him, it reflected both a 'lack of courage on the part of [the government] and/or a recognition that the Army could not fight, or both'.⁶ The exclusion of conventional forces had repercussions as special forces elements came to be considered the government's force of choice, to the chagrin of many among the conventional forces.

In light of the nature of operations undertaken by the Special Forces Task Group, Hindmarsh admitted that the job could have been done by Australian cavalry forces. Desert clearance was a cavalry role that pre-dated mechanisation of the cavalry. But Hindmarsh argued that they were not agile or responsive enough to achieve the objective given the time frame involved.⁷ Perhaps more importantly, the government's fear of casualties was the trump issue, pointing to the efficacy of the special forces as the less risky choice. Another concern was that the conventional forces were not fully equipped to conduct real operations in such a high-threat environment far from low-level contingencies envisaged in the 1980s and 1990s. After all, the Army only had obsolescent Leopard I tanks and the RAAF's F/A-18 aircraft lacked important electronic equipment.⁸



Informal group portrait. Left to right: Group Captain Ian Meyn, Brigadier Maurie McNarn and Lieutenant Colonel James McMahon within the compound of the Presidential Palace North. The damage to the building in the background was probably the result of coalition bombing during the early stages of the war. (Photo: David Dare Parker. AWM P04159.033)

While some argued about the efficacy of the SAS choice, Cosgrove was clear on Australia's limited political objectives translating into limited military objectives. For Cosgrove, a priority was to avoid Australian forces being tied up in Baghdad. Another priority was to transit sensitively through a neighbouring country – and this task would not lend itself to larger-footprint and higher-profile conventional forces such as a US armoured division. According to a former CO of the SAS Regiment and subsequently Commander 1st Division, Major General Rick Burr, there was also an issue of readiness that reflected on broader investment decisions and on the affordability of conventional forces. The special forces were chosen because they were small and ready, and practised at operating in Afghanistan alongside US counterparts. It also helped that the US military had specifically asked for the SAS for any Iraq mission due to their demonstrated versatility and interoperability. Realistically, there were very few military options left to protect the political strategy. Burr explained: 'Policy drove strategy which arrived at effective military options to achieve that. In essence, the SAS's role was a strategic raid – to



Protestors at a rally in Garema Place, Canberra, protest the Australian Government's decision to send Australian troops to Iraq. (Photo: Sue Ducker. AWM P04055.003)

achieve a strategic objective and with a planned withdrawal. It was very calculated with clearly defined, limited objectives.⁹

Arguably the most compelling reason to avoid deploying non-special forces troops was political. In farewelling the troops, the leader of the Opposition, Simon Crean, wished the troops well but said they should not be going.¹⁰ His comments reflected concerns over Australia's commitment to Iraq and presaged protests that echoed, albeit faintly, the anti-war protests of the Vietnam War era. Crean's views were echoed by the previous Labor leader and former Defence Minister Kim Beazley, who explained: 'Labor had always believed that Australia's military commitments should be time-limited when they are undertaken in regions where Australia does not have strong permanent interests.'¹¹ But at the time, and with American assurances, Australian troops would not be required beyond the initial combat phases of the operation. Howard was confident



Australian soldiers and allies commemorate Anzac Day each year, especially on operations. This image was taken at US headquarters in Baghdad, shortly after the fall of the city and its regime in 2003. (Lieutenant Colonel [Retd] Don Maclean)

that his approach did not breach the post-Vietnam convention of avoiding politically damaging domestic friction as he was making only a carefully calibrated force contribution far from Australia's shores. Special forces could be deployed and redeployed at short notice. Conventional forces, like the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, which was well suited to the fast-paced operations undertaken in Iraq's western desert, would have taken longer to disentangle.

McNarn had a clear understanding of these dynamics. He exercised national command over the deployed forces, including RAAF F/A-18 fighter aircraft and the deployed RAN ships, and played an important role ensuring that Howard's strategy was maintained, using the national 'red card' – a measure intended to enable McNarn to challenge American planners when a proposed course of action contravened the guidelines or overstepped the Australians' mandate. McNarn used the 'red card' when the Americans proposed something that had the potential to compromise Australia's legal position, such as targeting for destruction sites that were



The Minister for Defence, Robert Hill, Chief of Defence Force, General Peter Cosgrove and Brigadier Maurie McNarn, the Australian national commander during Operation Falconer, arrive at the captured Al Asad Airbase in western Iraq. (Photo: David Dare Parker. AWM P04101.405)

beyond operational necessity, or further extending the forces beyond a point to which the government had agreed.

McNarn and his staff faced several issues for which most had never been trained. Despite the lack of specific training, McNarn observed that his military education meant that he was able to adapt as he went. The Australian Army's fundamental education, his exposure to other units on previous operations, combined with reading widely and having a willingness to examine new ideas proved critical, argued McNarn.¹²

Once the war commenced, the SAS performed magnificently, engaging in numerous firefights as they set out to accomplish their mission of denying Iraq the ability to launch theatre ballistic missiles from Iraq's western desert. Other missions included harassing operations, destruction of critical command and control nodes and preventing freedom of movement of Iraqi forces. Colonel John Mansell, Chief of Staff of Special Operations Command, briefed that 'the insertion of the force was quite an achievement, carried out by night by vehicle and helicopter into areas remote from friendly conventional forces'. Thereafter, Mansell observed, 'Every day the SASR were in some form of heavy contact with the enemy . . . we used



An unidentified member of the SAS at Al Asad Airbase in western Iraq.
(Photo: David Dare Parker. AWM P04101.401)

Javelin rocket launchers, heavy machine-guns, Mk 19 grenade launchers and sniper rifles. This heavy lay-down of fire, coupled with the aggressive front foot approach of the SASR and extensive use of close air support, was enough to break the spirit of the most demanding enemy assault.’ The Special Forces Task Group completed its mission, securing their assigned area of responsibility in one week.¹³

Major Peter Tinley, Deputy Commander for the Special Forces Task Group in Iraq, was made a Member of the Order of Australia for his role in the planning and coordination of the operation. Tinley spent three months planning for the operation in the United States before deploying to the Middle East. ‘The government hadn’t committed us at that stage’, he said, ‘but you can’t just arrive at those things and expect a place at the last moment.’ According to Tinley, the entry of the SAS’s 1 Squadron into Iraq was ‘a significant culmination of the planning that had occurred’. The planning involved ‘tying up all the possibilities, all the credible options for the deployment and our operations in Western Iraq’. According to



Four unidentified SAS members on patrol at Al Asad Airbase in western Iraq. (Photo: David Dare Parker. AWM P04101.407)

Tinley, 'It was the right fit for us. It was a strategically important mission that we were given to ensure that these Scuds weren't launched.'¹⁴

Ken Gillespie was promoted to major general, returned to Australia from CENTCOM in Tampa, Florida, and placed in charge of Defence's Canberra-based Strategic Operations Division. When things were difficult, McNarn turned to Gillespie, seeing few others whom he could turn to for advice. Gillespie acted as a sounding board for McNarn, understanding the size, scale, structure and pressures he faced. Adding to the challenge, almost three-quarters of McNarn's staff changed over a few weeks before commencement of operations in Iraq, with his chief of staff and principal logistics and operations officers replaced in accordance with the routine peacetime posting cycle. 'If we had understood the complexity of modern warfare as well as the targeting and logistic challenges involved, we probably would not have done that,' he said.¹⁵ The Australian posting cycle remained on a peacetime footing. The war was not allowed to interfere.

Complementing the SAS squadron was an element of about 40 soldiers from 4 RAR (Cdo). Initially 4 RAR (Cdo) was warned to plan to protect the task force forward operating base and form an alert force in conjunction with US Army helicopters (including Chinooks and Black Hawks). The troops assumed their responsibilities with the



Brigadier Gerard Fogarty, Major General Mark Evans and Foreign Minister Alexander Downer during Downer's visit to Baghdad. (Lieutenant General [Retd] Mark Evans)



The Minister for Defence, Robert Hill, and Chief of the Defence Force, General Peter Cosgrove, answer questions at a press conference at the captured Al Asad Airbase in western Iraq, 24 April 2004. (Photo: David Dare Parker. AWM P04101.415)



Destroyed Iraqi weapons, including aircraft and drones, at Al Asad Airbase in western Iraq. (Photo: David Dare Parker. AWM P04102.006)

commencement of hostilities. As the operation progressed, other tasks presented themselves. Commando teams had to provide security to humanitarian assistance missions and other security operations at short notice. For instance, they provided 'sensitive site exploitation' at Al Asad Airbase after it was captured and cleared by other coalition forces. Once Baghdad was captured and the Australian Ambassador took residence, the 4 RAR (Cdo) team was given initial responsibility for security tasks in Baghdad until replacements from 2 RAR arrived. Other tasks included convoy protection using the 6 x 6-wheeled Land Rover special reconnaissance vehicles before the deployment of an ASLAV detachment from 2nd Cavalry Regiment.¹⁶

McMahon recalled that in the early days in Baghdad there was a real need to be prepared to learn and be adaptive. The challenges experienced were similar to those described as the 'three-block war' with fighting, humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping all within a short distance of each other. In Baghdad, at one point, the soldiers' efforts focused on engaging the UN aid organisations, while a short distance away they faced a sniper battle. To McMahon, the theme of an adaptive learning



Members of the Australian Defence Force attend the morning briefing at the Australian National Headquarters Baghdad (ASNHQ). During Operation Falconer the ASNHQ and the Coalition Force Land Component Command were temporarily located in the compound of the Presidential Palace North. (Photo: David Dare Parker. AWM P04158.051)

organisation made the difference between success and failure. Troops had to be continually poised to adapt to changing circumstances, learning as they went, and passing on the lessons learned to others.¹⁷

The Special Forces Task Group was ‘extracted’ on the completion of phase 3 of the invasion of Iraq, consistent with the conditions Howard and Cosgrove gave for Australia’s participation. Once again, this was meant to be a modest contribution in support of Australia’s key ally. But the security situation inside Iraq soon brought new pressures for renewed and prolonged military engagement inside Iraq. To contain the political domestic fallout of such a renewed engagement, a carefully designed force structure was formed. One part of the contribution was the Security Detachment in Baghdad.

SECURITY DETACHMENT ROTATIONS, BAGHDAD

As the security situation deteriorated in Iraq following the capture of Baghdad, a team was raised and deployed to Baghdad in 2003 to form an



An Australian soldier stops in a Baghdad street, near the former Australian Embassy residence, to talk with two members of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment on patrol in their ASLAV. (Photo: David Dare Parker. AWM P04101.571)

Australian Security Detachment or SECDET. The initial SECDET, under command of Major Mick Birtles, included 75 soldiers from 2 RAR, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, 1st Military Police Battalion and 3rd Combat Engineer Regiment. The SECDET took up residence in downtown Baghdad just outside the international zone known as the Green Zone among a population still in shock over events surrounding the fall of Saddam Hussein. The short notice for deployment left no time for pre-deployment training as a unit. Nonetheless, the SECDET members quickly managed to work together smoothly.

Vehicle checkpoints were conducted and Iraqi civilians were often detected carrying weapons without coalition authorisation. Managing this challenge required the display of calm, confidence and discipline. Foot and ASLAV-mounted patrols were carried out as well. Birtles observed that 'soldiers patrolled with weapons poised, observing their arcs of responsibility, and if required, ready to return fire. They correctly employed field-craft skills so as not to make themselves a target.' To Birtles, 'This was the Australian way of conducting operations and the same basic principles applied just as well in the streets of Baghdad as they do in the jungle, desert or rolling plains.'¹⁸ Incidentally, with other parts of 2 RAR in Solomon Islands, this was the first time an RAR battalion had



An ASLAV on patrol in Baghdad near the Swords of Qadisiyyah, also called the Hands of Victory, which consists of a pair of hands holding crossed swords. It is one of a pair of arches marking the entrance to an Iraqi parade ground, constructed to commemorate Iraq's victory in the Iran–Iraq War. (Photo: David Dare Parker. AWM P04101.800)

formed bodies deployed in two theatres on opposite sides of the globe at once.

In the meantime, the three-man explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team with the second SECDET rotation (SECDET II), Sergeant Steven Attleir and Corporals Carl Connell and Damien Woolfe, was attached to the US Army's 2nd Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment located south of Baghdad, and destroyed more than eight thousand pieces of unexploded ordnance and prepared a further 18 000–20 000 for detonation. The men received US Army Commendations and US Army Achievement Awards in recognition of their efforts.¹⁹

The SECDET rotated on a six-monthly basis from May 2003 onwards. Detachments varied in size, shrinking as the threat diminished, then expanding again to 120 personnel as the threat grew in mid-2004. The increase was from three to 12 ASLAVs and a platoon-sized to a company-sized infantry force. Major (later Colonel) Kahlil Fegan, the Officer Commanding A Company 3 RAR and SECDET 3 commander, related details of a contact on 13 April 2004: 'It involved a SECDET ASLAV engaging



An ASLAV and crew members of 2nd Cavalry Regiment arrive at Baghdad International Airport. The ASLAVs were deployed in Baghdad to form part of the Australian SECDET, which was responsible for providing protection to Australian diplomats and ADF personnel during the reconstruction period in Iraq. (Photo: David Dare Parker. AWM, P04159.066)

a mortar base plate that was in the process of firing a number of mortar rounds into the Green Zone.’ The base plate was neutralised with 25mm cannon fire. This was the first time the main armament from an ASLAV had been fired in a contact. This was considered a very successful contact that was seen as having directly contributed to enhancing security within the local area and the Green Zone.²⁰

On 25 October 2004 a bomb detonated as a three-vehicle ASLAV patrol drove by, wounding three 2nd Cavalry Regiment crewmen (one seriously), heavily damaging the ASLAVs as well as killing a number of Iraqi bystanders.²¹ On 19 January 2005 a vehicle rammed the barricades outside the SECDET’s headquarters and accommodation flats. The driver escaped and detonated a 500-pound bomb, wounding two soldiers in the blast and killing two Iraqi civilian bystanders. Concrete barricades prevented the attack from being much worse. Until then soldiers in the early rotations had been happy enough in the flats, seeking to work with the local population. Before the January incident, the locals had been prepared to keep them informed of threats. According to one soldier, the

view was: 'If everybody stops talking to you – go to instant [prepared to fire weapons].'²² But as the situation deteriorated the flow of information from locals dried up as well.

On 24 January 2005 a suspicious truck loaded with drums was parked outside the flats, and the driver left the vehicle, refusing to obey orders from the troops. In accordance with the rules of engagement the suspicious Iraqi was shot. On inspection of the truck, a large amount of petrol was found loaded in the drums – enough for a large bomb. That Australia Day another convoy of three light armoured vehicles was hit, this time by a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device while running between Baghdad airport and the Green Zone. Ten SECDET soldiers were wounded (three seriously), and the three ASLAVs were damaged. As the officer commanding SECDET 6, Major Matt Silver noted, 'All the incidents have shaken everyone up a bit – the reality of being over here, the fact that it's probably the most dangerous place in the world today.'²³ Following the attacks, the Australian Representative Office and the SECDET relocated to a more secure site within the Green Zone.²⁴

Operations in Iraq clearly demonstrated the particular value of being able to understand the situation by communicating with the locals and, as a result, several SECDET members attended the ADF School of Languages Basic Arabic course. As Major Spencer Norris observed, these language-trained personnel 'were essential in providing interaction with locals, from authorities such as the Iraqi Police Force, to children playing in the street'. Gaining the locals' trust and earning their respect, observed Norris, 'enabled the Australians to better provide security and increase force protection'.²⁵ Linguist skills would prove an increasingly important part of the capabilities employed to maintain situational awareness and communicate with officials and other locals. Such skills were always in high demand, and the Army was hard pressed to meet the need with its small supply of suitably skilled linguists. Indeed, traditionally the special forces had tended to have the greatest reserve of linguists. But the imperatives generated by the complex situations faced meant that there was a greater demand for a steady supply of such linguists to the conventional forces as well.

Force protection remained a major focus, but on 21 April 2006 Australia's run of good luck in Iraq ended abruptly with the tragic death of Private Jacob 'Jake' Kovco, a 3 RAR soldier deployed with SECDET 9. He died of an 'accidental discharge' of his pistol, which subsequently became mired in controversy. Lieutenant Colonel Mick Mumford, CO of 3 RAR, explained that Kovco's death hit the battalion hard, especially

following the death of Private Clark in the Solomon Islands the previous year and a non-military-related death in the battalion the month before.²⁶ Investigations sought to explain the circumstances of his death, as well as the widely publicised mishap with the delayed return of his body for burial in Australia. Reflecting the Army's positive approach to adaptive learning, the investigations triggered procedural changes, including stricter weapons safety checks and more efficient and safeguarded returns of the deceased.

Incidentally, in 2006, 3 RAR had troops deployed in three theatres: SECDET in Iraq, Battle Group Faithful in Timor-Leste and elements with 1 RAR in Solomon Islands. The spread of operations for one unit was symptomatic of the challenges of an unprecedented operational tempo. The Army was stretched thinly and simply did not have enough battalions at this juncture to do other than deploy subunits to different theatres. This spread also was symptomatic of the increased flexibility in the conventional forces, which, in turn, was bolstered partly by the heightened operational tempo.

In the meantime, SECDET rotations would continue until private security contractors took over responsibilities from SECDET 18 under Major Nathan Pierpoint in October 2011.²⁷

FORCES IN SOUTHERN IRAQ

While circumstances proved challenging in Baghdad, pressure was mounting for another Australian land force contribution in Iraq. With the imminent withdrawal of the Dutch from southern Iraq, Prime Minister Howard announced the additional force commitment in February 2005. The Al Muthanna Task Group, as the contribution was called, deployed to Al Muthanna province in southern Iraq. The task group was led by the CO of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier) Roger Noble. B Company 5/7 RAR, under Major Mick Garraway, formed Combat Team Tiger, the infantry combat team in the task group, with a company headquarters, two rifle platoons, a cavalry troop, a reconnaissance patrol and a sniper pair. An infantry platoon was also included in Combat Team Eagle, the combat team from 2nd Cavalry Regiment. One reason this unusual task group composition was required was that 2nd Cavalry Regiment had been stripped of its dedicated assault troopers during a peacetime cost-cutting initiative. Without dedicated troopers, 2nd Cavalry Regiment had to rely on supplementation to make the force workable.



Major General Mark Evans (CJTF 633) with Commander Regional Command South (Basra), Major General Jackson. (Lieutenant General [Retd] Mark Evans)

Coined Task Force Eagle, the task group, with its 40 light armoured vehicles, joined a British battle group commanded by a British Army colonel and accommodated in Camp Smitty, the forward operating base built just outside the town of As Samawah.²⁸ The significance of Australia's close ties with Britain was at work again, enabling clear communication, mutual understanding and close collaboration. On the other hand, Australia's restrictive rules of engagement earned some resentment from British counterparts, particularly when Australian help was called for and not provided because of extremely strict constraints on the use of Australian forces. As one officer commented: 'The Brits were fighting a war. We weren't allowed to do so.'²⁹ The tensions arising from this perception required close management at the higher levels, including the appointment of a hand-picked Australian national representative in the British divisional headquarters based at Basra.

The Australian national representative structure was established within the British division specifically to support the Australian task group. Brigadier Andrew Nikolic was the first National Command Representative in southern Iraq and concurrently served for a large part of his tour as chief of staff of the British-led Multi-National Division

(South East) headquartered in Basra. There he was intimately involved in the development and implementation of operational plans. Noble and Nikolic talked daily, discussing a range of sensitive operational matters concerning national command and the close scrutiny from Canberra they experienced.³⁰ Nikolic's selection for extra responsibility as chief of staff of the Multi-National Division reflected the confidence the British divisional commander had in what Nikolic could offer.

The initial focus for Australian task group operations was to augment the security of the Japanese Iraqi Reconstruction Support Group, and to provide security to Camp Smitty. This involved establishing routines and procedures for the manning of guard towers and the front gate as well as work aimed at further developing the camp's existing security measures. In support of the Japanese, mounted and dismounted patrols were conducted in combination with the use of observation posts. Of concern was the prospect of vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which, although not prevalent in Al Muthanna, remained a threat. Of immediate concern, however, was the threat from stand-off attacks using mortars or rockets, as was the case before the Australians' arrival.³¹

To minimise the threat from potential attacks, and following an age-old Australian Army tradition, an active patrolling program was instigated. But unlike in previous wars, these patrols were aided by the latest night-fighting equipment, new Bushmaster protected mobility vehicles and recently introduced 'personal-role radios' for use within sections – hitherto an item of equipment reserved for use by special forces. This equipment enabled patrols to operate dispersed while exercising an unprecedented level of influence. The effectiveness of patrols was enhanced further with interpreters and the dissemination of information leaflets intended to build rapport with the locals. Stemming from the motorisation trials of the 1990s, the Army's Bushmasters were rushed into service to provide improved levels of protection, mobility, communications and comfort. Used in conjunction with the ASLAVs, the Bushmaster-mounted patrols provided great flexibility to respond to issues as they arose.³² As Noble observed, 'The key aspect of the [Al Muthanna Task Group] was the integration of combined arms at the lowest level: infantry "bricks" (4 men) operating with three [light armoured vehicle] cavalry patrols as the basic tactical unit. There was no independent employment of either arm.'³³

The city of As Samawah, near the task group's base, remained fairly quiet but occasional incidents occurred. Noble recalled that there were seven deliberate enemy actions against coalition forces in Al Muthanna during the task group's tour.³⁴ On 12 October 2005, for instance, a task

group patrol mounted in light armoured vehicles was conducting a routine security run through the outskirts of As Samawah just before midnight when they were fired upon. Two armed insurgents were seen running from the area, but the light armoured vehicles broke contact and did not return fire. No damage or casualties resulted.³⁵

For Noble himself, however, a number of other issues made command particularly challenging. First, the span of command was significant, with elements of a wide range of units from across the Army as well as several joint and national assets attached to the task group, making the job of an erstwhile cavalry regimental commander unusually complex. Second, the degree of strategic-level interest in his performance was intense, particularly as his was the only Australian combat-capable land force unit in Iraq at the time and the first combat unit deployed since the withdrawal of the Special Forces Task Group in 2003. Noble faced heightened scrutiny from his superiors and great interest from the Prime Minister, the national media and elsewhere.

One significant feature of the task group deployment was that for the first time, Australian government national agency liaison officers deployed to directly support a 'conventional' unit commander. This followed the special forces' experience in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2002 and 2003, where the concept of national 'reach-back' for support and analysis was demonstrated in large part thanks to the robust information communications technology (ICT) network connecting deployed forces back to Australia. Before that, national agency liaison officers were retained at the national command element. The experience demonstrated the positive cascading effects of the special forces' lessons for the remainder of the Army, with capabilities being embedded further down the chain under unit-level (i.e. battalion-level) command.

The converse to this access to value-added intelligence and support was the fact that the government and Defence headquarters could and did pry into minute details of the task group's plans and operations. This prying added a significant burden and limited the CO's freedom of action in commanding his forces using 'mission command'.

As the need to form a second rotation of the task group became clear, 5/7 RAR, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier) Peter Short, was selected in May 2005 to form the basis for the 450-personnel group. As with the first task group, the second rotation, which deployed from late October to early November 2005, consisted of a headquarters, two combat teams, a training team, an operational support squadron and a wide variety of attached specialist capabilities. The

combat teams centred on C Company 5/7 RAR and A Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment. Reflecting the significance of combined exercises and training to the Army's prowess, preparation culminated in a mission rehearsal exercise with the components under the task group headquarters command.

That rehearsal was just as well, as they received substantial new equipment for the deployment, including remote weapon stations mounted on the personnel carrier variant of the light armoured vehicles, automatic grenade launchers, Javelin medium-range, direct-fire weapon systems, thermal weapon sights, 'surefire' torches, and the Australian-developed, off-axis viewing devices for infantry 'small arms'. Other new items included the multiband inter/intra-team radio and tactical satellite communications systems, as well as new helmets, body armour and chest webbing. Once again, many of these items had hitherto been used only by the Army's special forces. Additional intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance elements were also attached to the group.³⁶

The integration of this range of new equipment, with little time for preparation, bore testament to the soldiers' ability to quickly adapt and incorporate changes into their standard operating procedures. The mission rehearsal exercise and other lead-up training provided an opportunity for the deploying forces to learn quickly and think through the ramifications of the changes on tactics, techniques and procedures.

One item that proved useful and had a considerable impact on procedures was the Skylark miniature unmanned aerial vehicle (MUAV). Much as the troops had experienced in Solomon Islands, the Skylark proved versatile for patrols and base security. Short was full of praise for the MUAVs supplied by 131 Surveillance and Target Acquisition (STA) Battery, 20 STA Regiment, saying, 'It is an excellent capability and I could not imagine deploying without a UAV capability again.'³⁷ Reflecting on the versatility of his unit, Short observed that '5/7 RAR can operate at the higher end of conventional warfare as Battle Group Tiger'. Conversely, 'the battalion can deploy to complex, non-conventional environments, including peace support operations as demonstrated recently in Iraq'.³⁸

As the second task group's tour of duty progressed, a third rotation was selected, built around Townsville-based 2 RAR under Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier) Mick Mahy, along with a cavalry squadron from the Brisbane-based 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment (Queensland Mounted Infantry). During this battle group's tour of duty, the Japanese forces withdrew from Al Muthanna Province, which became the first in Iraq to be selected for transfer to Provincial Iraqi Security Control.

Primary security responsibilities for the province were handed over to the Iraqi Security Forces in July 2006. The transition to Iraqi control went smoothly with no major militia contacts and with significant celebrations by Iraqis at the transition ceremony.³⁹

The task group relocated to the east of Al Muthanna, at Camp Terendak on the Ali Air Base, Tallil, in neighbouring Dhi Qar Province. There the task group was reassigned with regional 'overwatch' responsibilities covering south-eastern Iraq. Reflecting continuity amid change, Australian infantry battalions had previously served alongside British forces in another Camp Terendak in peninsular Malaysia during the 1960s.

Dhi Qar Province was next to transition to Provincial Iraqi Security Control in September, and the Al Muthanna Task Group designation was abandoned in favour of 'Overwatch Battle Group (West)'. Al Muthanna and Dhi Qar are the westernmost of the four southern provinces in Iraq, and this new title reflected the force's integral role as the prime coalition intervention force in the western sector of the area of operations of the Basra-based Multi-National Division (South-East). Responsibility for overwatch of Dhi Qar Province was officially handed over from the withdrawing Italian contingent to the Australian forces in late October. The Overwatch Battle Group continued training Iraqi Security Forces at the Regional Training Centre in Tallil while also remaining available to support Iraqi Security Forces in a crisis. But such support required a request by the Iraqi Government and the Multi-National Force – Iraq, although the Multi-National Corps – Iraq would have been responsible. The mission was to be prepared to support Iraqi security forces in Al Muthanna Province if the need arose. This involved a range of preparatory activities, including meetings with local leaders, exercising with the Iraqi forces and supporting and mentoring their collective training capabilities.

In this context, the planning staff developed an operational approach along eight simultaneous 'lines of operations'. Each line of operation was a plan in itself and drew on the theory of 'Adaptive Campaigning' in vogue in the Australian Army at the time. Action cycles were arbitrary time periods that allowed for a regular 'act, sense, decide, act' rhythm that was congruent with the pace of events in the local environment. Each line of operation was described with an effect or objective, which provided measureable signposts.

The 'maintain consent' line of operation was intended to inform and shape perceptions, attitudes, behaviour and understanding of population groups in order to reinforce actions within other lines of operation. The



Defence Minister Brendan Nelson's visit to Baghdad, next to CDF Air Marshall Angus Houston, accompanied by the staff and commander of HQ JTF 633. (Lieutenant General [Retd] Mark Evans)

'reform security sector' line focused on bolstering security institutions including the judiciary, police and armed forces. The 'build economic capacity' line was to assist building a stable self-sustaining economy to enhance national stability. The 'enhance governance' line aimed to assist in improving indigenous governance processes. To do this, the CO sought to mentor the local Iraqi governor and local army commander. The 'secure civil environment' line involved mentoring and advising the Iraqi security forces. The 'secure self' line focused on protection for the battle group.⁴⁰

Captain (later Lieutenant Colonel) Michael Bassingthwaight was on the battle group headquarters staff. He observed that the battle group was concerned with 'preventing the insurgent's cause from gaining purchase in the prevailing society'. It was this, rather than the military defeat of the insurgents themselves, that was the Australians' priority. To Bassingthwaight, it was the constant small actions of the battle group across the lines of operation over time that proved to be effective.⁴¹

The Overwatch Battle Group congregated at the nearby Ziggurat located 'inside of the wire' of the Tallil airbase on 27 July 2006, where Mahy gave a speech, accompanied by his regimental sergeant major, Warrant Officer Class 1 David Hatton. Mahy congratulated the troops



Five MAs (Military Assistants) to CA (Chief of Army). The visit of Chief of Army Lieutenant General Peter Leahy to CJTF 633, 2007. Left to right: Martin Fogarty, Mark Evans, Peter Leahy, John Caligari and Adam Findlay. (Lieutenant General [Retd] Mark Evans)

on their successful transition from Camp Smitty to Camp Terendak.⁴² The new responsibilities presented new difficulties that, in turn, generated the need for further force adjustments. Hence, in September the Minister for Defence, Dr Brendan Nelson, announced that the government had decided to increase the number of troops with the Overwatch Battle Group. An additional 38 personnel and four Bushmaster vehicles subsequently deployed. The extra contingent enhanced logistics and intelligence support and increased protected mobility to the force. This lifted the number of Australian troops serving in southern Iraq to more than five hundred, along with 19 Bushmaster vehicles. With this increase, Australia's commitment to Iraq reached approximately 1400 personnel.⁴³

Not long afterwards, the decision to increase the force size proved justified when troops were engaged in an exchange of fire with 'Anti-Iraqi Forces' that lasted almost an hour and appeared well coordinated, including rocket-propelled grenades and small-arms fire. The incident occurred on 26 September while elements were conducting a meeting at

an Iraqi army barracks in the town of Al Rumaythah in Al Muthanna Province. This 'Key Leadership Engagement' meeting had been planned with the local chief of police to arrange reconstruction of the local police station and to check on the progress of a local agricultural project. The Australians withdrew from the area – under considerable fire – without loss of life, injury or serious damage to equipment and vehicles. The enemy had multiple sniper, machine-gun and rocket-propelled grenade teams totalling between 30 and 60 personnel.⁴⁴

The infantry company commander assigned, Major Andrew Stevens, recalled that midway through the contact the insurgents corralled children from the nearby primary school between the Australian and insurgent positions. Stevens said the Australians displayed 'remarkable discipline and courage', engaging the enemy while avoiding civilian casualties and enabling the breakout of the company headquarters elements from the Iraqi barracks, which was being attacked on three sides. The two section commanders, Corporals Wesley Wood and Benjamin Daly, established 'support by fire' positions under the command of Lieutenant Nick McCarthy on the flank of the Iraqi barracks that enabled the breakout. Seeking to avoid attacking and becoming further committed, they then conducted a fighting withdrawal over approximately 250 metres of open terrain. For their display of leadership in contact, both Wood and Daly were awarded the Distinguished Service Medal.⁴⁵

Mahy said afterwards that the soldiers 'acted with great discipline, exceptional courage and used well-executed tactics' to withdraw safely from the area. In the meantime, several among the opposing forces were wounded in the incident. The armoured vehicles also played a crucial role in protecting the soldiers and allowing them to disengage safely from the contact and move to safety.⁴⁶ In fact the constrained approach exercised by the Australians while under attack was later commented on by local supporters from the Iraqi Security Forces, who appreciated the restraint exercised. While indirect and air-to-ground fire were available, the decision was made not to escalate the confrontation and risk additional civilian casualties. Conversely, when the contact took place, the Australians' response conceivably could have been to engage with their integral and highly accurate javelin missiles and 25mm cannons rather than withdraw. Their restrained approach reflected well on the discipline and foresight of those involved.

British soldiers looked on enviously at some of the impressive equipment and firepower supplied to the Australians. On one occasion, when a British patrol got into serious trouble on the far side of a river, the

Australians were not allowed to go to assist. Eventually United States forces arrived from further away to assist the stranded British forces. As one Australian officer observed, British senior officers ‘understood’ the constraints of Australian rules of engagement. But the British soldiers, ‘the squaddies, called the diggers cowards to their faces. At least some of the diggers agreed.’⁴⁷ The net effect of this government-driven tactical approach was the absolute minimisation of Australian casualties. But this approach came at a price in terms of credibility with Australia’s allies and coalition partners and soldiers’ morale.

By the end of 2006 Australian troops looked set to stay in Iraq through 2007. But as British plans were announced in November to reduce their numbers and move, as Australia had done, to Provincial Iraqi Security Control in the two provinces for which they retained responsibility (Basra and Maysan), Australian authorities saw scope to reconsider the posture and mission. In a press statement, Nelson stated: ‘For the moment we have no intention of withdrawing our troops until the Iraqis themselves and our coalition partners – the British, the Romanians and others with whom they are working – are all satisfied that the Iraqis can take control of their own affairs.’⁴⁸

Consistent with that determination, and only a few days before the British announcement, on 11 November 2006, the first group of the next six-month rotation deployed from Robertson Barracks in Darwin. The second Overwatch Battle Group was commanded by the CO of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier) Anthony ‘Changi’ Rawlins, with one of his two combat teams comprising D Company 5/7 RAR, under the command of Major (later Colonel) Richard Bushby. The second Overwatch Battle Group deployed in full as the first Overwatch Battle Group returned home to Australia before Christmas.⁴⁹ Over the subsequent months Rawlins’ team continued their assigned mission with all the skills that had come to be the norm for Australian forces on operations. Thanks to excellent equipment, thorough and adaptive training, sound leadership and a healthy dose of good luck, the rest of their tour passed relatively uneventfully. Near the end of their tour, however, a patrol was hit by a roadside blast from a single IED that immobilised a Bushmaster carrying two soldiers, neither of whom were injured. Brigadier Gus Gilmore, who was then Defence spokesman, observed: ‘Integration of sound tactics, world-class vehicles and a comprehensive suite of personal protective equipment has limited the effectiveness of the attack.’⁵⁰

The Australian Counter-IED Task Force investigated the incident to ensure that as much as possible was learnt from the attack.⁵¹ In fact the establishment of the Counter-IED Task Force, under Brigadier Phil Winter, had proven to be a significant change agent within the ADF as it facilitated the rapid adaptation of capabilities and relearning of key defensive skills to counter the evolving IED threat. There was initial resistance to the establishment of a specific Counter-IED Task Force and, symptomatic of the difficulties in transitioning to being a truly learning organisation, the Army had not adequately harnessed many of the lessons of Australia's experience with the UN Mine Clearance Training Team in Afghanistan two decades earlier. But the eventual emergence of the Counter-IED Task Force based in Canberra reflected the metamorphosis that was taking place within the Australian Army in the face of growing pressures for rapid adaptation.

Shortly after the IED incident, Rawlins' team was replaced in May 2007 by the third Overwatch Battle Group based around 5 RAR battalion headquarters under Lieutenant Colonel Jake Ellwood. The handover took place on 7 June at Camp Terendak. The Commanding General of the Multinational Forces – Iraq, General David Petraeus, visited during Ellwood's command and told the assembled Australians at Camp Terendak they were 'making an excellent contribution to Iraq's security'. Petraeus declared: 'You Aussies should be very proud of the fine job you are doing here in southern Iraq.' Petraeus was warmly received and showed interest in their efforts to help stabilise security in southern Iraq.⁵² Defence Minister Nelson subsequently visited Petraeus in Baghdad and received similar feedback. Nelson recounted that Petraeus described the Australian soldiers as 'the epitome of professionalism. They are extraordinarily capable. They get it. And that is the highest praise in this kind of endeavour.'⁵³ Although his comments can be attributed to a diplomatic overstatement, there was genuine goodwill towards Australia for sticking with the United States during this period, despite the fact that the Australian approach was to keep a low profile and to minimise casualties.

The soldiers of the third Overwatch Battle Group had the opportunity to demonstrate their professionalism during a routine patrol 50 kilometres north of Camp Terendak. While visiting a town to meet local elders and discuss a potential community support project, two men armed with a rocket-propelled grenade and a machine-gun fired at one of the Australian vehicles. In addition to being protected by the bar armour mounted on the vehicles (an innovation UN Mine Clearance Training Team members

had observed in use by Soviet forces in Afghanistan two decades earlier), Ellwood stressed that 'what saved lives is the excellent training that Australian soldiers receive. When they came under fire they immediately took cover, returned fire, and pursued the insurgents, forcing them to flee.'⁵⁴

A widely recognised component of effective counter-insurgency operations is the realm of civil–military cooperation (CIMIC) projects. Australians undertook CIMIC tasks in East Timor and did so again in southern Iraq. The CIMIC team based with the second Overwatch Battle Group, for instance, helped to build new facilities to replace cramped tented classrooms where teachers taught in temperatures higher than 50 degrees Celsius. This team, under Major Jason Harley, travelled to Al Najem village, north-west of An Nasiriyah in Dhi Qar Province and identified a school to support. The sum of \$65 000 was allocated for demountable buildings, a hardstand (concrete paved area), generator, toilets and basic furniture for the school. Harley conceded that the project was symbolic for the battle group, representing an important opportunity to facilitate and fund a project that would 'lead to a more stable future for these people'.⁵⁵ The project, when completed, boasted two large air-conditioned buildings, a main gate, a toilet facility and septic tank, a water tank, a generator and a road linking the centre of town with the school. The headmaster thanked the Australians for their generosity in helping the children, aged 4 to 14 years of age.⁵⁶ In essence, every CIMIC activity was a calculated attempt to achieve an integrated effect in support of the mission. Ellwood observed that 'CIMIC would often provide us with access and influence into areas that were initially wary, bordering on hostile'.⁵⁷ Concerns remained, however, over whether in the long term the locals would be able to maintain the generators necessary for the air-conditioning.

On reflection, it was evident that the rotations of Al Muthanna Task Groups and Overwatch Battle Groups had undertaken a broad range of tasks with considerable scrutiny from the highest levels in Canberra and that they had done so with professionalism, bringing credit to the Army, the ADF and Australia. Their work involved challenging tasks, ranging from unexpected firefights to civil–military cooperation projects, interacting with local authorities and applying a wide range of military capabilities. To be sure, the situation was more benign than in central Iraq, where American forces suffered far heavier casualties and more thoroughly organised and determined opposition. In addition, there is little evidence that many of the projects initiated had long-lasting effects. But given the mission they were given and the resources allocated, the

men and women involved performed honourably and with distinction. Each force rotation studied the preceding one's experiences, to learn and absorb its lessons and to adapt accordingly.

TRAINING TEAMS

Meanwhile, drawing on a lineage from the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam, the Australian Army Training Team Iraq (AATTI) was established in late 2003 to train Iraqi Army forces in northern Iraq. The first AATTI CO was Lieutenant Colonel Ian Cruickshank. According to Cruickshank, the soldiers involved had been 'hand picked for their experience and commonsense'. Most of them had previous training experience in Australia, and some had also trained in Malaysia, Fiji, Vietnam and Papua New Guinea.⁵⁸ The first AATTI rotation included 45 Regular Army soldiers mostly from infantry, armour and artillery units organised into a headquarters element and three 10-person training teams. A force protection group was added later.

Each of the ten-person training teams was responsible for training an entire battalion supported directly from a headquarters that provided logistic and communication support. The team's overall mission was to train, mentor, advise and raise the 10th, 11th and 12th Battalions, including the brigade headquarters element, of the 4th Brigade of the New Iraqi Army. Training commenced with the preparation and, in some cases, the retraining of a large group of former Iraqi Army officers and senior non-commissioned officers who formed the nucleus of the new brigade. Initially mustering in Tadjji, then later moving to an abandoned fort on the outskirts of Tal-Afar, the officers and senior non-commissioned officers training got into full swing with battalion identities beginning to form.

Once the first phase of training was complete, the training team and the backbone of what was to be the 4th Brigade moved to a purpose-designed military base called Al Kasik, approximately 50 kilometres west of Mosul, close to the Syrian border. The base was built a number of years before by the former Iraqi regime but was never finished. This is where the officers and non-commissioned officers received their allocations of raw Iraqi recruits so that training could commence in earnest. Al Kasik was 15 kilometres north-east of Tal-Afar, a provincial town that went through stages of coalition and insurgent control. On the far side of Tal-Afar, a further nine kilometres from the town was a US-controlled forward operating base with a C-130-capable airstrip. This base was crucial as the main supply route supporting the team out of Al Kasik.⁵⁹



'The lads'. Photographs taken during the graduation occurred once the Iraqis had broken ranks. 'My linguist informed me that as they left the parade ground they were chanting "Down with America" but as they passed me and a few of my lads they changed to "Let's go Australia". I have this on video!' (Colonel Robert Hamilton)

Trainees in the Iraqi Army brigade included Kurds, Sunnis, Shia and other minority groups shipped to Al Kasik. Training conditions were rudimentary, and morale among Iraqi volunteers suffered serious blows from sporadic indirect fire. On 7 August 2004, a particularly notable day, a number of vehicle-borne IEDs, or VBIEDs (semi-trailers laden with explosives) supported by indirect mortar and rocket fire, hit the common dining facility and the US administration headquarters building, killing a number of Iraqi Army recruits and injuring co-located US administrative staff. Shortly afterwards many Iraqi troops simply left their posts and never returned, depleting overall brigade numbers. However, after the decision was made to fully arm the brigade with the AK-47s and pistols they were training with but had not yet taken control of, order returned and training resumed with a good result when the training cycle was completed.

Reflecting on the wider significance of the AATTI's efforts, one senior officer observed: 'Of course the training teams did well in what they were asked to do. However, they were not asked to accompany the 4th Brigade



Graduates of the program conducted by the Australian Army Training Team in Iraq. (Colonel Robert Hamilton)

into combat, an essential part of building a local force. The result was that the 4th Brigade, under a different brigade and division name following a reorganisation, was intimidated out of existence in Nov 2004. Essentially, all the good work that our early troops did was wasted.’ These comments reflect the tensions between the soldiers’ good intentions and the Australian Government’s constraints on their employment. The tension generated frustration among soldiers eager to demonstrate their professionalism and bravery. Taunts from British counterparts nearby were hard to stomach. Soldiers felt aggrieved as they were eager to do more but were under orders constraining them. Even in the less contentious setting of Afghanistan, where Australian mentors were allowed to accompany troops on combat operations, the government’s timidity limited the quantity and scope of operations. This had the effect of avoiding casualties, but it also constrained the force’s ability to achieve tactical aims.⁶⁰

With the second AATTI rotation, the training team was organised in three teams of 12 officers and senior non-commissioned officers assigned to the 19th, 20th and 21st Battalions of the Iraqi 8th Brigade. As with

the first AATTI, the second rotation conducted a staggered four-week officer and non-commissioned officer integration course, followed by an eight-week recruit-training course for each battalion.⁶¹ After the first two rotations, the training shifted to focus more on logistic operations and resource management as well as to support training in southern Iraq, where the Australian task group was based. The third team developed logistic doctrine and focused on training logistic supervisor skills at the Iraqi Army Support and Services Institute at Taji, north of Baghdad. Reflecting the unit's adaptive nature, basic infantry training returned to form the core of the training program for rotation four in 2005. For AATTI 4, under Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Tulley, the team had the responsibility of advising and training the 2nd Brigade of the Iraqi Army's 10th Division, based in Al Muthanna.

The main effort for the AATTI 4 was mentoring, advising and training the Iraqis in the planning and conduct of their operations, including vehicle and dismounted patrols, vehicle checkpoints and cordon and search tasks. Tulley observed when they arrived that 'it wouldn't be smart' to train the Iraqis in things they knew. So they spent the first two weeks looking, learning and understanding what the Iraqis were doing while seeking to develop rapport. They then worked out levels of proficiency and developed training plans aligned to the mission-essential tasks. As Tulley explained, 'We have to think of ways to better their capability using their manpower . . . so we don't try to enforce our Western ideas and approaches onto them.'⁶² Tulley's approach reflected the nuanced and culturally aware approach that had come to be associated with Australian soldiers. Some might say this was not remarkable. But the respectful approach displaying cultural sensitivity helped lessen resistance to other training goals and objectives. A haughty or insensitive approach would have been counterproductive.

In 2007 the AATTI continued training Iraqi soldiers. Team 7, under Lieutenant Colonel Peter Power, transitioned to Team 8 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Jeremy Hanson. Following the government's announcement in February that the training for logistics and combat operations would again be expanded, the training team grew to a total of a hundred personnel. Before departing Camp Terendak, the AATTI 7 named their accommodation line after the late Brigadier Ted Serong, Australia's pre-eminent practitioner of counter-insurgency operations during the Vietnam War.⁶³ This was seen as a fitting choice, given the reinvigoration of Australian counter-insurgency doctrine and concepts. The continuity with Serong's experience pointed to the importance of relating

in a non-threatening manner to trainees in cross-cultural settings. Australians had repeatedly demonstrated their abilities in this field.

The work of the AATTI received high praise from US counterparts as well as Iraqi staff and trainees. One US Army colonel managing the Taji national maintenance depot described the Australian trainers as a 'godsend'. He added, 'The training that the Australians are giving is "in depth", it's clear that the Iraqis really enjoy being in their classes.' Similarly, the Iraqi maintenance staff team leader, Captain Jabad, also praised the Australian trainers: 'For us, I believe that we need your support and it is an honour for me to tell you that we are working here together as one team . . . You show us good methods and have great professionalism and we look forward to more cooperation.' Reflecting on the AATTI's contribution, the AATTI's operations officer, Major Christian Hamilton, observed that since the team was founded in 2004, 16 500 Iraqi Army soldiers had been trained but, more importantly, 'the level of training we provide is second to none'.⁶⁴ Still, the sentiment behind some criticisms was shared by AATTI team members and would reverberate in their minds, gnawing away at their sense of achievement.

EMBEDDED STAFF

As part of Australia's constrained contributions to the war in Iraq, a group of about 30 Australians on rotations of six to twelve months, ranging from senior officers to corporals, were assigned to work as integrated staff members (known as embedded staff or 'embeds') with Coalition Joint Task Force - 7 (CJTF-7) commanding the five divisions and 155 000 troops stationed in Iraq. One of these, Warrant Officer Class 2 Blair Tidey, was posted as part of the C2X (intelligence) branch with the 'X' designating responsibility for human intelligence (HUMINT) and counter-intelligence. Tidey observed that despite the large number of technical collection assets in Iraq, it was estimated that more than two-thirds of all 'actionable' intelligence came from HUMINT. The teams were routinely exposed to danger and, because of their successes, became the commanders' intelligence collection 'assets of choice'.

Tidey's experience typified that of many Australians working alongside American counterparts. He observed, 'We had a number of aces up our sleeve.' First, while the United States had invented a whole new language with its own jargon, once the surface was scratched, it was apparent that their procedures were pretty similar to those of the Australian Army. Second, according to Tidey, 'Whatever our specialty in the Australian Army,

we found that our skill and experience base was wider than most comparative US personnel.’ In Tidey’s case his experience and qualifications as a ‘Manager Intelligence Operations’ spanned six separate trades in the US Army’s Military Intelligence Branch. Third, the Australians approached the job with a very strong work ethic. Numerous US personnel commented that they enjoyed working with Australians because they took responsibility and ‘got things done’. Finally, the Australians enjoyed what Tidey called ‘undiplomatic immunity’, or the ability to tell sometimes very senior officers in very blunt terms that things were broken and exactly how they needed to be fixed. Maybe it was the ‘Crocodile Dundee’ image of Australians as straight talkers, Tidey said, but the Americans seemed to accept it as the way we did business – and it worked!⁶⁵

REFLECTIONS

In September 2007 Nelson announced that the deployment of the Overwatch Battle Group (West) had been extended until the end of June 2008.⁶⁶ The next battle group to deploy as the Overwatch Battle Group would be based around the 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment, Queensland Mounted Infantry (2/14 LHR [QMI]) with the unit’s CO, Lieutenant Colonel Chris Websdane, designated commander of the fourth Overwatch Battle Group. Once again, deploying forces undertook comprehensive mission rehearsal exercises, informed by the latest lessons observed in Iraq. The unit was farewelled at Gallipoli Barracks in Brisbane on 2 November 2007, two days after the 2/14 LHR (QMI) had celebrated the ninetieth anniversary of a previous deployment to the Middle East and its antecedents’ role in the charge at Beersheba on 31 October 1917 during the First World War.

By the end of 2007 the government’s assessment of the people’s tolerance for military involvement in Iraq meant that there was little appetite for further expansion. Australian forces that remained on Operation Catalyst covering Iraq included nine elements:

- a 110-strong SECDet with ASLAVs, tasked to protect the Australian Embassy in Baghdad
- a 520-strong Overwatch Battle Group (West) at Tallil Air Base, undertaking security overwatch for Al Muthanna and Dhi Qar provinces
- a 70-strong AATTI assisting with basic military training
- a Navy ‘major fleet unit’ (i.e. ship) patrolling offshore oil platforms in the northern Arabian Gulf



Gunner Daniel Mahoney, Gunner Andrew McKenna and Bombardier Jamie Cornwall from the 16th Air Defence detachment deployed on HMAS *Kanimbla* operate an RBS-70 Missile Launcher from the ship's bridge while on operations in the Khawr Abd Allah waterway. (Photo: David Dare Parker. AWM P04101.447)

- an RAAF AP-3 Orion aircraft detachment of 170 personnel undertaking surveillance patrols
- a 140-strong RAAF C-130 Hercules detachment with aircraft, ground crew and support elements
- a Force Level Logistic Asset (i.e. a unit supporting all assigned ADF elements) with 110 personnel providing communications and movement control support
- a small element working in the Combined Explosives Exploitation Cell (CEXC), and
- about 90 embedded staff at Multi-National Force headquarters and in units, including with the Iraqi Army.

Notwithstanding the positive aspects of Australia's contribution in Iraq, there were criticisms to be made. One critic claimed:

There was a contradiction at the centre of our Iraq policy that should be addressed because it impacted on our soldiers. We went to Iraq to impress our allies. We took a good force in 2005 to Muthanna at a time when the US desperately needed assistance. We put that force

into the quietest province in Iraq where nothing was happening, then restricted the force in what it could do to the extent that we impressed no one . . . Our rules of engagement were so shameful in Baghdad that I heard that we could not even provide a [Quick Response Force] to the US forces when they were strapped, despite having enjoyed the US [Quick Response Force] for years . . .

He claimed further: 'The deployment of troops and Overwatch Battle Group (West) to Iraq failed not because of the soldiers but because of the reluctance of the government to carry a fair share of the burden – at a time when the US was desperately short of troops.'⁶⁷

This stinging critique pointed more to government policy decisions than the capability of the Australian Army *per se*. Moreover, this officer's claims that the deployment 'failed' pointed to a contested conception of the force's mission. Nonetheless, his comments reflected an enduring concern about the imposition of arbitrary policy restraints to define mission success and the ramifications such policy decisions had on deployed forces as well as on the mission to which Australia contributed as a coalition partner. He continued, noting: 'When you put token forces and then prevent them achieving the political aim (which required combat) so that the allies that you were trying to impress (quite legally and morally) were totally unimpressed except in their public diplomatic statements, you venture into immoral acts as a government.'⁶⁸ This critique points to significant concerns over Australia's Iraq strategy, but it is important to make the distinction between the government-imposed constraints and the inherent capabilities that were at the government's disposal. Australian soldiers could be upset and disappointed, but they could still hold their heads high as having complied with explicit and lawful government directions with professionalism.

Reflecting the significance of its links with society, the Army remained a faithful observer of government direction, and the Australian Government weighed up the balance of risks and benefits, concluding that the force posture and rules of engagement were appropriate. It remained the duty of soldiers deployed to follow such guidance to the letter.

To be sure, as one officer observed, 'We know senior US and UK officers have to be diplomatic.' And 'speeches saying the Australians made a real contribution prove nothing'.⁶⁹ A number of soldiers were frustrated at the embarrassment apparently generated. On balance, however, there was genuine goodwill at the highest levels towards Australia for being there and for remaining involved when Iraq was so contentious, so far



General Peter Cosgrove, AC, MC, Chief of the Defence Force; Senator Robert Hill, Minister for Defence; and the Prime Minister, John Howard, watch on the quayside at Victoria Quay, Fremantle, as HMA Ships *Anzac* and *Darwin* return from the Persian Gulf and Iraq, 17 May 2003. (Photo: Brad Rimmer. AWM P04192.028)

from Australia, and when the Australian Army was genuinely preoccupied with other missions in Timor-Leste, Solomon Islands and other parts of the Pacific.

Of note, the Australian combat forces, other than the security detachment in Baghdad, left Iraq by 29 July 2009, and the next day the CDF issued an Order of the Day. On 31 July 2009 the Defence Minister, Senator John Faulkner, noted the conclusion of a six-year mission involving twenty thousand ADF personnel. 'Our service men and women again proved the ADF's high reputation in complex and difficult operational environments and I thank them on behalf of the Australian Government,' he said.⁷⁰ Faulkner's announcement reflected the Army's pivotal link with society. After all, the Australian Labor Party had campaigned and won the November 2007 national elections partly on the platform of withdrawing Australian troops from Iraq.

Despite the criticisms, the deployment and maintenance of the wide range of capabilities listed above provided challenging and rewarding missions for the ADF. For the Army, the SECDET, the training teams

and Overwatch Battle Group tasks inspired a high level of conscientious, focused and disciplined effort by the entire Army. This helped to ensure that every troop rotation deployed with the best equipment, training and personnel that could be mustered. While each deployment represented only a small fraction of the Army, significant preparatory and support effort was required from across the Army and beyond to ensure each mission's success and the troops' safe return.

The commitment of additional troop rotations to Iraq, in addition to the commitments in Afghanistan, East Timor, Solomon Islands and elsewhere, placed considerable pressure on an already well-experienced force. With such a high operational tempo, the challenge of maintaining the force levels without a spike in 'separations' (i.e. resignations) from the Army proved a significant challenge.

On reflection, Australian operations in Iraq and the wider Middle East saw a significant number of lessons either learned or reinforced, not the least in the realm of robust communications networks. Networked operations contributed to mission success, and shared information, intelligence and situational awareness were identified as crucial factors. The networked support arrangements significantly enhanced commanders' ability to exercise command. On the other hand, at times an overload of information was just as likely to hamper effective decision-making. An almost insatiable demand for increased bandwidth presented communicators with challenges that the Defence Department addressed through acquisition of additional communications bearers. These networked arrangements, in turn, illustrated the significance of the ADF's so-called network-centric warfare capability and reinforced the need for enhanced training, doctrine and equipment acquisition.

Acquisition, at times, needed to occur quickly. Consequently, 'Rapid Acquisition' policy was developed based on successful procedures implemented in Iraq and the wider Middle East. These procedures took into account 'through-life-support' requirements and financial management arrangements to ensure that public resources were applied with stewardship. One example of this was the acquisition of unattended aerial vehicles, which, once introduced, were quickly accepted as part of the all-arms-and-services team, although it would take a little longer before doctrine, training and development aspects matured.

Liaison officers placed in coalition headquarters also contributed significantly to the planning and conduct of operations. Australia's investment in training allies and having Australians trained by allies on exchange postings paid dividends and reflected on the significance of ties with allies.

The effectiveness of Australian liaison officers repeatedly demonstrated the importance of personal relationships for effective information-sharing and interoperability as well as ensuring high levels of mutual trust. Their effectiveness also bore testimony to the prowess of the Australians who filled these appointments. They themselves were very capable soldiers, but they were the product of Australian society and of the Australian Army's training institutions. Their experiences also reinforced the utility of continuing high levels of interoperability and information sharing with allies and coalition partners, following US and NATO standards.

Of note, operations in Iraq benefited from a significantly improved logistics information management system introduced following exposure of shortcomings experienced in East Timor in 1999 and 2000. The logistics system required careful oversight and intensive management, but the system was robust enough to handle peculiarities to an unprecedented degree.⁷¹

The Army and the wider ADF demonstrated that they had learned from experience and applied many of those lessons in the Middle East. In the meantime, the Army continued to refine operational capabilities with significant conceptual development work undertaken back in Australia. That work was accompanied by rigorous field, command-post and mission-rehearsal exercises, demonstrating, in part at least, that superior training and equipment were essential to success on operations. Additional opportunities to test the effectiveness of the Army's training and equipment were to be found on further operations, once again in Afghanistan, the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER | 9

RETURN TO AFGHANISTAN, 2005–06

The security situation in Afghanistan remained fragile and, with growing American pressure for re-engagement, the Australian Government considered sending a reconstruction task force. But conscious of the risk of casualties a significant engineering presence might engender, Prime Minister Howard and Foreign Minister Downer preferred the redeployment of special forces at least on an interim basis until the security situation improved.¹

OPERATION SLIPPER

The Australian Government therefore agreed to recommit a Special Operations Task Group (or SOTG) to Afghanistan in 2005. Once again, the deployment was under the title of Operation Slipper, but instead of deploying again to Kandahar, the SOTG was committed to the province immediately north of Kandahar: Oruzgan. Within the Army there was some informal debate about the fact that the special forces were selected rather than the conventional combat forces, which had formed the backbone of rotations in East Timor. Ultimately, it was a political decision for the government, resulting in a more open-ended commitment than any entered into over Iraq. The politicians involved were mindful that the special forces, having done so well on operations previously, were better placed to keep casualties to an absolute minimum. They were perceived as able to ‘dodge bullets’ better than their conventional counterparts.

The first SOTG rotation was drawn predominantly from the SAS Regiment under the CO, Lieutenant Colonel Jim McMahon, who had performed impressively in East Timor in 1999. McMahon had assigned elements of 4 RAR (Cdo) and the Incident Response Regiment, and support personnel from almost every corps in the Army. The second rotation was commanded by the CO of 1st Commando Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel John Gould. Following completion of the second rotation in May 2006 the third rotation deployed under the command of the CO of 4 RAR (Cdo), Lieutenant Colonel Mark Smethurst.

McMahon recalled that, for Operation Slipper, force structure was critical. Given that there were so many unknowns, including the speed of deployment and the reaction of the enemy, it was important to let the man in charge on the ground be the one who built the force required. 'We trusted our appreciation and experience on the ground,' he said. The SOTG had firefights on average every three days in the first year. Key factors that enabled the force to undertake its tasks with minimal casualties, McMahon argued, were the combination of the speed of deployment, the work-up, the add-ons to the force (from across the Army and beyond) and the liaison officers at all levels, which enabled rapid and trusted communication and information updates. In addition, the commander on the ground was given the freedom to test and adjust the force structure to the changing circumstances. McMahon wrote a capability paper every two months, which in effect was a revised appreciation of the situation. That report was used to call for adjustments to the force structure in light of the changing circumstances. It provided the force with great flexibility and responsiveness.²

The group established its forward operating base in the southern sector of Oruzgan Province, near a US Army Provincial Reconstruction Team site at Tarin Kowt. From there it worked with the Afghan National Army and Police as well as forces assigned to the US-led Coalition Forces Command – Afghanistan as part of the Coalition Joint Special Operations Task Force. During their deployment the SOTG became engaged in numerous contacts with anti-coalition militia, but with ready access to a plethora of integral and supporting air-based covering fire as well as sophisticated intelligence support, the Australian troops suffered few casualties.

Smethurst's team, including SAS troops and commandos, was involved in the heaviest fighting Australians had been involved in since the Vietnam War, and several received bravery awards for outstanding actions. In the course of 306 days on patrol undertaken by the first of three SOTG

rotations, Australians made contact – that is, fired shots at the enemy or were fired on – 139 times. Eleven Australians were wounded and none were killed. Smethurst ascribed the success during his tenure partly to the cumulative efforts of the previous SOTG rotations and the refined multi-source intelligence that enabled him to conduct operations with unprecedented precision.³ Given the overall counter-insurgency objective of winning hearts and minds, it was this precision that helped limit the negative consequences from ‘collateral damage’. The then head of Australian Special Operations Command, Major General Mike Hindmarsh, said of the mission: ‘Rarely a day went by when there was not some sort of contact with the enemy. These incidents ranged from skirmishes with small groups of anti-coalition militia to pitched battles involving hundreds of fighters over a number of hours, often so intense that hasty aerial ammunition resupplies were necessary.’⁴ Commenting on the ferocity of the fighting involved with such surprisingly low own-casualties, McMahon observed: ‘Our success was our non-routine way of doing business.’⁵

FIRST RECONSTRUCTION TASK FORCE

In keeping with the government’s desire to contain Australia’s commitment in Afghanistan, the completion of the third SOTG rotation saw the First Reconstruction Task Force (RTF 1) raised to deploy in the same location instead. The new task force used the Darwin-based 1st Combat Engineer Regiment as the core, with Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier) Mick Ryan in command. Command, logistics and other support elements came from the Darwin-based 1st Brigade. Ryan’s force was assigned to work in Tarin Kowt, but his mission was to work closely with the newly arrived 1400-strong Dutch force known as Task Force Uruzgan, which took over primary security responsibility for the Oruzgan province and Tarin Kowt in particular (the Dutch spelled Uruzgan with a ‘U’ in contrast to ‘Oruzgan’ used by Australians at the time, although subsequently ‘Uruzgan’ came to be used also by Australians).

Ryan was eager to work closely with the local Afghan community in a way that was consistent with the broad intent of the SOTG mission. For the engineers, however, emphasis was not placed on destroying the forces motivated to jihad, but in ‘kicking the Taliban where it hurts most, in the support of the people’. Through building basic infrastructure, providing health care and establishing an education system, the taskforce set out to show the Afghan people that a better future was possible for them under a coalition-supported Afghan national government than under the Taliban.



Prime Minister Howard with Lieutenant Colonel Mick Ryan, CO of the First Reconstruction Task Force, during Howard's visit in March 2007. The soldiers, according to Ryan, treated Howard 'like a rock star'. (Brigadier Mick Ryan)

With these considerations in mind, the RTF included combat engineers and tradesmen (carpenters, plumbers, electricians and plant operators) for construction activities and skills training for the local population to ensure that the benefits continued beyond the tenure of the deployment.

In order to perform these tasks in what remained a high-threat environment, the need remained for close-in protection above that expected from Dutch forces, whose responsibilities were province-wide. A platoon of infantry with dedicated Bushmaster vehicles was therefore included in the original 250-strong RTF. But with security concerns increasing, this force was augmented by a reinforced infantry company in November 2006, bringing the RTF total strength to about four hundred people.⁶ The augmentation elements were drawn from the Brisbane-based D Company 6 RAR, which provided the operators for the Bushmasters, and from the Darwin-based 2nd Cavalry Regiment, which contributed crewed ASLAVs. Darwin-based 5 RAR also provided soldiers from B Company for security as 'dismounts' for the Bushmasters.⁷ In effect, for a small team of engineers to move into and out of a worksite safely became a challenging procedure requiring planning days in advance, and utilising dozens of troops, Bushmasters and ASLAVs. The augmentation was required



Prime Minister John Howard with the troops from the First Reconstruction Task Force at Tarin Kowt. (Brigadier Mick Ryan)

because of the security measures required for every move ‘outside the wire’ of Kamp Holland – the name Dutch forces gave to the base built just south of, and overlooking, Tarin Kowt.⁸ The augmentation team was seen as a critical part of the RTF’s success. They performed to a high standard, both as a team and individually.⁹ The ability of the RTF to absorb such disparate force elements was testimony to the third reason for prowess at work: subunits and support elements from the arms and services readily worked in together. The effectiveness of this approach bore testimony to the Army’s disposition to tailor complementary force elements for a specific mission.

Critics would contend that the composition of this force was biased heavily towards force protection. Ryan understood that counter-insurgency operations were population-centric rather than enemy-centric. Therefore, he argued, ‘It is those actions by the counterinsurgency to gain support of the people that will largely determine the outcome of the war in Afghanistan. This requires a constant balancing act between kinetic actions (which kill the enemy and provide time and space for non-kinetic operations) and non-kinetic actions (which make the enemy irrelevant). The reconstruction operations undertaken in Oruzgan were designed to make a significant contribution to the non-kinetic fight, and therefore assist in making the Taliban irrelevant.’¹⁰

Notwithstanding the kinetic effects required, the level of assurance the force protection provided enabled Ryan and his team to undertake more than fifty missions. Each mission had formal 'hot wash-ups', with back-briefs to share emerging institutional knowledge, with the representatives from the Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO) working alongside to assist in facilitating learning and adaptation on the run. Much of what was gleaned was also passed back as advice to assist in the force preparation of the Second Reconstruction Task Force (RTF 2). This feedback and adaptation process proved invaluable in entrenching a learning and adaptive culture within the Army.

One notable story was the rapid reconstruction tasks that Ryan called 'backyard blitzes'. These short-duration tasks allowed for some quick successes but relied on a high level of confidence derived from the intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR) assets deployed in support. For such missions, Ryan observed, 'Buildings and mountains don't add the complexity: people do.' With this in mind, the assigned ISTAR elements played a pivotal role, validating and updating threat assessments on locations and people for each move outside the forward operating base. In the end, Ryan observed, these missions were so successful that 'we had village heads demanding Australian troops come back'.¹¹ Another notable endeavour was the Australian-run trade training program in the military base at Kamp Holland, near Tarin Kowt. This program completed a series of courses graduating Afghan men from Oruzgan Province who were to perform rudimentary but useful tasks such as hand- and power-tool operations for building construction,¹² although critics observed that, being established inside Kamp Holland, the school was accessible by only a fraction of the target population.

In reflecting on his experiences, Ryan observed that the Australian Army, and Headquarters Joint Operations Command charged with conducting operations, provided him and the RTF with a robust support infrastructure. Ryan's Australian boss, the Baghdad-based national commander, Brigadier Mick Crane (who had commanded forces in Oecussi in East Timor in 1999), exercised 'mission command'. As Ryan explained, this meant that 'once confident he knew I understood the strategic intent, he let me run RTF operations with the Dutch forces. I didn't have to ask, I just did it'.¹³ In addressing the soldiers of RTF 1 before their redeployment back to Australia, Brigadier Crane observed:

When they entered the [Middle East Area of Operations] in September 2006, they confronted a daunting range of tasks... Before

they could commence operations they had to establish themselves in an austere forward operating base. They also had to develop a working relationship with a new partner, the Netherlands, and form an understanding of the International Security Assistance Force environment in which they would be working. . . Only then would they be free to focus on the complex engineering reconstruction mission assigned to them . . . the men and women of the RTF succeeded magnificently in these endeavours. They quickly came to grips with their surroundings and learned to work with their Dutch counterparts . . . they have been outstanding ambassadors for Australia and have made a key contribution to restoring security and stability in Afghanistan.¹⁴

Crane's assessment was a fitting tribute to the RTF and its contribution in Oruzgan. Still, there were clear limitations to the efficacy of the RTF's approach, particularly given that other elements of a holistic counter-insurgency campaign in Oruzgan were missing from the Australian forces' arsenal. But with limited resources and an eye to containing the size and scope of Australia's commitment, there was a reluctance to do much beyond reconstruction. Mentoring of Afghan security forces was considered as an option, and eventually this would be taken up as the preferred mission focus. Reconstruction would come to be seen as overly paternalistic and subject to subsequent vandalism by the Taliban. In addition, for an effective exit strategy to be developed, follow-on local forces had to be prepared to take over the security tasks undertaken by Australian and allied troops. In the meantime, while the Australian Government and the Defence Department deliberated over the pros and cons of taking this more risky approach of mentoring, the Australian Army had made yet another contribution in Afghanistan.

CHINOOK HELICOPTERS

In addition to the RTF, Australia deployed a detachment of two CH-47 Chinook medium-lift helicopters and a hundred personnel from 5th Aviation Regiment to Kandahar Airfield in 2006. The detachment operated as part of the Combined Forces Command Task Force Knight Hawk, tasked to provide air mobility support and aeromedical evacuation capabilities. For twelve months they flew 1215.5 flying hours, more than 1823 sorties, carried 7827 passengers and transported 1 773 863 kilograms of cargo. To ensure that the aircraft were ready for combat in the high-threat



Corporal Garth Pregnell, an aircrewman technician with C Squadron, 5th Aviation Regiment (5 AVN) aboard a Chinook CH-47 helicopter over Afghanistan. (Photo: Sean Hobbs. AWM P05730.206)

environment (where concerns remained about residual Taliban stocks of US-supplied Stinger surface-to-air missiles), \$35 million was spent before the deployment to equip the aircraft and crew with state-of-the-art navigation, communication, electronic-warfare and ballistic self-protection and mini-gun weapon systems. As a result, the Aussie Chinook became the 'aircraft of choice'. While this rapid investment pointed to the speed at which the logistic support system could respond when pressed, it also pointed to the enduring problem of hollowness within the force, with many force components not quite ready for immediate deployment in high-threat environments. There was still work to be done.

The tasks performed included the full spectrum of operations from combat service support, delivering 'beans and bullets', through to combat missions that assaulted enemy compounds. The detachment's helicopters were frequently used for 'hot extractions' whereby troops were recovered from helicopter landing zones while the helicopters were under enemy fire. Lieutenant Colonel Kevin Humphreys, who commanded the first and last of three rotations, observed: 'The professionalism and work ethic of the men and women of the Chinook detachment has earned the respect and admiration of our coalition partners.'¹⁵ Indeed, the Chinook

detachment performed admirably, and there were calls for its prompt return to Afghanistan. In late 2007 plans were underway for the return of the Chinooks to Afghanistan in 2008. This time they would return with additional technology, including the 'Blue Force Tracker' system, which allowed users to monitor their position and that of other aircraft as well as other coalition units on the ground.¹⁶ The Australian Chinooks would deploy to Afghanistan in subsequent years as well.

RETURN OF SPECIAL FORCES ALONGSIDE THE RECONSTRUCTION TASK FORCE

Although the RTF's efforts, and those of the Aviation detachment, were to be highly commended, there was a growing perceived need for 'kinetic' efforts involving combat forces to directly target the Taliban. Hence, in anticipation of the Taliban's extended spring-to-autumn fighting season, the government announced, in April 2007, the deployment of another SOTG to Afghanistan. This was a significant break from the government's earlier approach. Unlike previously, this was not a straightforward exchange of engineers for special forces. This was a significant increase in the level of Australia's commitment to a successful outcome in Oruzgan Province. The decision was made in the context of significant additional terrorist attacks, which appeared to warrant the Australian Government taking a more forthright stand: namely, the bombings in London in July 2005 and in Bali in October 2005. The decision also was made in the context of the Americans being particularly stretched in Iraq and needing to find forces to recommit to Afghanistan.

Some argued that this was a 180-degree turn for the Howard Government, which left it committed to an open-ended and potentially messy nation-building exercise.¹⁷ To be sure, this was the closest Australia had come to a Vietnam War-like commitment to managing the military operations of an entire province. But back then the brigade-sized 1st Australian Task Force reached 4500 soldiers with a peak of 6000 servicemen and women in Vietnam. The contrast with Vietnam illustrated that even this increased commitment studiously avoided accepting responsibility for the overall campaign in Oruzgan. Instead Australia left that responsibility firmly in the hands of allies, initially the Dutch, and, once they withdrew, the Americans. The government's desire remained unwavering: to avoid an open-ended commitment that would see politically damaging levels of casualties erode the government's political support base. Howard took

the move knowing that Australia's role in Afghanistan had bipartisan support. This meant that when elections came in late 2007, Afghanistan commitments would not directly affect the outcome.

The 300-strong SOTG included special forces soldiers from the Incident Response Regiment, the SAS Regiment and 4 RAR (Commando) as well as integrated intelligence, logistics and mobility support. In addition, the ADF was tasked to provide an RAAF air surveillance radar capability based at Kandahar Airfield and an additional C-130J Hercules transport aircraft, along with the two Chinook helicopters. The intention was for the SOTG to deploy for at least two years, operating under the operational authority of the commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Oruzgan province.¹⁸ In announcing the deployment, Howard declared that the role was 'to enhance provincial security by disrupting Taliban extremists' command and control and supply routes'. The Chief of the Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, elaborated, stating: 'It's a more robust group than last time, we've applied all the lessons learned from the last time and I think we've got a very good, very well-led, very well-equipped group to deal with the very challenging environment that we face there.'¹⁹

This robustness and experience placed the SOTG in a good position for the challenges it was to face this time around. Three special forces soldiers were wounded in an engagement with the Taliban early in September 2007. Two of the soldiers received superficial wounds and remained on the mission, although one was evacuated to receive further treatment. Three more were wounded by roadside bomb blasts in mid-September.²⁰ The adversary had adapted some of its tactics, and the SOTG was adapting in response as well.

Commenting on the effect of the special forces in Oruzgan, Hindmarsh described their operations as 'classic counter-insurgency'. He observed in September 2007 that 14 Australian special forces soldiers had been wounded since deploying to Afghanistan in 2005, but he made the point that the SOTG's operations had thrown the Taliban 'off balance', undermining their ability to launch attacks on the key provincial towns: 'The Taliban, they're tough resilient fighters, but they're also a nasty bunch of bastards and our guys are very happy about the work they are doing there.' Hindmarsh continued: 'One thing we can't be accused of is being obsessed with force protection – in other words staying in base camp and venturing out every now and again... We like to patrol, and patrol in depth, which means well out, and we like to do it for lengthy periods of time... Our *modus operandi* is to get out there – get among the enemy

and spend a long time in their safe areas, becoming as familiar with that environment as the enemy.²¹

The tasks performed certainly contributed to undermining the Taliban, but there was still plenty of work for the other forces to undertake as well. For instance, Australian soldiers with the RTF also engaged in a four-hour firefight in September 2007 against 50 Taliban militants about eight kilometres north of Tarin Kowt. Lieutenant Glenn Neilson, the infantry platoon commander involved, said the Taliban had established strong firing positions from the cover of an orchard during the fight, and they had been reinforced with more fighters as the attack progressed. This firefight was reported to be the biggest and longest confrontation RTF soldiers had fought up to that point, and it involved a substantial amount of fire from both sides. The Australians were able to call in air support from Dutch F-16 fighter aircraft and Apache helicopters, and this proved decisive. The Australians were also supported by soldiers from the Afghan National Army trained by Australians in Oruzgan.

Lieutenant Colonel Harry Jarvie, the CO of RTF 2, said the confrontation was one of a number of defeats for the Taliban in Oruzgan and neighbouring Helmand provinces in the preceding week. Jarvie went further, saying that Australian soldiers had been regularly tested by the Taliban. 'In every case they have performed magnificently.' Despite the Taliban firing automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenades and also suffering heavy casualties, no Australian soldiers or civilians were wounded in the incident and no Australian vehicles were damaged.²² But there were some close shaves.

Private Philip Hodgskiss, for instance, owed his life to the enhanced combat body armour that protected him from two shots in the back when Taliban insurgents opened fire. Hodgskiss's initial reaction was to get down onto the ground and engage the Taliban with return fire. He and his colleagues engaged them with Steyr rifles, Minimi light machine-guns, 40mm grenade launchers, M-72 rockets and hand grenades. After firing a full magazine at the Taliban 300 metres away, Hodgskiss turned to check for signs of blood on his back, but found nothing. Only after checking his body armour did he find the bullet lodged in the armour plate. Hodgskiss said afterwards, 'I knew I had been shot because it felt like someone had run up behind me and punched me very hard in the back.' His section commander, Lance Corporal James Prascevic, told him to put his webbing back on and to continue firing at the enemy, saying, 'We'll sort it out when we get back.'²³ The armour had undoubtedly saved

the soldier's life, but the incident demonstrated the focused, unfazed and hard-hitting approach of Australian soldiers under fire.

Australia's remarkable run of good luck could not hold out indefinitely and on 8 October, a soldier in RTF 3, Trooper David Pearce, was killed and another soldier wounded when a bomb exploded next to an ASLAV. The vehicle was part of a patrol operating about six kilometres from their base in Tarin Kowt. The men had been part of a patrol returning from an engineer reconnaissance task. Trooper Pearce was the second Australian serviceman killed in combat since the Vietnam War, after Sergeant Russell, who was killed in Afghanistan in 2002. His remains were returned to Australia aboard a C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft.²⁴

Not long afterwards, on 25 October, SAS Sergeant Matthew Locke was killed in action while supporting Afghan and coalition forces to target and clear Taliban in the Chora Valley north of Tarin Kowt. His colleagues called for a medical evacuation helicopter and administered first aid, but despite the best efforts of all involved, he could not be revived.²⁵ Locke had recently been awarded the Medal for Gallantry for his actions in hazardous circumstances during his previous deployment in 2006. His citation captured well the nature of operations undertaken. The citation reads:

For gallantry in action in hazardous circumstances as second-in-command of an SAS [Regiment] patrol while deployed on Operation Slipper, Afghanistan, in 2006. The patrol was tasked with establishing an Observation Post in rugged terrain overlooking an anti-coalition militia (ACM) sanctuary. After an arduous 10-hour foot infiltration up the side of the mountain, the patrol was called into action to support elements of the Combined Task Force Special Forces patrol in contact with ACM in the valley floor to their north. After the engagement, Sgt Locke's patrol remained in location and was the only coalition ground element with visibility of the target area. During the course of the next day the patrol continued to coordinate offensive air support to further disrupt and degrade the enemy's morale. During the afternoon, the O[bservation] P[ost] became the focus of the ACM who made repeated attempts by day and night to overrun and surround the position. In one such incident the ACM attempted to outflank the OP and Sgt Locke, without regard for his own safety, led a two-man team to locate and successfully neutralise the ACM. This particular incident was followed by another ACM attempt to manoeuvre to attack the OP

from another flank. Sgt Locke, again with little regard for his personal safety, adopted a fire position that was exposed on high ground which dominated the planned ACM assault. While deliberately exposing himself to intense rifle and machine-gun fire, he again neutralised the lead assaulting elements while suppressing other ACM until the arrival of offensive air support. While still under sustained fire, Sgt Locke then directed indirect fire to effectively neutralise another ACM advance on his patrol's position. The courageous and gallant actions of Sgt Locke were instrumental in regaining the initiative and allowing the successful exfiltration of the patrol on foot prior to first light the next day. Sgt Locke's actions of gallantry, while under enemy fire in extremely hazardous circumstances, displayed courage of the highest order.²⁶

Locke's remains were flown back to Australia, having been placed on a C-130 aircraft at Tarin Kowt by his colleagues during a ramp ceremony on 28 October 2007.

Shortly after Locke's death, Sergeant Michael Lyddiard was seriously wounded on 2 November. Lyddiard was involved in a route clearance task during Operation Spin Ghar when an IED was discovered. He was in the process of attempting to render the device safe when it detonated. The experience demonstrated the need for increased automation of counter-IED functions, particularly through the increased use of robotics.²⁷

Again, a month later, another soldier, Private Luke Worsley, was killed by small-arms fire while participating in a planned attack against Taliban elements in Oruzgan province. The SOTG had been conducting an operation to clear a Taliban compound, following several weeks of monitoring and intelligence gathering by Australian and coalition forces. No other Australian troops were killed in the protracted engagement, which took place about 10 kilometres east of Tarin Kowt.²⁸

Both Sergeant Russell and Trooper Pearce died from injuries sustained in bomb blasts from explosive mines otherwise known as IEDs. This happened despite Australia's extensive experience with deploying soldiers to the United Nations Mine Clearance Training Team (UNMCTT) in Afghanistan and Pakistan from 1989 to 1993. During that deployment, Australian engineers had learnt much about the techniques and equipment used in Afghanistan. But when they returned to Australia in the early 1990s few saw the need to capitalise on their experience. One observation made by UNMCTT members was that the Army had a noticeable capability gap concerning the lack of mechanical route mine clearance equipment

to clear roads of such IEDs. Tragically, a number of Australian deaths in Afghanistan would occur partly because of the lack of adequate mechanical route clearance equipment. More could have been done to capitalise on the expertise of those who had deployed as part of the UNMCTT.²⁹

In the meantime, back in Australia, the fact that so few Australians had been killed in the early years of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq meant that funerals became significant national events. With bipartisan political support for the Afghanistan commitment, where a surge in casualties was occurring, political leaders from both sides felt obliged to attend and be seen to be supporting the troops and grieving families. The level of senior officer representation at these funerals was also high. Usually they were attended by the Prime Minister, Opposition Leader, Defence Minister, CDF, Chief of Army, Special Operations Commander and others. The funerals attracted media attention and triggered discussion on the meaning and purpose of Australia's involvement in Afghanistan. They also tended to reinforce the military's links with society as many onlookers shared the grief felt by those directly affected.

Meanwhile, despite the surge in contacts with the Taliban, the RTF continued its work on construction tasks, completing two major health facility projects. Fortunately the force was equipped with specialist equipment, especially armoured trucks and engineer plant equipment, to enhance the protection of the soldiers undertaking the work. The first construction project undertaken was the redevelopment of the Tarin Kowt Hospital, costing \$800 000 and involving the provision of a new water supply, kitchen, outpatient facilities, X-ray facilities and an infectious-diseases ward. The second was the Yaklengah Comprehensive Health Clinic, constructed 10 kilometres south-west of Tarin Kowt for \$340 000. The two projects were all planned, funded and managed by the RTF engineers and handed over to the local government in the presence of the provincial governor on 16 September 2007.³⁰

RTF soldiers also were quick to get involved in a range of other tasks, particularly in detecting and defeating one of the Taliban's favourite weapons – IEDs. Warrant Officer Class 1, Tony Quirk, was the RTF Engineer Task Group sergeant major and a demining expert. He observed that explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) technicians had to pit their minds against those of the bomb-makers to stay a step ahead of them. As Quirk explained, 'Aussie engineers, especially the EOD lads, are highly trained and experienced in their field... They treat the device with the

appropriate respect, which is why we have been able to locate and render safe a number of IEDs that were designed to, and probably would, kill Australian troops.’³¹

In the meantime, the 370-strong RTF 3 was preparing in Townsville to deploy to relieve RTF 2. The commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel David Wainwright, commented on its capability and professionalism, saying, ‘We have put them through the hardest tests and training that could be provided to ensure that they are ready to represent Australia when they get to Afghanistan.’ This time a ten-man 81mm mortar section accompanied the force to provide offensive support to RTF operations. The deployment highlighted the ADF’s continual review of the situation encountered and its commitment to provide whatever force protection measures were necessary.³²

OPERATION SPIN GHAR

Of concern for the RTFs was the lack of guidance for how to conduct their operations. Despite the apparent success of the backyard blitzes and other reconstruction tasks, headway in terms of improved security was patchy and hard to measure. RTF 3 had received only general guidance and, in many ways, situational awareness developed at the tactical level was considered dislocated from views in Canberra at the time.³³ Operation Spin Ghar, RTF 3’s first major operation, involved the Kandahar-based Regional Command (South) seeking to clear the Chora Valley, Baluchi Pass and northern Dorafshan of Taliban in order to allow increased Government of Afghanistan participation in the area. The RTF constructed checkpoints in Kala Kala, Nyazi and Sangar. Construction was supported by active patrols in the Chora Valley, which led to the discovery of a number of Taliban caches and greater understanding of the Taliban’s operations in the area.

The task force’s concept of operations as part of Operation Spin Ghar was for Combat Team Hammer, the engineer-based team, to prefabricate and preposition construction stores. Combat Team Spear, the manoeuvre-based combat team, having organised itself to provide a security element and a construction element, moved from a forward operating base with an accompanying battle group to secure a position south of the Chora Pass where the Nyazi checkpoint was built near Tarin Kowt. Once completed, it was handed over to the Afghan National Security Forces. An infantry platoon was then inserted by helicopters to clear the route into Kala

Kala village. Simultaneously, Combat Team Spear elements constructed the Sangar checkpoint overlooking the river crossing on the southern access road to the Chora district centre. The clearance was followed by a handover to the Afghan National Security Forces before the task force returned to their base in Tarin Kowt.³⁴

The Australians' performance delivered results with the completion of the checkpoints across the Chora Valley to allow the Afghan security forces to stabilise the area and to enable the Afghans themselves to reduce the Taliban's ability to operate freely.³⁵ The team undertook an array of tasks having constructed three Afghan National Army checkpoints in the Chora Valley, two patrol bases in Dorafshan as well as expanding a patrol base into a forward operating base.

For the RTF, the unit's title belied the combined-arms nature of the team. For Operation Spin Ghar, for instance, a combat team would be organised into an advance guard, main body and rear guard. The lead element of the advance guard, the vanguard, consisted of a combat engineer section (minus – i.e. not a complete section) and an infantry platoon. The main guard consisted of a cavalry patrol and the combat team tactical headquarters. The main body would consist of the combat team main headquarters, any engineer construction elements and the supporting 'echelon'. The rear guard would consist of an infantry platoon and a cavalry patrol, with unmanned aerial vehicles screening the front and flanks. The vanguard would clear the route, with the main guard and rear guards holding key points. The main body would then transit from its secured location until the destination was reached and an attempt at deception was carried out to give the impression that the team was resting overnight and moving the next day, then would be followed up by another element transiting through. The infantry element would approach the fertile 'Green Zone' in early morning darkness and conduct a deliberate 'cordon and visit' operation, seeking to avoid unduly aggravating the locals with indiscriminate searches.

According to Major Michael Bassingthwaighe, these operations, 'if not achieving a kinetic effect of taking detainees or locating caches, had the non-kinetic effect of inserting uncertainty in the mind of the enemy by the perception that we could be anywhere at any time'.³⁶ At the same time, the task force would seek effectively to engage with the locals, drawing on the engagement team specialists from information operations, intelligence and the provincial reconstruction teams.

The construction of key security infrastructure helped bolster the Afghan security forces' capabilities and enabled them to conduct 'population control actions' and maintain a permanent presence where

Taliban would previously roam unhindered. This ‘had an immediate effect on Taliban leadership and operations and caused concern over which location would be targeted next’. According to Wainwright’s successor, Lieutenant Colonel Stuart Yeaman, the insurgents were clearly frustrated by this direct challenge on areas they considered their heartland, and this operation contributed to the Taliban abandoning their summer offensive.³⁷

OPERATION TAKHT

As time passed, the focus shifted from reconstruction to mentored reconstruction: this was because operational uncertainty restricted other civil organisations from helping with reconstruction. One of the enduring operations in this line was Operation Takht – intended for the construction of permanent infrastructure that assisted rehabilitation and indigenous capacity-building. The operation continued over four rotations with Australians mentoring locals rebuilding and improving several key items of local infrastructure.³⁸

The RTF civil works program included construction of the Eastern Causeway (US\$1.2 million), Tarin Kowt Provincial Hospital (US\$1.25 million), Afghan Health and Development Training Centre (US\$1.66 million), Yaklengah Health Centre (US\$322 000), Tarin Kowt Waste Management Facility (US\$420 000), Tarin Kowt Primary School (US\$1.59 million) and Tarin Kowt Boys’ High School (US\$280 000).³⁹

The task force engineers imparted sufficient knowledge and experience to enable them to contract local companies to build bridges and buildings outside the city, where previously it had been unsafe to go. This, in turn, prompted local ministries to undertake their own contracted works without task force support.⁴⁰

Subsequent task forces increasingly focused on mentoring rather than reconstruction as the priorities shifted and the Australians gained a greater understanding of the need to develop indigenous security force capabilities if they were ever to be able to depart without their efforts unravelling.⁴¹

EMBEDDED STAFF

In addition to the RTF and SOTG in Tarin Kowt, Australian Army personnel were deployed as integral staff members (‘embedded’) as well as liaison officers in various coalition units and headquarters in Tarin Kowt and across Afghanistan, including Kabul, Kandahar in southern Afghanistan and Baghram, north of Kabul. In Tarin Kowt, embedded staff worked in

the Dutch-led Task Force Uruzgan Headquarters where they facilitated close collaboration, coordination, mission deconfliction and enhanced mutual understanding. Further afield, military personnel were placed in key positions to assist with planning and conduct of the overall campaign while keeping abreast of developments to inform Australian planning.

Lieutenant Colonel Mark Brewer, for instance, deployed in mid-2006 as part of the Aegis multinational task force based at Kandahar Air Field helping to pave the way for the RTF's deployment. Brewer deployed with a mine action officer, Warrant Officer Class 2 Andrew Dixon, and a logistics officer, Captain Ty Domin. The three trained in Canada as part of a Canadian-led multinational brigade headquarters stationed in Kandahar. Brewer observed that the Canadians had operational experience similar to Australia's, and the Australians fitted in well: 'We speak the same military language and when we plan, we talk issues through so there are no misunderstandings.'⁴² Brewer observed: 'For we three embeds, we saw the challenge of building a coalition, establishing procedures, and developing a campaign, while simultaneously establishing the framework for operations, deploying a multinational force and conducting a complex relief in place with US forces. The key benefit for Australia was that our operations in Iraq and Afghanistan operated in support of other nations. Embedded positions provided a crucial opportunity to understand the bigger operational problems posed by running warfighting operations.'⁴³

Placing military personnel in appointments like this provided unprecedented access to planning and awareness of the latest tactical and operational adaptations of partner nations' forces in Afghanistan. Those selected also had unparalleled opportunities to practise the higher operational art of military operations. Anecdotal evidence indicates that where they did so, they proved highly capable of performing the roles assigned, demonstrating to others the Army's prowess. In addition, much of the information and experience gained informed planning and refined procedures for subsequent Australian deployments. These placements were facilitated by the close associations established with partner armies through the ABCA arrangements.

OPERATION HERRICK

Links between the Australian Army and the British Army had been maintained through a number of avenues for decades, notably through the ABCA. With Australia eager to maintain a calibrated approach to engagement, while also wanting to provide its gunners with an opportunity

to gain operational experience, arrangements were made in 2007 for Australia to contribute to manning British artillery units operating in Afghanistan as part of Britain's Operation Herrick. This contribution, commencing in 2008 and lasting until 2011, consisted of 15 Royal Australian Artillery (RAA) soldiers on six-month rotations from Australian artillery regiments deploying to Afghanistan as part of the United Kingdom's Task Force Helmand. The gunners completed a six-month intensive work-up and training phase in the UK, then deployed with the UK task force under a bilateral arrangement. The Australian artillery contingent was under the immediate command of an Australian lieutenant and operated within a UK artillery troop. This was the first operational deployment of Australian gun-line personnel, in their primary role, since Vietnam in 1971. The initial deployment from 8/12th Medium Regiment was followed by a similar rotation from Townsville's 4th Field Regiment late in 2008. The Australian gunners used the UK 105mm L118 Light Gun (almost identical to the Australian Army's L119 Hamel Gun) from forward operating bases throughout Helmand Province.⁴⁴

REFLECTIONS

In Afghanistan, the Australians deployed only volunteer soldiers, equipped and trained to an unprecedented level and backed up by an Army and wider Defence organisation that demonstrated greater responsiveness and operational focus than witnessed since at least the height of the Vietnam War. That responsiveness and operational focus meant that soldiers deployed with arguably the best equipment available and with the highest standards of training achievable. Soldiers of other armies were frequently heard to remark with a degree of envy on the Australians' equipment. British soldiers in particular found Australians better equipped, with more modern and higher-tech equipment.⁴⁵

While always leaving room for improvement, the responsiveness of the procurement agency to the need for acquisition of selected items in many cases became very rapid. Items could be identified as operationally important and were procured and quickly introduced into use. The cycle for testing and adjusting also became more responsive, with modifications and alterations to equipment and procedures introduced at unprecedented rates. The provision of high-technology equipment also further enhanced the capabilities of both the special and conventional forces. These improvements served the interests of both groups as the more capable conventional troops freed up the special forces to focus

on other tasks. For the conventional forces, being involved once again in combined-arms combat operations (albeit on a fleeting rather than regular basis) helped to reaffirm their confidence in core warfighting skills.

The high standards of equipment and training, coupled with the knowledge of support from the rear echelons in Australia, meant that soldiers in Afghanistan could operate with high morale, supremely confident in their ability to undertake assigned tasks and in the support they would receive. In Iraq similar observations could be made concerning proficiency and capability of the force deployed, although the politicised nature of Australia's involvement there understandably constrained the force's freedom of action.

Major General (Retd) Jim Molan observed: 'On a tactical level we are learning our own lessons. It's not just combat lessons, it's logistic lessons, operation of combat aviation and intelligence. This is incredibly valuable for the Australian Defence Force. However, we're learning little at the operational and at the strategic levels. What we must do is examine in extraordinary detail the lessons at the operational and strategic level of our allies who are running campaigns . . .'⁴⁶

To be sure, the absence of an Australian formation-level command appointment in Oruzgan precluded the Army from learning the operational and strategic lessons directly. Some of this would come later when Australia eventually accepted command of forces in Oruzgan. But the experience of a wide range of embedded officers in coalition headquarters partly compensated for this shortcoming, as did the work of the Australian JTF headquarters. Moreover, virtually without exception, these officers performed exceptionally well, bringing credit to Australia and returning with a wide range of valuable experiences.

Molan's criticisms pointed to the casualty cringe and concern for the fallout of political over-reach. Molan was critical of the government for its unwillingness to commit more substantial forces and to give them greater leeway in the conduct of combat operations. But the government was motivated to avoid using the Army in a way beyond the political 'pain threshold' of the Australian community. This was a concern of virtually all Australian governments involved in planning military deployments on 'wars of choice' far from Australia in the post-Vietnam War era. Arguably, Molan's concerns pointed to a failure by government to explain to the people why the commitment was important.

As in Vietnam, it was hard to tell how much influence Australia's contribution was having on the ground in Oruzgan province. After all, Oruzgan, like Phuoc Tuy province in Vietnam, was chosen by the Australians

as their selected area of responsibility partly because it was a manageable size and because it was known to be important for the overall campaign, while at the same time it was not the centre of the highest concentrations of enemy forces. Given this factor, it subsequently would become difficult to discern how much the pacification of the province could be attributed to the actions, capabilities and uniqueness of the approach taken by the Australian forces.

A key feature from the Afghanistan commitment was that the Australian Army sought to learn from its experiences on operations. The significance of the common individual and collective field training was reflected in the use of operational evaluation teams, reconnaissance teams and mission rehearsal exercises in Australia. Army's Land Command, Special Operations Command and Training Command also sought to modify training in light of the changes in enemy tactics and techniques evident on operations. This predisposition to adapt individual and collective training meant subsequent rotations could deploy with an understanding of the latest tactical and technological developments concerning coalition and enemy forces.

In addition, the force structure deployed on subsequent rotations after 2007 would be adjusted in light of assessments on the most effective use of Australian resources in Oruzgan. Notably the emphasis for the RTF would shift from reconstruction to mentoring. This shift reflected ongoing assessments of the best way to tailor Australia's force contribution to have a positive effect, while optimising the Army's ability to sustain repeated force rotations using only volunteers. What became apparent later, however, was that this strategy had its own down side, as casualties mounted in subsequent years.

Despite the best efforts of those involved, there remained room for improvement. Some observed that even after several rotations, the Army still did not have a baseline for Afghanistan deployments. Also, the view was that the mission rehearsal exercises 'take you a fair way there, but we still have a way to go'.⁴⁷

Beyond these lessons, however, significant criticisms were levelled at Australia's approach in Afghanistan. Lieutenant General (Retd) Peter Leahy observed that Australia was pursuing what he called 'half a strategy in Afghanistan'. To Leahy, the Australian Government had traded off the bravery, resolve and professionalism of its soldiers for too long. The nation-building task was not just for soldiers but one that required defence, security, international relations and foreign aid resources.⁴⁸ However, critics could respond by arguing that as a former Army chief,

Leahy was in a significant position to influence that strategy yet was prepared, at the least, to comply with it while in office.

Reflecting a level of frustration among Australian Regular infantry elements, one infantry officer, Major (later Colonel) Jim Hammett, observed that Australia's contribution to offensive warlike operations following 2001 had consisted primarily of special forces. Yet while only a 'very small percentage' of Australian infantrymen had participated in offensive combat operations, US, British, and Canadian militaries had employed their conventional forces in combat operations without hesitation in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴⁹ This frustration was accentuated by comparisons with the missions undertaken by Canadian, British and American conventional troops in neighbouring provinces.

In seeking to place this frustration in context, it is useful to consider the experience of the Canadians. For Canada, the first rotation in late 2001 and 2002 was a battle group based around the 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, which deployed to Kandahar to help destroy Al Qaeda havens and rout Taliban elements. The follow-on group, the 3rd Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment, deployed to Kabul instead, and subsequent rotations remained there until a decision in 2005 to re-deploy their forces from Kabul back to Kandahar.

Canada's contrasting experience pointed to different political dynamics at work as well. The Canadians were conscious of not having contributed ground forces in Iraq in 2003 and felt obliged to play a more assertive role in a part of Afghanistan where they would have a higher and riskier profile. Australia did not feel the same pressure because of its participation in the invasion of Iraq in 2003. By early 2006 the Canadians were involved in intense fighting in an area west of Kandahar known as the Panjwahi, along the Arghandab River. Canadian casualties started to mount. They quickly learned from initial mistakes and inexperience and subsequently deployed tanks, reversing their decision to delete tanks from their inventory. They also deployed additional helicopters to ensure adequate combined-arms and close-in support to resupply forces, evacuate casualties and ensure that overwhelming firepower was available for the close-in fight against Taliban opponents when necessary.

The operations there stood in stark contrast to the Canadians' twentieth-century experience as peacekeepers. Their experience also validated the use of tanks as an important component of the combined-arms team, capable of significantly altering the balance of power in firefights in their favour. This approach also helped to limit the Canadians' own casualties while simultaneously boosting the troops' confidence and morale.

To the Canadians, the experience of real warfighting was sobering, but it vindicated the retention of tanks and combined-arms capabilities required for such battles. Their experience, as well as that of British and American forces operating in southern Afghanistan, stands in contrast with Australia's, having chosen instead to rely on other countries' forces to bear a large portion of the load in directly confronting Taliban strongholds.⁵⁰

The Canadian experience is instructive particularly as they chose to be more self-reliant than Australia, deploying with a greater range of their own combined-arms components. The experience taught significant lessons to the Canadians about combined-arms warfare. But this came at a cost in terms of casualties. Politically, the price was too high for Canadians to bear, and their combat force would be withdrawn from Kandahar in 2011, leaving behind a 950-strong training and mentoring team deployed as part of the NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan instead.

In contrast, the Australians avoided deploying conventional forces in such dangerous circumstances, leaving the more intense fights to the special forces and to allies. By contributing a niche force and relying on allies and coalition partners to provide significant backup, Australia avoided a potentially painful political battle over its contribution to Afghanistan. In doing so, Australia risked the allies having higher priorities elsewhere at critical junctures and risked learning incomplete lessons from the Oruzgan experience.

Not wishing to undermine his political mandate or see a surge in casualties, Howard was attuned to the political contention over the war. In response constraints were imposed on the employment of Australian troops and other government resources. Ironically, it seemed difficult for a government that emphasised that Australians lived in a global economy to suggest that the country's security was not only influenced by events in its immediate region but also by those further afield in such places as Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, as elsewhere, the special forces repeatedly displayed their skills, time and again demonstrating why they were considered special. In Afghanistan their accomplishments effectively derailed Taliban plans for Oruzgan province, targeting key leaders with such stealth and determination that remaining Taliban players were left confounded. But the division of responsibilities, with the special forces being authorised to undertake the operations of highest risk and the conventional forces being constrained in their mission risk profiles, meant that frustration among the conventional forces lingered.

Critics could argue that the province of Oruzgan was the quietest in Afghanistan's Regional Command – South. A similar criticism could be levelled at Australia's participation in the Vietnam War, where the 1st Australian Task Force operated in Phuoc Tuy province, south-east of Saigon. But in both cases, it was not at all certain when the forces initially deployed there that these would be considered among the more peaceful provinces in the years that followed. As in Phuoc Tuy, it was no accident that Oruzgan came to be considered relatively 'pacified'. The pacification of a province like Phuoc Tuy, far away from the border with North Vietnam, came about through the conduct of a wide range of relentless, deliberate and specifically targeted operations aimed at dealing with the insurgents, using the special and conventional forces as well as the assets of allies operating nearby. Similarly in Oruzgan, the Australian approach, relying on the highly skilled soldiers of the special and conventional forces, was remarkably effective, despite the criticism made about the war in Afghanistan and the over-reliance on the special forces for combat operations.

One particular negative associated with Australia's campaign in Oruzgan was that from the onset the Army, due to a lack of media coverage, was fighting a largely unreported war, with many battles simply not featuring in public consciousness due to tight government management of media access to Australia's forces. As a result, a decade of operations passed by with little of myths and legends to retell. As Leahy observed, 'This is ten per cent of our history – a very active ten per cent with little to show.'⁵¹

The lack of media coverage stood in contrast with the greater media access given to British and American forces on operations in Afghanistan – reporting that often dominated Australian television news reports, for instance. For successive risk-averse Defence ministers eager to maintain control of potentially damaging news stories, this made eminent short-term political sense. But in hindsight this was a cynical and largely self-serving exercise of executive power to minimise political risk. The price of that risk aversion, as Leahy indicated,⁵² was a decade of lost opportunities to tell the soldiers' story and to explain to the people of Australia what their soldiers were doing on their behalf and why. To be sure, the earlier experience of the Vietnam War weighed on the minds of policy-makers. After all, during that war gruesome television footage, most of which concerned the actions of US rather than Australian forces, eroded support for the war. But there was a big difference between that conflict and the conflicts Australia was involved in arising from the 'war on terror'.

These were conflicts that involved professional volunteer soldiers, not conscripts. The concerns that had eroded support for the Vietnam War, particularly conscription, were not relevant.

On balance, Australia's contribution in Afghanistan, far from Australia's shores, was quite reasonably considered to be appropriate by the Defence senior leadership and by Australian governments of both political persuasions. The force contribution in Afghanistan remained strongly influenced by the Army's links with society and was arguably commensurate with the level of investment in Afghanistan warranted by the degree of national interests at stake: this was particularly the case compared to other Western countries involved in Afghanistan. In the meantime, calls for other commitments both at home and abroad kept much of the rest of the Army on an operational footing.

PART | 4

ASIA-PACIFIC
ENGAGEMENT
AND ADAPTATION
AT HOME

The Australian Army's experience covered in Parts 2 and 3 has tended to dominate the public consciousness of what the Army was up to during the period from 1999 to 2007. After all, this is where the majority of the media attention was focused. The operations involved considerable risk and danger to those involved operating close to home in East Timor and Solomon Islands and in the Middle East, principally in Iraq and Afghanistan. But there is considerably more to the story than that to which these accounts attest so far. The Australian Army found itself in demand for a wide range of additional tasks during this period both in Australia and abroad. Reflecting on that experience illustrates the breadth and range of tasks undertaken. It also points to the surprisingly broad utility and versatility of the Army.

The combination of commitments to operations in the Middle East and closer to home also contributed to considerable rethinking about how the Army was supposed to operate. A series of reform initiatives were instigated, changing the way the Army was organised and how it perceived and prepared itself for varied roles the Australian Government expected it to perform, often with little, if any, warning. The following three chapters, on aid and other assistance, a spike in operational tempo in 2006 and 2007 and efforts at conceptual and organisational adaptation within the Army, attempt to cover this remaining gap in public consciousness.

AID AND OTHER ASSISTANCE SINCE 2000

The Australian Army had long featured as the government's force of choice to assist with natural disasters within Australia and, increasingly, for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief overseas, often alongside other government agencies and relief organisations. This chapter commences before the deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq took place. It considers those operations and other significant activities that happened while the Army was preoccupied with operations in East Timor and Solomon Islands, and subsequently Afghanistan and Iraq. The chapter looks at operations in Australia; other operations in Australia's region, often in the form of crisis response with Australia taking a leading role; operations far from Australia's shores, where often enough only token contributions were made; and regional engagement activities with neighbours, notably military exercises in Australia and abroad. A brief look at the impact of the Olympic Games and on the events of '9/11' in the United States sets the stage. The years from 1999 onwards proved replete with operational challenges far and wide, many arising at short notice and others with significant planning lead times, like the Olympic Games.

OPERATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

For the Sydney Olympics in September 2000, the lead agency for security was the NSW Police Force. But the ADF and the Army in particular played a substantial role in ensuring that they went smoothly. An ADF

Joint Task Force, JTF 112, or JTF Gold, was established in January 1999 in Victoria Barracks at Paddington, Sydney, under the command of Brigadier Gary Byles. The JTF's mission was to contribute to a secure and professional Olympic Games that enhanced the image of the ADF and the nation. After the Games, Byles said, 'I could not have asked for a better result.' In summing up, Byles observed that around five thousand ADF personnel, including two thousand reservists, were directly involved, with many more playing supporting roles, thus ensuring that Operation Gold delivered essential capabilities and services for a successful Olympic Games.¹ Byles' comments reflect detailed planning and preparation, but they also reflect a period, before 11 September 2001, when terrorism had not yet gained significant prominence in Australia. The government recognised that risks had to be mitigated, but internationally-linked and home-grown terrorism was not widely seen as a problem in Australia. Still, precautions had to be taken.

Troops were employed on a wide range of tasks. ADF Liaison officers were placed at the Olympics Precinct and Regional Operations Centre, the Olympic Security Command Centre, the Olympic Intelligence Centre and the Olympic Roads and Transport Authority. These placements were essential for smooth and productive relations between groups with contrasting organisational cultures. In addition, a Joint Incident Response Unit (JIRU) was created, drawn from specialists within the Navy, Army, Air Force and Defence Science and Technology Organisation. JIRU existed for high-risk search and incident response, including improvised explosive device disposal and chemical, biological and radiological response. The unit included specialist equipment as well as highly trained personnel and explosive detection dogs. An Operational Search Battalion also was created with personnel from the Army's 2nd Division. The largest Reserve battalion raised for an operation since the Second World War, the Operational Search Battalion peaked in strength at 1800 personnel during the Games.²

The units of Special Operations Command were on high alert. A counter-terrorism capability was assigned as well, but as a distinct grouping known as Joint Task Force 114 or JTF 114. This included elements from the SAS Regiment, 5th Aviation Regiment, 4 RAR (Cdo), 10th Force Support Battalion and 3rd (RAAF) Airfield Defence Squadron, and others. In the months leading up to the Games, JTF 114 conducted a series of counter-terrorism exercises, rehearsing day and night, in all weather and with minimal inconvenience to the public.³

A series of exercises were also conducted for JTF 112 alongside the NSW Police, fire brigades and ambulances in the lead up to the Games to test and refine procedures and skills required. On its busiest day, 21 September, Operation Gold deployed 3754 personnel, including 846 ADF personnel operating vehicle checkpoints at 24 locations at various venues. In planning for the operation, there were many things to orchestrate. Most important was the need to ensure that there were close working relationships with the supported NSW Police and the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG).⁴

The ADF's contribution to the Olympic Games certainly assisted in ensuring that the Games ran smoothly. In addition, the experience of working closely with other government agencies and in exercising significant counter-terrorism capabilities proved extremely useful, particularly given the events that would transpire from 11 September 2001 onwards.

When terrorists attacked the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, Prime Minister Howard was nearby at the Australian Embassy in Washington, which made the attacks much more vivid and personal for him. The events of 11 September 2001 left a searing impression on Australians and most particularly on Howard. With the events of that day reverberating and while still in Washington, Howard invoked the ANZUS Alliance. In doing so, he committed Australia to the defence of the United States against its aggressors. This would involve the Army in a series of operations unforeseen at the time, starting in Afghanistan, then Iraq and again in Afghanistan – all while still committed to operations in East Timor and Solomon Islands. In essence, Australians wholeheartedly backed the initial commitment alongside the United States.

Australia's involvement in Afghanistan and in the 'war on terror' is addressed in earlier chapters, but it is important to recognise the significance for the Army of the Olympic Games experience. A large number of soldiers were directly exposed to working closely with other government agencies and in addressing issues removed from the 'conventional' military training to which most soldiers had been accustomed up to that stage. To a certain extent, that new 'unconventional' experience helped to shape the culture of the Army and the wider ADF so that it became more comfortable with playing a supportive role alongside other government agencies. In addition, the relationships built up with state and federal police services proved invaluable in the years ahead, particularly for the operations undertaken in Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands, where

Australia took the lead. The experience also helped prepare for a range of further challenges in and around Australia, including a series of domestic security operations.

OPERATIONS GUARDIAN, SCRUMMAGE, MIATA AND FLUENT

Close cooperation with state and federal police was required for a number of low-key domestic security-support operations. Operations Guardian I and II, for instance, were launched for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) at Coolumb on Queensland's Sunshine Coast. The meeting was scheduled for October 2001 but postponed until 2–5 March 2002. Operation Guardian II involved 2400 ADF personnel, including the SAS Regiment, a chemical, biological and radiation management unit, a technical high-risk engineer search squadron, a low-risk search element and IED detection teams. The operation also included RAAF F/A-18 aircraft providing patrols in light of the perceived heightened air threat after 11 September 2001.

Operation Guardian employed more formed units and relatively mature capabilities than the ad-hoc units and arrangements implemented for Operation Gold in 2000. The change reflected the Army's adaptation to changing demands. It also reflected the tendency to benchmark security arrangements from those used for preceding operations.⁵ This approach involved establishing a baseline from previous experience with which to commence planning for subsequent domestic contingencies.

A similar arrangement was established with Operation Scrummage for the 2003 Rugby World Cup held in Australia. Operation Scrummage was described as 'ceremonial, protocol and security support during the Rugby World Cup'. US President George W. Bush and China's President Hu Jintao visited Australia in October 2003. Operation Miata was described as providing 'security support during the visit to Australia by the US President'. Operation Fluent provided the same type of support for the visiting President of China.⁶ Thankfully the ADF was not required to exercise its capabilities to aid the civil power during these little-known operations. On balance, these were largely procedural operations with little chance to overtly demonstrate improvements learned from previous experience or to test the limits of capability. Nevertheless, they provided additional opportunities to further practise and refine procedures and capabilities that continued to

draw the Army close to the nation's other security-related government organisations.

OPERATION TARTAN: VESSEL APPREHENSION

A few months before Operation Scrummage, during the Easter weekend of 2003, Operation Tartan was launched when the Army's Special Operations Command was called on to seize a renegade drug ship, the North Korean-registered MV *Pong Su*. State and federal law enforcement agencies effectively treated the smugglers' actions as those of potential terrorists and sought to apprehend the vessel over several days, but the special forces were required to actually seize it. Under the command of the CO of 4 RAR (Cdo), Lieutenant Colonel Greg De Somer, the boarding was carried out by members of Tactical Assault Group (West), Tactical Assault Group (East) and the Incident Response Regiment, which has specialist skills in boarding vessels in open seas. Using HMAS *Stuart* and rigid-hulled inflatable boats, with RAAF flight crews maintaining overwatch, the teams boarded the *Pong Su* and moved quickly to dominate the ship by securing the bridge and detaining the 30 crew members.

The Commander Special Operations Command, Major General Duncan Lewis, said Operation Tartan was extremely successful and highlighted the readiness and capabilities inherent in his command. The command's links with state and federal agencies were also put to the test and found to be robust.⁷ Lewis could be trusted to make complimentary remarks about his soldiers. But his observations were reasonable as the operation was the first of its kind in Australian waters and went relatively smoothly, with a number of government agencies collaborating to ensure its success. The operation resulted in a significant haul of heroin and demonstrated how effectively Army, Navy and Air Force elements could work together with state and federal police and other agencies in a coordinated manner.⁸

Unfortunately when the matter went to trial in the NSW criminal court the detained crew were acquitted following the longest criminal trial (150 days) in NSW legal history.⁹ The experience demonstrated that while interagency cooperation had been effective to a point, there remained considerable room for improvement. Still, the operation capitalised on the experience gained and investment made in building solid relationships among all those involved. The operation also reinforced the value in raising the Army's counter-terrorist capability and in maintaining more

highly trained, specialist capabilities within Special Operations Command for such unusual predicaments.

OPERATION RESOLUTE: BORDER PROTECTION

In the meantime, growing challenges to Australia's north generated other controversial responses. Suspected illegal or irregular entry vessels (known as SIEVs) increased in number. In August 2001 the Norwegian-flagged vessel, MV *Tampa*, rescued 438 distressed refugees, mostly Hazaras fleeing the Afghan Taliban, in international waters. Under pressure and intimidation from a small number of those rescued, the ship's captain steamed to Christmas Island rather than nearby Indonesia and appealed for Australian assistance. Prime Minister Howard ordered an SAS team, led by Major Vance Kahn, along with a medical officer, to board the vessel to assess the situation and instruct the captain to take them elsewhere. But with Indonesia unwilling to accept them and international and domestic political pressure mounting, Howard reluctantly accepted the refugees and had them taken to Nauru. This placed the SAS squadron involved in the middle of a politically contentious situation.

Throughout, the soldiers acquitted themselves with restraint and professionalism. But commentators were saying that the Army had been called in to do the government's 'dirty work'. The judgment ruling on the *Tampa* incident made clear where responsibility lay and should have helped to diffuse the matter, but the ruling was made only hours before the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 in the United States. The incident therefore was conflated in the public consciousness with terrorism and provided the Howard Government with a convenient point of differentiation.¹⁰ The *Tampa* incident pre-dated another tragedy at sea, in October 2001, this time involving the tenth identified suspected illegal or irregular entry vessel, which came to be known as 'SIEV X'. The vessel sank in international waters with the loss of 353 lives. Operation Relex was established in response to these issues in an attempt to manage the challenges associated with SIEVs. But Defence and Customs elements continued to operate with separate mandates.

Eventually, the Joint Offshore Protection Command (JOPC) was established in December 2004 following growing concern about illegal or irregular immigration, illegal resource exploitation and the threat of terrorism in the maritime domain. JOPC was a combined ADF and Australian Customs agency led by a Navy rear admiral. In the two years

following its establishment, JOPC assumed command of the ADF's ongoing border security missions. The political significance of JOPC's work continued to grow as the numbers of suspected illegal or irregular entry vessels (SIEVs) steadily increased and the political debate heated up. The Howard Government was accused of politicising the issue to gain political advantage, so efforts were made to ensure that the position was as defensible as possible.

In light of growing concerns to ensure that the matter was addressed holistically and with relevant agencies involved, these missions were combined into a single operation, Operation Resolute, on 17 July 2006. This streamlined the ADF's contribution to the 'whole-of government' efforts of a number of government agencies involved in various aspects of the protection of Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).¹¹ Shortly afterwards, on 23 October, JOPC was renamed Border Protection Command (BPC). The Army's engagement with BPC was established, through the ADF's Northern Command (NORCOM) Headquarters, to the regional force surveillance units, including the Pilbara Regiment, and Norforce and through Special Operations Headquarters.¹² The creation of BPC and the coordination of elements across a wide area and various jurisdictions presented organisational and cultural challenges. In this context, the Army gained considerable experience in multi-agency law enforcement operations on land and at sea (with Army 'sea riders' deployed on Navy vessels, for instance). While the Army provided support to Operation Resolute, the main responsibility was seen to reside with Customs, with Navy and Air Force providing the bulk of the Defence Department's support. Army saw itself as only of secondary importance, particularly given that its priorities were on a range of operations elsewhere.

OPERATIONS AROUND THE REGION

Initially there was little expectation that events of the kind seen in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001 would be matched by an atrocity involving Australians much closer to home. But the post-9/11 period would see Australia take a leading role in response to a number of crises in Australia's neighbourhood, ranging across an arc that included a number of Pacific Island states to the western end of the Indonesian archipelago. One of the first such operations took place in the popular tourist destination of Bali in neighbouring Indonesia. Few realised how such a searing effect on both the Indonesian and Australian consciousness

would bring about change in bilateral relations in the coming months and years.

OPERATION BALI ASSIST

On 12 October 2002 the 'war on terror' took on a new dimension with the bombing of entertainment facilities in Bali. The dead amounted to 202 people from 21 countries, including 38 Indonesians and 88 Australians. This horrific attack triggered a strong response from around the world, but particularly from Indonesia and Australia. The Indonesian Government welcomed prompt Australian support, and the Australian Government responded with Operation Bali Assist, involving the deployment of five C-130 Hercules aircraft with medical support and an RAAF Orion P3 aircraft with Australian Federal Police officers.¹³ While primarily involving the RAAF, other arms of the ADF and the government, including the AFP and DFAT, worked closely to assist those in need.

Nearly two hundred Australians were later officially recognised with awards for their bravery or outstanding service, rescuing family, friends and strangers from the burning clubs in the minutes immediately after the bombings and for the work performed in the hours and days afterwards. Several Army personnel played important roles, and a number were awarded a Conspicuous Service Cross (CSC) for their contributions. To understand the diversity of the work they performed, it is worthwhile reflecting on their citations. Major David Read's CSC was awarded for his work 'in the performance of duty as a medical specialist carrying out lifesaving procedures at the airport in Denpasar without the normal range of equipment or anaesthetic'. Captain Alasdair Stehouwer's CSC was awarded for providing outstanding linguistic services for liaison between the AFP and Indonesian authorities and 'for tireless service to families of the victims through understanding and support at the time of victim identification'. Major Jonathan Steinbeck was similarly awarded for providing ADF liaison to the Head of Defence Staff – Jakarta to facilitate evacuation plans for Australians, and in the establishment of professional procedures at the Sanglah Hospital morgue, Denpasar. Colonel Neil Thompson was the Australian Army attaché in Jakarta. His CSC was awarded for effectively coordinating the evacuation of injured personnel from Bali to Australia as part of Operation Bali Assist. Lieutenant Colonel Susan Winter likewise was awarded a CSC for providing exceptional medical care to critically injured victims of the bombings as the specialist medical officer to Operation Bali Assist.

A further two were awarded the Conspicuous Service Medal (CSM). Captain Rodney Cocks was awarded the CSM 'For outstanding service in the provision of immediate first-aid and assistance in the evacuation of the many injured following the Bali bombings, and for providing crucial information that enabled the ADF and UN to plan for medical teams and the evacuation of victims'. Chaplain Haydn Swinbourn was awarded a CSM 'For outstanding service in the provision of pastoral support to families and friends of missing and deceased, assistance to next-of-kin in the identification of loved ones, and pastoral support to deployed members of Operation Bali Assist'.¹⁴

Out of the trauma and the horror, some good emerged. Operation Bali Assist was the precursor to considerably closer working relations between the police and armed services of Australia and Indonesia. Relations between these two countries improved as extensive bilateral person-to-person links were established, helping to build trust and dispel animosity aroused following the 1999 intervention in East Timor. The operation also served as a reminder of the need for the ADF to be postured to respond at short notice to a range of regional contingencies. The skills required were called on again in 2005 (discussed below). In the meantime, there would be other pressing operational priorities, including responding to needs arising from damaging cyclones.

OPERATION NIUE ASSIST

One such natural disaster struck in early January 2004, this time in the South Pacific. Cyclone Heta was a powerful tropical cyclone that devastated Tonga, Niue and American Samoa. The damage was estimated at many millions of dollars. Once the scale of the damage became clear, Australia responded quickly and made a significant contribution. Niue welcomed Australian participation not just in the delivery of stores but also in active support on the ground. Other countries contributed on a greater scale than Australia, notably the United States and New Zealand, which had ongoing responsibilities for and a close connection with American Samoa and Niue respectively. New Zealand worked actively in restoring essential services across the affected areas of Niue.

By 10 January an RAAF C-130 Hercules aircraft deployed to Niue with more than 11 500 kilograms of stores, vehicles, generators, medical supplies and tents to provide a medical treatment capability and to assist in restoring destroyed infrastructure. Australia's 1st Health Services Support Battalion's medical contingent came under the battalion's operations

officer, Major Sean Kennaway. The overall contingent commander was Major Ron Armstrong, an Army Transport Corps officer from the Logistic Support Force based in Randwick, Sydney. The contingent included 21 Army and Air Force personnel who worked hard alongside the Niue Disaster Council and the staff at the Niue Hospital. The Army medics remained on the island for 14 days, during which time they treated four hundred patients, assisted with the restoration of local health services and drinking water, and managed threats posed by vermin and insects. But the situation in Niue remained precarious in the years that followed, which suggested that further calls for assistance could be expected.¹⁵ Given the short time frame and small ADF footprint involved, no major lessons were seen to be drawn from the experience in Niue. But the operation helped burnish Australia's credentials as a good international citizen and important and benevolent regional middle power.

OPERATION NAURU ASSIST

The Army was also called upon to provide an explosive ordnance disposal team to investigate and dispose of unexploded Second World War ordnance in Nauru. This task provided an opportunity to practise important skills while also contributing to Australia's regional engagement program in the South Pacific. The detachment was sent as part of Operation Render Safe, the ADF's enduring operation to provide explosive ordnance disposal support to South Pacific Island nations. There would be further such operations in the years that followed.¹⁶

OPERATION SUMATRA ASSIST, INDONESIA

At the end of a busy year of exercises and with operations continuing in East Timor, Solomon Islands and elsewhere, another disaster struck, this time in the Indian Ocean rim. Operation Sumatra Assist was the name given to the ADF's contribution to disaster relief in Indonesia following the Indian Ocean earthquake that generated a devastating tsunami on Boxing Day, 2004. The tsunami was followed, in March 2005, by a severe earthquake in Sumatra, which drew further ADF support as well. Initially, ADF personnel were deployed by RAAF C-130 Hercules aircraft within hours of the earthquake and tsunami, demonstrating the speed of response that the ADF was capable of providing. The members of the joint task force established for the operation under Brigadier David Chalmers

served mainly in the tsunami-devastated portions of Aceh province in Indonesia's north-western tip.

Chalmers was commander of the Brisbane-based 7th Brigade when appointed to command the relief task force. His chief of staff was Colonel Stuart Smith, drawn from the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters co-located with Headquarters 7th Brigade. Smith had commanded AUS-BATT VIII in East Timor in 2003. The assigned force included Army medical staff and engineers from 1st Health Services Support Battalion, under Lieutenant Colonel Georgina Whelan, and 1st Combat Engineer Regiment, under Lieutenant Colonel Ian Cumming. 'This operation also validated the utility of a new Civil Military Cooperation (CIMIC) capability nurtured by Headquarters 1st Division. A small CIMIC team was attached to the Joint Task Force Headquarters under stewardship of Lieutenant Colonel David McGuire and was instrumental in synchronising the effort of countless non-government aid agencies in the Banda Aceh area.'¹⁷

Critical to the deployment of these Army assets was the availability of Navy amphibious vessels such as HMAS *Kanimbla* and the Army's landing craft, carried on deck. Working closely alongside were Army engineers, who were able to lay portable track over a beach landing site, thus enabling heavy equipment to move over soft ground. The force also deployed with Army helicopters and RAAF cargo aircraft. Once deployed, they were supported offshore by HMAS *Kanimbla* and its two Sea King helicopters.

For the first phase of the operation, the ADF carried out a substantial number of tasks in support of the Indonesian authorities. Their work included moving 1200 tonnes of humanitarian aid distributed by air; 70 aeromedical evacuations; 2530 people transported by air; 3700 medical treatments in the advanced field hospital; 4.7 million litres of clean water produced; 9000 cubic metres of debris cleared; 1000 metres of road cleared; 1700 large drains cleared; and six large fishing boats salvaged.

In one instance, members of Major Tim Reynolds' Operational Support Squadron undertook major repair on a fire truck belonging to the Aceh City Council. In another instance, recovery mechanics from the Army's 1st Combat Service Support Battalion, attached to 1st Combat Engineer Regiment, assisted with the removal of damaged fishing boats. Meanwhile, water purification points were established and handed over to the local chapter of the Indonesian Red Crescent. Assisting all deployed elements was a detachment of UH-1H Iroquois helicopters from 5th Aviation Regiment. One of their most prominent support activities was the

distribution of humanitarian aid to isolated villages. In the meantime, Lieutenant Colonel Whelan and her team from the 1st Health Support Battalion built up, then handed over the facilities of the Anzac Field Hospital to the Banda Aceh Public Hospital. Members from the Brisbane-based 2nd Health Support Battalion also deployed. Captain Mick Kent, for instance, deployed with a team using a thermal fogging machine to control mosquitoes that spread dengue fever.¹⁸

Improvements to the ADF's logistics system were clearly evident during this operation as well. In remote locations in Aceh a soldier could place an electronic order for an item, which would go straight to one of the ADF warehouses, which would automatically fulfil it and send it on its way, 'not relying on manned staff and middle-man processes'. This was a significant achievement after the civilianisation of the Defence Materiel Organisation and Joint Logistics Command warehouses. In addition, the ADF had developed expertise in contracting and outsourcing work since much of bulk ADF logistics were civilianised. Joint Logistics Command liaison officers were able to oversee substantial contracts wherever and whenever an ADF deployment was required.¹⁹

During Phase 2, following the earthquake in March 2005, the joint task force delivered 133 tonnes of rice, provided 5000 litres of water, treated 570 patients ashore, conducted 13 surgical and further treatments on board HMAS *Kanimbla*, conducted seven Sea King aeromedical evacuations, repaired the Lahewa town water pump and generator, and moved more than 138 tonnes of stores by C-130 Hercules. Sadly, nine ADF (RAAF and Navy) members lost their lives in a tragic Sea King helicopter accident on 2 April 2005 during Operation Sumatra Assist Phase 2.²⁰ The accident pointed to the risks involved in extending airframe life and continuing to fly past safe limits. It demonstrated also the need for increased vigilance with aircraft maintenance and safety procedures in testing operational environments and workloads. Safety and maintenance procedures were tightened as a consequence.

Indonesia was not the only country affected by the tsunami, with Thailand and Sri Lanka being significantly affected as well. The ADF focused its efforts on supporting the operation in Sumatra, but it contributed in Thailand with Lieutenant Colonel Jamie Patten-Richens being seconded to the US Combined Support Force established at the Royal Thai Navy Base at Utapao, south-east of Bangkok. Australian Embassy Defence staff, including Major David Eyland, also deployed to Phuket and were intimately involved in assisting civil organisations and the police in victim recovery and identification.²¹

Overall, Operation Sumatra Assist demonstrated the extraordinary utility of the Navy, Army and Air Force capabilities, particularly when working together as a team. The operation also demonstrated the utility of close relations with aid organisations and neighbouring military forces assisting. In such devastating circumstances, the utility of the ADF became readily apparent as ADF elements working alongside those of other countries, were able to respond first, often where most aid organisations were unable to go beforehand. The operation demonstrated the kind of positive contribution to peace and stability that forces designed essentially for warfighting could contribute in such circumstances. The experience provided an excellent opportunity for Australia to demonstrate its goodwill to its neighbours, particularly Indonesia, and to a lesser extent Thailand. Facing a crisis of this magnitude, there was no alternative to ADF resources for the tasks involved.

OPERATION BALI ASSIST II

A few months after Operation Sumatra Assist had concluded, three suicide bombers attacked separate locations on 1 October 2005 at Kuta and Jimbaran Bay, both popular places on Bali. The death toll this time was 26 (including four Australians), with about 130 people injured (including 19 Australians). Seeing the significance to Australia of actively assisting its own citizens in such an incident, and conscious of the potential significance to further improving bilateral relations with Indonesia, Prime Minister Howard quickly agreed to the despatch of ADF resources to assist.

This time, the ADF was better prepared, having learnt from the experience in 2002 about emergency response, as well as inter-agency cooperation with the AFP, DFAT and the local Indonesian security and emergency agencies. Headquarters Joint Operations Command and Headquarters Air Command coordinated the necessary support from disparate ADF but primarily RAAF elements (including Reserve and Regular components) to ensure the necessary support. In addition to health personnel, security and logistics staff deployed to provide airfield security, deal with the media, and assist with power and airfield safety issues. Unlike the first Bali bombings, when most injuries were burns, there was a higher proportion of penetration trauma from ball bearings used in the explosive devices.²²

Some reflected on the repeat occurrence, noting that it signalled Indonesia's lack of understanding of the threat and the government's

lack of a comprehensive strategy to fight local jihadists. The attack also demonstrated Indonesia's continued lack of counter-terrorist leadership and its failure to develop the appropriate legislation, training and intelligence.²³ As a consequence, Australia placed priority on even closer collaboration between Australian and Indonesian security agencies, seeking to encourage and accelerate appropriate institutional reforms.

OPERATIONS FAR FROM AUSTRALIA'S SHORES

Further afield and consistent with its calibrated approach to commitments far from Australia's shores, the Australian Government committed token force elements to work as part of UN-endorsed multinational peacekeeping missions, mostly in Africa. This approach served a number of purposes. First, it gave Australia credibility in international forums when dealing with international issues of concern to Australia. Being able to recount Australia's contribution on a number of such missions gave Australian diplomats a certain cachet, which was politically useful. Second, such deployments provided some niche opportunities for ADF personnel to gain experience working alongside the forces of partner nations. Sometimes they were carried out as tokens reciprocating support offered elsewhere. One such case was in Sierra Leone.

OPERATION HUSKY, SIERRA LEONE

In October 1999 the UN Security Council authorised the establishment of the UN Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) to assist the government and the parties in carrying out provisions of the Lome Peace Agreement. On 7 February 2000 the Security Council decided to expand the military component from 6000 to a maximum of 11 100 personnel, including the 260 military observers already deployed. The council also authorised increases in civil and administrative components of UNAMSIL. Sensing the need to reciprocate Britain's generous support in East Timor in September 1999 (most visibly represented by the reinforced British Gurkha infantry company that deployed in the initial stages) and recognising the benefits to its international image of contributing to operations in Africa, Prime Minister John Howard decided to make a small contribution. Operation Husky was the codename for the Australian contribution to the International Military Advisory and Training Team formed to provide direct military advice and training assistance to the Sierra Leone Ministry of Defence and the Republic of Sierra Leone

Armed Forces. Australia sent two Army officers out of a total of 17 ADF personnel, with the deployment lasting from December 2000 to February 2003.²⁴ Experience here and elsewhere demonstrated the importance of close collaboration with and facilitation of aid organisations, which in many cases were better placed than the military to provide the continuous support required to ensure mission success and to bring about the country's rehabilitation.

OPERATION POMELO, ETHIOPIA-ERITREA

In the meantime, war broke out between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998 initially as a result of a border dispute. Intensive UN diplomacy ensued and the two warring factions were brought together at the Organisation of African Unity summit in Algiers in July 1999. Following the UN Security Council Resolution 1312 in June 2000, 40 nations agreed to provide 4200 peacekeeping forces for the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE). In January 2001 Australia was persuaded to make another relatively token contribution, providing two Army staff officers, a Royal Australian Engineers major and an arms corps captain for four 6-month rotations. The captains served in the UNMEE Military Training Branch, where they helped peacekeepers to make the switch from conventional military to UN peacekeeping operations. Similarly, the engineer officer assisted with the UNMEE Geographical Cell, helping to capture and utilise accurate and timely topographical and geospatial information. One report indicated that Operation Pomelo provided the opportunity to gain valuable experience in working in a multinational headquarters and the exposure to and interaction with Ethiopian and Eritrean military formations of up to corps size, which were largely based on former Soviet structures, doctrine, tactics and equipment.

By May 2004 the peace process had stalled, and the formal border demarcation was postponed. There were seven rotations, in which a total of 14 officers participated until the completion of the Australian commitment in February 2005.²⁵ On 30 July 2008 the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1827 terminating the UNMEE mandate with effect from the following day.²⁶ There is little evidence that Australia's contribution generated any significant lessons for the ADF. But the deployment did provide participants with challenging and valuable operational experience and further burnished Australia's benevolent international credentials, 'flying the flag' for Australia.

OPERATION IRAN ASSIST

On 26 December 2003 a massive earthquake devastated the Iranian city of Bam, killing thousands of people and leaving thousands more injured and homeless. Australia saw Iran as of lesser strategic priority to Australia but being moved to compassion by the extent of the devastation and motivated by the trade dimension of the bilateral relationship, the Australian Government promised a humanitarian airlift. The ADF-activated Operation Iran Assist employing a C130 Hercules aircraft along with 10 500 kilograms of medical and other immediate relief supplies as well as staff from the Army's 1st Health Services Support Battalion. Although willing to accept aid, Iran insisted that it be given without fanfare and without any presence on the ground beyond the delivery of aid at the airport. Australia's contribution had to be tailored to comply with Iranian requirements. Consequently, the aircraft landed at Kerman, Iran, where local military and international aid personnel quickly unloaded it. After a short break, the team returned to Australia on 3 January 2004.²⁷ The operation demonstrated the close working relationship developed between the RAAF and the Army for such contingencies and once again enhanced Australia's credentials in the realm of humanitarian aid and disaster relief. In the meantime, other requirements would emerge once again in Africa.

OPERATION AZURE, SUDAN

In March 2005 the UN Security Council authorised the establishment of the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) after the government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement signed a 'Comprehensive Peace Agreement' to end a civil war that had lasted more than two decades. The Howard Government decided to provide modest support. In doing so, the government was burnishing its credentials in Africa, seeing the opportunity to make a useful contribution to the UN mission there while mindful of extensive commitments elsewhere. In April, the Army contributed to the 17-strong ADF contingent of military observers and specialists in air movements and logistic support. Operation Azure continued throughout 2006 and 2007 and thereafter (having been renamed Operation Aslan in 2011).²⁸

In March 2006 Captain Mark Thorp and Lieutenant Vince Carroll were part of a patrol investigating an ambush of a convoy of unarmed

members of a disbanded faction and their families. The 16-vehicle convoy from Khartoum carrying two thousand men, women and children was attacked, leaving 13 killed, dozens wounded and most vehicles damaged. The UN patrol sent to investigate, led by Captain Thorp, was unarmed. On arrival at the ambush site at first light, Captain Thorp established control of the families and soldiers milling about and conducted detailed interviews with witnesses and convoy members. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Carroll, who had completed a three-week combat first-aid course, established a triage area and a temporary aid post where he treated a number of broken bones and wounds from RPG strike fragments. Thorp and Carroll were praised for displaying the degree of selflessness and professionalism that had come to be expected from Australian soldiers in such circumstances.²⁹

The experience in Sudan reinforced the lessons from earlier missions in Africa concerning the difficulty of deploying and supporting ADF personnel in remote locations far from coastal ports and modern infrastructure. Providing meaningful security advice and support to small contingents deployed so remotely proved an enduring challenge for the ADF. The difficulties encountered were compounded by having to deal with corrupt and incompetent officials operating under a weak mandate, with limited resourcing and lukewarm international support. Still, individuals involved made significant contributions personally and brought home a greater respect and appreciation for the qualities and strengths of the Australian Army and the wider ADF, as well as a new-found appreciation for coming from the 'lucky country'.

OPERATION PAKISTAN ASSIST

In the meantime, a few months after the launch of Operation Azure, and a week after the 2005 bombing in Bali, a devastating earthquake struck Pakistan on 8 October, killing 87 000 people. In response, the Australian Government quickly provided financial and material aid through AusAID. The earthquake happened a few months after Pakistan's President Musharraf had visited Canberra and shortly before Howard was scheduled to conduct a reciprocal official visit in early November. Although large-scale humanitarian assistance involving the ADF was usually reserved for requirements closer to Australian shores, the imminent visit and the scale of military commitments next door in Afghanistan meant that there was an imperative to be seen to be doing something



Camp Bradman, home to an Australian Army Black Hawk helicopter detachment from the Army's 5th Aviation Regiment enabled aeromedical assistance to remote regional villages in rugged terrain with limited road access, often subject to subzero temperatures. (Photo: Gary Ramage. AWM P07966.017)

commensurately impressive for Pakistan, partly to pre-empt any embarrassing requests for assistance during Howard's visit.³⁰

Australia announced that it would commit an ADF medical team, along with a Black Hawk helicopter detachment from 5th Aviation Regiment, to assist in the international efforts to provide vital health care to those affected by the earthquake. The ADF team began to deploy into Pakistan on 11 November. The immediate aim of the relief effort was to provide medical assistance to the people of Dhanni, in the Neelum Valley region, an area 20 kilometres north-east of Muzaffarabad on Pakistan's side of the Kashmir Line of Control in the Himalayas. This deployment built on the successful assistance provided to those affected by earlier natural disasters.

The ADF medical team set up a camp in a valley surrounded by snow-covered mountains and, seeking to capitalise on the goodwill associated with Australia's legendary cricketer, named their base 'Camp Bradman'. The team consisted of around 140 personnel (including several specialist reservists) drawn from the Army's Sydney-based Logistic Support Force, particularly the 1st Health Support Battalion, and an Air Force primary



Camp Bradman, the base of an Australian Defence Force medical team deployed to Pakistan to provide health-care assistance to those affected by the earthquake of October 2005. (Photo: Gary Ramage. AWM P07966.005)

health-care team all under the command of Colonel Andrew Sims. Sims observed: 'Precise and careful planning was vital, more so for this mission than perhaps for any other before it.' As operations were conducted in a remote place, far from the main supply lines in Australia, detailed and careful preparation was required. As Sims put it, 'The biggest thing we learnt from all this was the importance of meticulous planning and a great deal of foresight before we left home.'³¹

The primary health-care teams provided a critical medical capability in a time of extreme need, performing more than 9500 medical treatments and at least 4000 immunisations, while the helicopters performed 74 life-saving aeromedical evacuations. Much of this work was done in trying conditions, at 1850 metres above sea level, and often subject to freezing conditions. The efforts of the health-care teams were crucial to enable surviving residents to begin to re-establish themselves. In March 2006, as the ADF team was pulling out, the primary health-care facility established at Dhanni was handed over as a gift to the government of Pakistan along with some ADF military equipment and supplies. This gift was intended to help improve the community's ability to rebuild. The last of the contingent flew home to a reception at Townsville airport on 9 April, greeted by



Camp Bradman, Pakistan, 2005. (Photo: Gary Ramage. AWM P07966.028)

the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence, Senator Sandy MacDonald.³²

Overall, Operation Pakistan Assist demonstrated the ongoing utility and value of maintaining high-readiness medical support teams able to respond to short-notice contingencies. The adaptability demonstrated had its origins in the experience gained on the operations conducted in Irian Jaya and PNG in the late 1990s and earlier in Iraq in 1991. On reflection, the operation also demonstrated, once again, the effective incorporation of specialist reservists as part of a tailored force brought together at short notice and able to deploy to a remote location to deliver critical support to those in need. Australia's contribution also assisted in bolstering the perception within Pakistan that the country was not being neglected – thus reinforcing the message of support for the government of Pakistan in a time of need.

REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND EXERCISES

Operations far from Australia's shores mostly involved considerable discretion, with the government being able to choose for itself the size and nature of the contribution offered. But as the various crisis response operations closer to shore illustrated, there was a genuine need for Australia

to be proactively engaged with regional security partners to help build trust in such a way as to facilitate close engagement for unforeseen events requiring collaboration and assistance. With this in mind, the Australian Army and the wider ADF participated in a number of bilateral and multilateral exercises in Australia and around the region.

EXERCISE *CROIX DU SUD*

Although in the minds of many engagement with the French was seen as something largely reserved for commemorations of First World War battles, many overlooked the fact that France had an enduring military presence in the South Pacific that warranted close attention. Short-notice operations in the South Pacific also pointed to the utility of having a sound working relationship with the French armed forces stationed nearby in New Caledonia known as the FANC (Forces Armées de la Nouvelle-Calédonie). Exercises with the FANC had not always featured prominently, particularly at times of dispute over nuclear weapons testing in the Pacific in the 1980s and 1990s. But with a surge in operations in the Pacific from Bougainville onwards and closer ties in Afghanistan and elsewhere resulting in improved bilateral relations, the natural complementarity of exercising together with France in the Pacific became increasingly self-evident.

'A' Company 6 RAR, for instance, formed the basis for a 102-personnel contingent deployed to New Caledonia in November 2002 for Exercise *Croix du Sud* (Southern Cross). The aim of these exercises was to establish and develop tactical interoperability between the Australian and French forces as well as the New Zealand Defence Force, and improve preparedness for multinational evacuation operations in event of a regional crisis.³³ In 2004, 3 RAR also took part. For Australia, there was considerable utility in having access to New Caledonia, which justified the investment in the bilateral relationship. Access to air and maritime port facilities there meant that operations in areas of the Pacific to the north and east of New Caledonia could be more readily supported if and when required.

EXERCISES IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Apart from re-energising relations with the French, the Army sought to maintain a strong bond with the PNG Defence Force – an organisation largely spawned by the ADF in the lead up to PNG independence in 1975.

One way of doing so was through such activities as Exercise Puk Puk (Pidgin for crocodile). This was an annual two-month exercise involving Australian Army engineers and the PNG Defence Force Engineer Battalion. In 2004, for instance, the 17th Construction Squadron deployed to Wewak in north-west PNG to improve the infrastructure at Moem Barracks for the 2nd Battalion, Royal Pacific Islands Regiment (2 RPIR). The Officer Commanding the 17th Construction Squadron, Major Paul Hobbs, said the exercise provided a valuable learning experience and that 'this was the perfect training environment to practise engineering for operations, being isolated, in a harsh environment and with little to no infrastructure to rely upon'.³⁴ Engagement through such exercises provided an important means of maintaining effective working relations between PNGDF and ADF personnel. Such engagement also provided excellent training opportunities for Australians in challenging terrain while in turn exposing the PNGDF to developments in the ADF.

FIVE POWER DEFENCE ARRANGEMENT EXERCISES

In the meantime, with troops out of Afghanistan and Iraq (albeit temporarily), 2004 was seen as a good year in which to reinvigorate regional ties through a series of exercises. Recognising the long-term significance of ties with South-East Asian armies, the Australian Army renewed links with the countries in the Five Power Defence Arrangements including Singapore, the United Kingdom, Malaysia and New Zealand – the first letters of each participating country went to make up the title of one of the FPDA's exercises: Suman.

Exercise Suman Warrior was conducted in 2004 as an independent exercise with a multinational brigade headquarters commanding five separate national battle groups. With the Australian Regular Army stretched on operations elsewhere, the Army Reserve's Brisbane-based 25th/49th Battalion, Royal Queensland Regiment (25/49 RQR) deployed under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Darryl Campbell. Campbell dryly observed that this Suman Warrior was 'a four-day exercise crammed into a 14-day deployment', with plenty of opportunity for soldiers to interact with one another.³⁵ Given the prevalence of coalition operations, participation in exercises like this was prudent and relevant.³⁶

Another one was Exercise Bersama Lima, which in 2004 was held in Singapore. The exercise was based on a 'non-permissive environment' scenario (i.e. where deploying troops would be opposed by force) with a

humanitarian situation. Major David Moon, the DJFHQ Civil Military Coordination officer, said the exercise 'allowed us to understand the differing military cultures, the differences in planning processes that each nation has when trying to draw that into a common planning and operating environment'.³⁷ The experience also stood the participating nations in good stead for the unexpected and devastating Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004, which saw significant force contributions from FPDA countries.

Another exercise, Southern Tiger, was a popular exchange exercise with Malaysia.³⁸ In 2004, for instance, B Company 9th Battalion Royal Malaysian Regiment (Airborne) visited Australia to conduct the exercise with 3 RAR. The Malaysian officer commanding observed: 'Our camp in Malaysia we call Canberra Lines . . . I think it is good our soldiers and officers come here to get training together with Australian soldiers – very good exposure for our military.'³⁹ Critics may dismiss such remarks as platitudes, yet they reflect the genuine utility of face-to-face interaction and the establishment of personal bonds of friendship and trust. It is virtually impossible to quantify accurately the benefits that accrue from this approach, yet their utility when the two forces meet while providing crisis responses in such places as Aceh and elsewhere is evident.

ARMoured EXERCISES

While infantry elements deployed on FPDA exercises, armoured forces trained in northern Australia. From 1999 onwards, Exercise Predators Gallop was the 1st Brigade's annual readiness exercise. In 2004, for instance, the brigade's Deployable Battle Group (DBG), 5/7 RAR, exercised alongside three hundred New Zealand Army soldiers, an electronic warfare detachment from the 7th Signal Regiment, RBS-70 teams from the 16th Air Defence Regiment, reconnaissance helicopters from the 161st Reconnaissance Squadron and armoured vehicles from the 2nd Cavalry Regiment.⁴⁰ Such exercises occurred periodically, but critics observed that the armoured corps units sometimes exercised *en masse*, even though the Australian Army never deployed them on operations that way.⁴¹

The Australian approach of 'penny-packeting' armoured vehicles (sharing them in small numbers) in direct support of infantry or other combat elements stood in marked contrast to the approach of American and British counterparts more accustomed to operating armoured forces in larger numbers. Often enough, Australian armoured corps officers

returned from UK and US exchange postings invigorated by their experience of working alongside well-resourced and well-equipped armoured units and eager to see such approaches replicated in Australia. But with relatively few armoured vehicles and with the Army's strong propensity for dismounted infantry exercises and a tradition of dismounted infantry operations, such officers tended to be frustrated by the situation in Australia.

AMPHIBIOUS AND AIRBORNE EXERCISES

Exercise Arnhem, 3 RAR's regular parachuting activity, was also conducted to maintain the capability of the parachute company group.⁴² In addition, a regular amphibious exercise, Exercise Sea Lion, was usually held in North Queensland, around March or April. The culmination of the exercise involved a landing at Cowley Beach, north of Townsville, utilising amphibious ships and landing craft as well as Black Hawk helicopters from 5th Aviation Regiment and embarked Navy Sea King helicopters. This often set the scene for more ambitious exercises later in the training year.⁴³

The problem for the parachutists was the perception of their vulnerability and limited utility for plausible operations. Critics argued that there was no need for Australia to maintain a full battalion of parachutists. However, defenders of the battalion's parachute capability remained sceptical that anything less than a full battalion could guarantee the seizure and holding of an 'airhead' (airfield) for follow-on forces to utilise, this being the principal function of the parachute battalion.⁴⁴ In the end 3 RAR would be rerolled as light infantry, handing over the parachute role to Special Operations Command and relocating from Sydney to Townsville in 2012.

COUNTER-TERRORISM EXERCISES

Experience in Bali pointed to the need to enhance Australia's domestic counter-terrorism capability. As a consequence, 4 RAR (Cdo) was tasked to refine its special operations capabilities. In the multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional Counter-Terrorism Exercise (CTEX) Mercury 04, for instance, the ability of 4 RAR (Cdo) was tested for concurrent terrorist events in urban and remote settings.⁴⁵ Exercise Mercury was held again in October 2005 with several thousand ADF, federal and state police and emergency services personnel and public servants. Designed to

test the 'whole-of-government' response and coordination on counter-terrorism, it involved a series of rolling incidents across Australia.⁴⁶ Similarly, Exercise Wyvern Sun, conducted with the Royal Thai Armed Forces, involved Defence working with several other Australian Government departments.⁴⁷ These exercises provided important opportunities to hone skills and increase mutual understanding and trust.

With the heightened operational tempo, the Army Reserve's 1st Commando Regiment was placed at a higher level of readiness. This involved a series of exercises such as Exercise Strike Anchor in 2004, focused on airborne, amphibious and urban operations skills. The CO, Lieutenant Colonel Anthony John, noted that the separation rate was considerably lower than for other Army Reserve units. In fact the biggest 'loss' of qualified commandos was to Regular Army units in Special Operations Command.⁴⁸

READY RESPONSE FORCE – EXERCISE REBUS

The high operational tempo of the mid-2000s also demonstrated the utility of Reserve forces readily available and responsive to tasking. The government established the Reserve Ready Response Force within regionally based Army Reserve brigades around Australia. The requirement to practise and test capabilities in a realistic scenario therefore became important. In 2004, for instance, the 8th Brigade's Reserve Response Force, under Major John Fahey, participated in Exercise Rebus, which focused on domestic security skills. Around 150 soldiers participated from the 41st Battalion, Royal New South Wales Regiment, 7 Field Regiment (artillery), 8 Combat Engineer Regiment, 8 Combat Services Support Battalion and the 12th/16th Hunter River Lancers.⁴⁹ There were a number of domestic security scenarios for which this training was envisaged as being useful and for which provisions were made to utilise such forces if and when the need arose. Often enough, however, soldiers motivated to participate in such exercises volunteered to deploy on rotations to Solomon Islands (discussed in [chapter 5](#)).

DEPLOYABLE FORMATION CONTROL

Operational commitments to such places as Solomon Islands required command and control mechanisms, and these mechanisms had to be developed and rehearsed. The Australian Defence Force Warfare Centre (formerly the Australian Joint Warfare Establishment) conducted planning and command-post exercises for such formations as the Deployable

Joint Force Headquarters (DJFHQ). Formation-level exercises also continued to provide exposure to multiple battalion tasks alongside American forces. These included combined exercises such as RIMPAC and the Australian-New Zealand combined joint exercise, Swift Eagle. For Swift Eagle, Australian and New Zealand infantry battalions deployed, along with other 3rd Brigade elements, Navy amphibious ships and RAAF aircraft.⁵⁰ The areas around Innisfail, south of Cairns, and the Shoalwater Bay Training Area, north of Rockhampton, featured prominently for these exercises, particularly with the reinvigoration of amphibious operations following endorsement of the Army's concept for manoeuvre operations in the littoral environment (MOLE).

Although Australia had deployed a formation headquarters (Headquarters 3 Brigade) and the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters to East Timor in 1999, this was seen by some as an aberration. Army exercises rarely tested headquarters above battalion level with much rigour. This was in part because of the preference to deploy land forces up to unit or battalion level and consider anything beyond that only *in extremis*. The INTERFET experience proved successful, yet there remained a gnawing concern about how well a formation would handle a similar crisis if the situation was genuinely contested.

FORCE-ON-FORCE SIMULATION

In the meantime, field training became more realistic and challenging with the help of force-on-force simulation. In August 2005, for instance, the 2 RAR Battle Group faced off against an independent company from 3 RAR. This was the first time such a large group had been tested at the Combined Arms Battle Wing. The free-play exercise involved both sides wearing simulation equipment to show accurately the outcomes of contacts. The CO of 3 RAR, Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier) Adam Findlay, observed that both sides 'were able to conduct full combat appreciations and carry out plans with a high degree of realism'.⁵¹ To be sure, such exercises could never fully replicate the experience of receiving incoming fire from a real enemy. But the added realism and ability to validate and improve performance was welcomed.

REFLECTIONS

The period from 2000 onwards saw the Army and the other elements of the ADF exposed to a wide range of challenges, many of which were

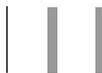
unimaginable a few years earlier. No one envisaged that Australian forces would be welcome in Aceh, for instance, only a few years after the East Timor crisis brought relations between Australia and Indonesia to a nadir. Experience on such operations, often at short notice and almost invariably working alongside partner nations, validated the utility of extensive regional engagement particularly through military exercises. These activities demonstrated the significance of collective field training and ties with close allies and regional partners. In doing so they provided opportunities for different forces to become familiar with each other and with each other's procedures and idiosyncrasies.

That investment paid off repeatedly as Australia found itself working closely alongside a wide range of security partners from the armed forces and numerous other agencies of the nations in the immediate vicinity of Australia and beyond. By 2005 Australians were on operations on almost every continent around the world, often alongside partner forces with which they had established routine bilateral or multilateral exercises.

Critics have expressed concern about the militarisation of aid.⁵² Indeed, there are valid concerns for the safety and integrity of the work of a number of aid organisations that see danger in being too closely associated with military forces. This is in part for fear of being seen as partisan and therefore part of the conflict and, in turn, made to appear to be a legitimate target for the opposing forces. In part it also reflects starkly contrasting world views of numerous workers in aid groups with a disdain for the military. Yet in practice the Army and the wider ADF have repeatedly demonstrated the important and arguably irreplaceable role they play at times in paving the way for aid organisations and in facilitating their continued contribution in otherwise hostile environments. In the end, the ADF's contribution in this field would be validated by successive governments eager to continue using the ADF as an effective instrument of state in this domain, particularly in response to unforeseen catastrophes like that witnessed in Aceh.

Apart from the commitments to Iraq and Afghanistan, Australians found themselves on operations in Africa, Indonesia, several places in the South Pacific and various places around Australia. The tempo of operations from 2000 to 2005 was very high. In 2006 it became even higher.

CHAPTER



OPERATIONS EVERYWHERE – THE ARMY IN 2006 AND 2007

Operation Pakistan Assist was only beginning to wind down when the operational tempo for the Australian Army spiked even further. The period from May to November 2006 would mark the highest operational tempo experienced by Australian military forces (in terms of the number of concurrent operations undertaken) since the Second World War. Troops were deployed in unit strength in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait and Solomon Islands, and they redeployed to East Timor in May 2006. Elsewhere, smaller contingents continued to contribute to a wide range of internationally mandated operations. In addition, further short-notice contingencies arose in Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga and Lebanon (discussed below). Admittedly, overall they did not involve serious fighting. But the fact that the Army and the wider ADF managed to handle the array of dispersed and varied tasks in a compressed period without serious complications is testament to their adaptability and resourcefulness. The experience also stands in stark contrast to the limited operational responsiveness of the ADF in the mid-1980s. This chapter illustrates the point.

OPERATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

OPERATION ACOLYTE: COMMONWEALTH GAMES, MELBOURNE, 2006

While the Australian contingent in Pakistan was preparing to return to Australia, the Australian Army was also busy preparing to be involved

in another operation, this time assisting civil authorities with security for the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne from 15 to 26 March 2006. Operation Acolyte, as it was known, was named after the Greek word for 'helper' or 'assistant'. The Army and the wider ADF had learned from the 2000 Olympics and were mindful of changed threat perceptions in the post-9/11 era. With this in mind, planning for the operation commenced in 2003 to coordinate with the relevant government agencies and organising bodies. Joint Task Force 636 was established under the command of Brigadier Andrew 'Boomer' Smith, with a force of 2600 personnel tasked with a range of specialist roles in support of the police. A deliberate policy of minimising ADF contributions to 'general support' tasks also influenced the smaller force size: unlike the Olympics, little was done that was not security-related (such as general driver support).¹

Incidentally, in 1999 and 2000, Smith had commanded the 2nd Combat Engineer Regiment, and in that appointment he raised the Joint Incident Response Unit for the 2000 Games. Thus, with Operations Acolyte and Deluge, coupled with his extensive doctoral studies in the field, Smith had become the Army's leading expert on domestic event security operations.²

Although smaller than for the 2000 Olympics, Joint Task Force 636 featured a number of elements, including a Special Forces Task Group, an Engineer Task Group (based on the headquarters of the 3rd Combat Engineer Regiment), a Security Task Group (including Army Reserve Response Force elements as well as Brisbane-based Regular Army units), an Underwater Task Group (clearance divers), a Maritime Task Group (including HMA Ships *Manoora* and *Warramunga*), and an Air Task Group (with F/A-18 aircraft, air-to-air tankers and a deployable radar). The Special Forces Task Group included a Tactical Assault Group from 4 RAR (Cdo) on standby with Black Hawk helicopters in support.³ Roles included assisting with vehicle checkpoints, responding to bomb threats and underwater clearance diver tasks as well as air patrols with F/A-18 aircraft.

Brigadier Smith observed that the training was thorough, which helped to ensure that events went smoothly and without an unduly high profile for security. Smith explained, 'While security was 95 per cent of our task, it's important to remember that the Commonwealth Games was not a security operation – it was a sporting and cultural event based on friendship across the Commonwealth.'⁴ Indeed, Smith later observed, 'There is still an inherent reluctance to support these operations on the part of the ADF – they are not considered core business and getting forces for

them (especially from the Army) is like getting blood out of a stone.⁵ Such reluctance reflected the unusually high operational tempo experienced by the Army in 2006. Resources were scarce and had to be very carefully managed to ensure success on all the missions then underway. In the end, the Games passed without a significant security incident, but with a wealth of additional experience in collaborative security support, working alongside the police as well as a range of other government and non-government agencies. That experience helped prepare the ADF for similar support requirements in 2007.

OPERATION LARRY ASSIST: CYCLONE RESPONSE, NORTH QUEENSLAND

In the meantime, while the Commonwealth Games were in full swing, Cyclone Larry struck Innisfail and parts of the Atherton Tablelands in northern Queensland on 20 March 2006. The Army was called on to respond. Brigadier Mick Slater, as commander of the Townsville-based 3rd Brigade, was best placed to provide substantial land-based support to the civil authorities, particularly the Queensland State Emergency Services, and his forces were quick to respond. By midnight on 20 March, a transport convoy departed Townsville for Innisfail with support stores. Further troops and engineer support departed the next morning. Eventually a total of 400 troops from 3rd Combat Services Support Battalion (previously known as 3rd Brigade Administrative Support Battalion), 3rd Combat Engineer Regiment, 2 RAR and 3 RAR were involved, working to the ground commander, Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Bottrell. The force also included Army Reserve soldiers from A Company, 51st Far North Queensland Regiment (51 FNQR), based south of Cairns, which played a pivotal role in the early days of the operation.⁶ The CO of 51 FNQR, Lieutenant Colonel Paddy Evans, explained that their role was to reconnoitre and assess the situation, then to assist the Queensland State Emergency Services in the provision of emergency relief. They focused on assessments, route clearance, emergency relief and assistance in the functioning of key community infrastructure.⁷

Patrols were sent out for six days continuously, maintaining '24/7' operations to conduct damage assessments and to relay what they saw and heard back to Brigadier Slater and his staff. The unit's VHF and HF communications were like 'gold dust', explained Evans, providing effective and reliable links. In fact all the Regular and Reserve force soldiers

involved worked selflessly and for extended periods without rest. ‘Even some soldiers who had lost their own property were out helping others. I couldn’t have asked for more,’ said Evans.⁸ Also in support were three Iroquois helicopters and a Chinook heavy-lift helicopter undertaking reconnaissance and providing airdrops of supplies. Once the initial emergency abated, the focus shifted to repairing buildings, reconnecting services and clearing fallen trees.⁹

In the end, Operation Larry Assist once again demonstrated the Army’s ability rapidly to meet needs arising from unexpected contingencies. Only a few weeks later the versatility on display would be called upon again for operations in Timor-Leste following the breakdown of the security situation there in May 2006 (discussed in [chapter 6](#)).

OPERATIONS OVERSEAS

OPERATION RAMP: LEBANON EVACUATIONS

One of the additional short-notice tasks arising in 2006 was the requirement to evacuate Australians caught up in the war between Hezbollah and the Israeli Defence Force in southern Lebanon. From 19 July to 25 August 2006 Operation Ramp saw the ADF deploy 120 personnel to assist DFAT evacuate Australian citizens. The ADF contribution included a team of 22 personnel rapidly deployed and tasked to support the Australian embassy staff in Beirut, Cyprus and Turkey. A joint task force, under the command of Colonel Andrew Condon, followed shortly afterwards with 96 personnel incorporating a command element, two evacuee processing teams, liaison officers, movements officers, health specialists and linguists. A large portion of the joint task force consisted of personnel from Army’s 17th Combat Services Support Brigade and 10th Force Support Battalion.

The ADF supported the evacuation of more than 5300 Australians and 1300 foreigners from Beirut and Tyre.¹⁰ Interestingly, Operation Ramp capitalised on the close links with partner defence forces, notably Britain, Canada and the United States, using facilities in Cyprus. The ability to provide such a quick response is testament to the calibre of those involved and to the ADF’s flexibility and resourcefulness. After all, a tailored task force was generated that rapidly deployed and carried out the assigned mission effectively – all while the ADF was busy with a plethora of other missions. In the meantime, other than humanitarian assistance tasks, the Army would again be called upon at short notice for operations abroad.

OPERATION QUICKSTEP

A little while later events in Fiji and Tonga also became the focus of attention.¹¹ Following tensions in Fiji between the military and the government, three Australian naval vessels deployed to international waters off Fiji in preparation for a potential evacuation of Australian citizens. Operation Quickstep was the name given to the ADF's response to the potential coup, which eventually occurred on 4 December with no bloodshed, when the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), under Commodore Frank Bainimarama, took control of the Fijian Government. Like Operation Morris Dance in 1987, Operation Quickstep was only ever intended to provide for the 'permissive' (i.e. not opposed by force) evacuation of Australian citizens and other approved foreign nationals in the event of an outbreak of violence following a military takeover.

The deployment of forces, as in any peacetime military activity, always involves risk. On 29 November 2006 a Black Hawk helicopter crashed while attempting to land on the deck of one of the ships assigned to Quickstep, the amphibious HMAS *Kanimbla*. Nine of the ten crew and passengers were rescued, with one, Captain Mark Bingley, a pilot, dying from injuries. The tenth person, Trooper Joshua Porter, was declared missing presumed dead following a 96-hour, search-and-rescue operation involving Navy and RAAF aircraft and ships. With the aid of deep-sea recovery equipment on loan from the US Navy, his body and the lost helicopter were subsequently recovered.

On 20 December the Australian Government announced that ADF elements involved in the operation were being recalled as the potential need for evacuation had passed. In the meantime, the Townsville-based Ready Company Group, which had been prepared to assist as part of Operation Quickstep, was called, at very short notice to assist with yet another task.

On 16 November riots broke out in the capital of Tonga following a political confrontation that turned violent. The request for support from the Tongan Government came the next day, and by 18 November around 50 ADF personnel, mostly from the Ready Company Group in Townsville, under the command of Major James Hammett (later appointed Operations Officer for 1 RAR in Timor-Leste), were deployed to Tonga where they served with the New Zealand-led combined military force that supported the Tongan Security Forces in stabilising the situation. The combined force provided security at the Fua'amotu International Airport before moving some elements to support the Tongan Defence Service personnel in the riot-ravaged capital Nuku'alofa. An RAAF Boeing

707 also flew a number of Australian citizens and foreign nationals who were stranded when commercial flights were suspended.¹² In response to their enquiry, passengers were advised that no frequent flyer points would accrue from the flight! The incidence illustrated the heightened level of service that Australian citizens had come to expect from the Australian Government and the ADF.¹³

Previously, such a task might well have been the preserve of the special forces, particularly given the government's predilection to turn to special forces first, and noting their exceptional small-group dynamics and heightened cultural training. But, with the special forces stretched with commitments elsewhere and with existing spare capacity within Army's conventional forces, the task was appropriately handled by the soldiers from 1 RAR. In this instance, there was no need for the engagement of special forces.

The Chief of Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, congratulated the contingent, saying, 'I was particularly pleased that we were able to respond so promptly with our New Zealand colleagues who led the force. I congratulate Major Hammett and his team for their excellent performance on this short but important mission.' Houston said that the 'commitment and courage' shown by the soldiers deployed to Tonga was 'a testament to the men and women who wear the Australian military uniform'. After having helped to restore calm in Tonga, the Australian military contribution was withdrawn on 30 November 2006.

Operation Quickstep, covering Fiji and Tonga, served to demonstrate, once again, the importance to Australia of the islands of the Pacific. The operation also reinforced the potential benefits expected to accrue with the acquisition of more highly capable helicopter-carrying amphibious ships in the years ahead.

Operation Quickstep also provided an interesting contrast to Operation Morris Dance, conducted in May 1987. During that mission, the ADF responded relatively well, particularly given its capability constraints and the ADF's lack of experience in working together for such a contingency. In 2006, however, the close cooperation, embarked capabilities, the soldiers' high-technology equipment, the speed of response and the high level of situational awareness provided to embarked forces via classified information and communications systems were in marked contrast to the experience in 1987. Admittedly there also were accidents with helicopters but, unlike Operation Morris Dance in 1987, when there were no other major ADF deployments underway, Quickstep occurred when the ADF was operationally stretched.

The fact that Quickstep took place and was adjusted in midstream to account for Tonga, when so many other issues were being addressed, stands as witness to the progress made in the intervening years.

To be sure, Australia's success in these circumstances with little or no shooting involved does not categorically prove that the ADF was ready for and capable of handling an operation on which medium to heavy casualties were likely. But the avoidance of escalation speaks to the restrained approach employed by Australian forces. Perhaps another reason why the special forces were not called upon for the deployments to Fijian waters and Tonga relates to assessments of little to no casualties expected. One of the reasons the special forces have tended to be popular with the government is because they virtually guarantee success with minimal or no casualties. But special forces operations are inherently risky. In 1996 two Black Hawk helicopters collided in mid-air at night over ground. Had such a mid-air collision occurred in mid-Pacific then the repercussions would have been widely felt.¹⁴

Another important feature of Operation Quickstep was the employment of the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters (DJFHQ) to command the operation. Commander DJFHQ, Major General (later Lieutenant General) Ash Power, was designated the Joint Task Force Commander – the first joint task force that DJFHQ had commanded since INTERFET in East Timor. While DJFHQ remained in barracks and did not leave Brisbane, the headquarters carried out all the responsibilities assigned to Joint Task Force 636, and worked directly to Headquarters Joint Operations Command instead of DJFHQ's usual headquarters, Army's Land Headquarters in Sydney. Power also had a forward command element with additional force elements that were ready to deploy if required. The Chief Staff Officer for Joint Operations (J3) of DJFHQ at the time, Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier) Chris Field, observed: 'We had, incidentally, conducted the same preparation [for the 3rd Brigade Headquarters' deployment to Timor-Leste] with Operation Astute, although DJFHQ was never the joint task force for that operation.' Field further observed that four key lessons were derived from Quickstep. First, DJFHQ remained a proven concept, reinforcing the lessons of INTERFET. Second, the experience confirmed the validity of exercises that rehearsed required capabilities within DJFHQ. Third, the support received from Navy, RAAF, Army's Special Operations Command, DFAT and other government agencies was very good, consistent with the experience gained on preceding exercises. The fourth key lesson was that Headquarters Joint Operations Command could rely on DJFHQ to provide the deployable functionality required for

such contingencies, and hence the deployable role would stay with DJFHQ and not be passed to Headquarters Joint Operations Command.¹⁵

Operation Quickstep demonstrated the extent of development and adaptation experienced with the Army and its sister services – capabilities best displayed when the three services worked together as a team. That improvement in inter-service capability did not happen by accident. The creation of joint training institutions was central, and was aided by a wealth of experience gained on major exercises.

BATTLE GROUPS IN 2006

By mid-2006, the Regular Army could muster eight battle groups selected from and centred on 12 units from 1st Division, Special Operations Command and 16th Aviation Brigade. These were:

- the Ready Battalion Group, centred on 1 RAR or 2 RAR
- the Follow-on Battalion Group, centred on 1 RAR or 2 RAR
- the Airborne Battle Group, centred on 3 RAR
- the Mechanised Battle Group, centred on the 1st Armoured Regiment or 5/7 RAR
- the Cavalry Battle Group, centred on the 2nd Cavalry Regiment or the 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment
- the Motorised Battle Group, centred on 6 RAR
- a Special Operations Task Group, centred on the SAS Regiment or 4 RAR (Commando), later renamed the 2nd Commando Regiment, and
- an Aviation Battle Group, centred on the 1st Aviation Regiment or the 5th Aviation Regiment.

As Field observed, each battle group could have included any combination of these units, but they were always complemented in their combined-arms effects by combat-support and combat service-support units throughout the Army, and indeed Defence and coalition partners.¹⁶

Reflecting the unprecedented operational tempo, at one point in 2006, five of the six Regular commanding officers of RAR units were deployed on operations. The CO of 1 RAR was in Solomon Islands; that of 2 RAR was in Iraq conducting a handover with his counterpart from 5/7 RAR. The CO of 3 RAR was in Timor-Leste, preparing to hand over to 6 RAR, and that of 4 RAR (Cdo) was in Afghanistan. 6 RAR remained in Australia, meeting the mandatory requirement to have a Ready Battalion Group prepared for short-notice deployment. The year 2006 also was the first time since 1988 that all RAR units were commanded by

commanding officers with the Infantry Combat Badge.¹⁷ This was symptomatic of an army having experienced a particularly high operational tempo.

Maintaining the level of operational tempo demanded of the Army in 2006 and 2007 presented a number of challenges. Without doubt, in the face of such a multitude of ongoing tasks the small size of the Australian Army presented capability limitations that the Australian Government had to take into account when considering additional tasking. In one sense, the Army was a victim of its own success, with the community having very high expectations of its performance.

ENHANCED LAND FORCE

Recognising that the Army was stretched, Howard announced in August 2006 the Enhanced Land Force initiative whereby the Army would gain 2600 soldiers under an 11-year, \$10 billion plan designed to prepare the ADF to intervene in failing states in an apparently increasingly unstable region. The Enhanced Land Force initiative facilitated an expansion of the number of potential battle groups and included several elements. First, the Army increased from six to eight infantry battalions, while increasing the Regular Army to 30 000 soldiers. Second, new force structures were developed and implemented to support nine battle groups. Third, the initiative refocused the Army Reserve, providing approximately 2800 high-readiness reservists to support the Regular Army.

Subsequently, the Darwin-based battalion 5/7 RAR was split, to re-create 5 RAR and 7 RAR; the new battalion, 7 RAR, being scheduled to relocate to Adelaide as a mechanised battalion by 2010. The second unit selected to be revived was 8/9 RAR, formed as a light infantry battalion based in Brisbane. In addition, the plan involved 3 RAR relocating to Townsville and rerolled as a light infantry battalion. This left the special forces as the principal maintainers of the army's parachute capabilities. The increase came in addition to 1485 soldiers recruited under the modernised Army plan launched in 2005.

In announcing the increase, Howard said the need for a bigger army was self-evident, stating: 'This country faces ongoing and, in my opinion, increasing instances of destabilised and failing states in our own region.' He further warned that in the next 10 to 20 years Australia would face a number of situations the equivalent of, or potentially more challenging than, Solomon Islands and East Timor. Howard argued that it was overwhelmingly in Australia's interest to stop states failing and to

deal pre-emptively with regional problems.¹⁸ His remarks pointed to the prospects of more operational challenges and to the land-centric nature of future conflict, as envisaged in 2007.

Brigadier (Retd) Justin Kelly observed that despite the ‘happy ending’, with the endorsement and implementation of the Hardened and Networked Army initiative, getting to the decision ‘was a bureaucratically bloody process’. To Kelly, the new initiative was too revolutionary to be comfortable, and the need for it implied that the Army’s modernisation process was not working as it should. To Kelly, ‘This was because the combat development world had become too disconnected from the operational world – they were working at odds, rather than in unison.’¹⁹ Still, the Hardened and Networked Army and Enhanced Land Force initiatives reflected the need for change and continued adaptation.

LIVE INSTRUMENTATION

In the meantime, force preparation for troops due to deploy to Afghanistan and Iraq was continuing. The Command Battle Wing and Combined Arms Battle Wing helped with mission rehearsal exercises for the Al Muthanna Task Group and Overwatch Battle Group (West) rotations for Iraq. The introduction of a \$40 million live instrumentation system in late 2006, capable of tracking units over 900 square kilometres, facilitated even better training support. According to the Combat Training Centre CO, Lieutenant Colonel John Simeoni, the instrumentation system was an excellent addition to ‘what has always been the strength of Combat Training Centre Live – experienced and well-trained observer trainers’.²⁰ These facilities enhanced the Army’s ability to train to exacting standards and rapidly adapt as lessons from recent operations were fed back into the training system. The main limitation was that units had few opportunities to participate in exercises using the live instrumentation system.

COMBINED ARMS TRAINING ACTIVITY

For the Townsville-based units, the Combined Arms Training Activity (CATA) was an important annual exercise early in the training cycle. In 2006 it was cancelled due to overriding operational demands. But the proven value of the urban operations training facility at ‘Line Creek Junction’ – a simulated Australian country town – located in the High Range Training Area west of Townsville meant that it was replicated

for the Darwin-based units in the Northern Territory but informed by experience in East Timor.

For the 2007 CATA, Commander 3rd Brigade, Brigadier John Caligari, deployed more than 3000 soldiers practising skills for counter-ambush drills and assaulting makeshift buildings. Units worked up through individual and small-unit collective skills to more demanding tasks involving 'combined arms' to generate added realism.²¹ 'Serials' (i.e. programmed events) designed to enhance interoperability were incorporated from lessons learned on operations.

MAJOR EXERCISES

The Australian Army also benefited from exercising alongside US forces. Combined (multinational) joint (interservice) US and Australian exercises were conducted that focused on dynamic simulated combat operations. These included Crocodile in 1999 and 2003, Tandem Thrust in 2001 and 2002, and Talisman Sabre in 2005 and 2007.²² The 2007 Exercise Talisman Sabre trained Australian and US forces in planning and conducting combined task force operations and improving Australian and US combat readiness and interoperability.²³ Some criticised the major military exercise series as being overly scripted. But such limitations were to be expected as the exercises were important for the training of higher-level commanders and staff for combat operations. A certain level of scripted play was necessary to ensure that key training objectives were met.

For the 2007 exercise, for instance, much of the action centred on a new, heavily instrumented urban operations training facility in the Shoalwater Bay Training Area. This facility replicated cultural features likely to be encountered such as churches, mosques or hospitals. The facility included 370 shipping containers resembling a generic Third World urban environment. Established as part of the Joint Combined Training Centre, the facility enabled the United States and Australia to measure individual and team capabilities.²⁴ Major General Ash Power, commander of the 1st Division at the time, played the role of the Joint Task Force Commander, commanding Townsville-based forces that included Headquarters 3rd Brigade and 2 RAR, supported by the 2nd Cavalry Regiment and the 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment (Queensland Mounted Infantry) initially embarked on US and Australian amphibious ships. Power observed that the exercise presented not just a purely military solution. Instead the force adopted an inter-agency approach or a 'whole-of-government approach to a very complex problem'.²⁵

OPERATION DELUGE: APEC FORUM, SYDNEY, 2007

As Exercise Talisman Sabre was winding down, planning for a significant domestic operation was underway. Security-related aspects of ADF involvement in the September 2007 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum leaders' meeting was considered well before the event, like with the Commonwealth Games in 2006 and Olympics in 2000. Once again Brigadier Andrew 'Boomer' Smith was appointed as the task force commander. Code named Operation Deluge, and drawing on staff from the 7th Brigade in Brisbane, Joint Task Force 634 supported the NSW Police security operations in Sydney from 29 August to 10 September. More than 1500 ADF personnel, including many General Reserve members from 2nd Division, were involved. In the lead-up training, Black Hawk helicopters featured prominently, flying in formation to 'drop soldiers onto city rooftops'.²⁶ These rehearsals acted as a deterrent to would-be trouble-makers, while also demonstrating the versatility to be able to assemble the joint task force with a minimum of fuss.

In terms of personnel and assets assigned, Operation Deluge involved the full range of ADF capabilities from major platforms such as F/A-18 aircraft and ships to dedicated and committed Army reservists. Smith observed, 'we had to make sure we had the forces available to be ready to respond, for example the police weren't sure how big the low-risk search tasks were going to be so we had to be prepared to provide enough personnel.' Ten months planning and preparation was involved. The APEC Forum leaders' meeting took place with no major security incidents.²⁷

Once again the Army's role was low in profile but appreciated by other government agencies. For the Army, the experience reinforced lessons accrued from operations in what was termed a 'whole-of-government' effort. The operation once again demonstrated how those government agencies' functions were complementary to those performed by the Army and the ADF and, conversely, how the ADF's capabilities were enhanced by inter-agency collaboration.

OPERATION OUTREACH: EMERGENCY RESPONSE, NORTHERN TERRITORY

Shortly before the APEC Forum, in June 2007, Howard decided to take decisive action in the Northern Territory in an attempt to break the

cycle of violence and abuse against Aboriginal children. In doing so, the government turned to its most trusted national institution, the Army, for support and facilitation. But this was to be seen as a very different sort of operation for the Army – one that would be politicised.²⁸

Major General David Chalmers was appointed Commander of the Northern Territory Emergency Response Task Force's Operational Group. Chalmers was also appointed executive director and made a member of the Task Force Leadership Group, chaired by magistrate Dr Sue Gordon. Chalmers was an appropriate choice for the role, having experience in East Timor as Commander Australian Contingent and as commander of the Joint Task Force to Aceh and Sumatra in the wake of the tsunami in late 2004 and early 2005.

The ADF's support commenced on 27 June 2007, under the banner of Operation Outreach. Colonel Mark Shephard was chosen from Headquarters Land Command in Sydney as the initial commander of Operation Outreach's Joint Task Force 641. Shephard was an excellent choice, having extensive experience with the Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Program (AACAP), which had operated in remote communities since the mid-1990s. AACAP was undertaken primarily by Army engineering units in support of remote Indigenous communities. Tasks focused on construction, health support and skills training for local Indigenous people, and the program built considerable goodwill towards the Army.

With the operation placed on a more routine footing, and with 600 ADF personnel involved, Lieutenant Colonel Michael Rozzoli, CO of a Regional Force Surveillance Unit known as the North-West Mobile Force (Norforce) was placed in command of Joint Task Force 641 from October 2007.²⁹ Joint Task Force 641 was created based primarily on Norforce, with elements located throughout the Northern Territory. In addition, Joint Task Force 641 included a small element from the Pilbara Regiment and elements of Sydney-based Headquarters 2nd Division. Norforce was the ideal choice for the operation, having a high proportion of Aboriginal soldiers and having worked with Indigenous communities over the preceding two and a half decades. The unit's commitment to and local knowledge of the population of northern and Central Australia proved crucial.

Early on, small survey teams deployed to conduct community engagement and area surveys in communities across the southern half of the Northern Territory. In the remote but troubled Northern Territory community of Wadeye, for instance, a Norforce contingent provided

logistical support for government health teams setting up in the local primary school. There they were met with trust from the local elders. By September 2007 ADF support included mobility, communications and sustainment assistance to police and civilian health teams, inter-agency liaison, and assistance with the procurement and provision of medical stores and contracted trade services.³⁰

The short-term measures implemented under Outreach from June to October were only ever going to be the initial stage of a longer-term strategy to address the problems. But the Army's role was pivotal to the early successes and to its continued viability. No other organisation could bring so much rapid deployability, capability and trust.

The Army's involvement in the Emergency Response Task Force would conclude in October 2008. By then, the ADF would make a significant contribution, including to logistic support and coordination to Department of Health and Ageing Child Health Check Teams in 74 communities; logistic support to the delivery and installation of 18 Northern Territory Police stations, including custodial facilities; logistic support to the delivery of new safe houses as well as emotional and physical support to visiting agencies in unfamiliar environments. The ADF helped to transport people and equipment by land, air and sea, and provided long-range communications support, linguist support and camping equipment support to small groups.³¹

OPERATION PNG ASSIST

In the meantime, further demands for ADF assistance arose following devastating flooding after Cyclone Guba struck Oro Province on Papua New Guinea's north coast. Oro Province, north of the Owen Stanley Range, is at the northern end of the Kokoda Trail, which saw heavy Australian fighting in the Second World War. On 21 November 2007 PNG's acting prime minister, Puka Temu, asked Australia to assist. Australia's frequent engagement with PNG facilitated a rapid response.

5th Aviation Regiment quickly joined other ADF units in support of AusAID in assisting the disaster-affected province. 5th Aviation Regiment CO Lieutenant Colonel Michael Pricor observed that Operation PNG Assist was the unit's thirteenth squadron-level deployment in two years. Three Black Hawk helicopters were dispatched, along with 12 aircrew, 12 headquarters and logistics refuelling personnel and 10 maintenance staff with maintenance equipment.

Other Army elements included communicators from Sydney's 17th Signal Regiment, logisticians from 10th Force Support Battalion and sappers from 2nd Combat Engineer Regiment. The team deployed to Girua airstrip in Oro Province, which remained largely unaffected by the flooding. Joint Task Force 636 was established for the operation, commanded by Air Force Group Captain Tim Innes, as the RAAF provided the bulk of the resources transporting and pre-positioning stores and other support with its C-130 Hercules and CC-08 Caribou aircraft.³²

In the end, order was restored and supplies were promptly distributed, allowing the force to return home after a little over a week. The operation went smoothly not only because of the relatively straightforward nature of the task but also because the ADF elements involved, including Headquarters Joint Operations Command, and the various units contributing to the joint task force, had well-honed deployable capabilities that required little warning. Critical to the prompt response was the provision of adequate mapping of the area and prompt imagery support from the Defence Imagery and Geospatial Organisation (DIGO). This satellite-derived enhanced mapping (which built on the ADF's topographical work from the 1970s and 1980s) provided significant situational awareness in the early stages of the operation. The quick response from DIGO reflected a greater responsiveness to ADF requests for support from national agencies such as DIGO, which was a consequence of the heightened operational tempo.³³

REFLECTIONS

Notwithstanding the high operational tempo due to commitments in East Timor, Solomon Islands and the Middle East, the Army maintained a prominent role in a range of other operations, onshore and offshore. No other comparable organisation is flexible enough to accomplish so much. On that basis alone the work done was impressive. But these operations had three additional consequences.

First, they provided important and unique opportunities to test and refine capabilities, working alongside the other armed services and other government agencies. Most of the Army's capabilities were ones that supported the core functions of warfighting – that is, health, engineering, logistic support, communications and security assistance – but which sometimes were not deployed when relevant support from coalition partners was available.

Second, in each instance, the operations provided an opportunity for the ‘second-tier’, or non-‘combat-arms’, functions within the Army to hold centre stage, enabling them to demonstrate their prowess. Soldiers were tasked to perform roles often beyond their formal military training. In doing so they demonstrated the effectiveness of the Army’s individual and collective training system in preparing them to be flexible enough to handle the tasks at hand.

Third, these operations demonstrated how well individual soldiers could operate under trying circumstances with little guidance, exercising their own initiative to accomplish assigned tasks. This was nothing short of remarkable – compassionate, when compassion was required (in the Northern Territory, for instance); determined, when effort was called for (in PNG’s flooded Oro Province, for instance); and unflappable in the face of adversity (in northern Queensland following Cyclone Larry, for instance). But what was perhaps most striking was the way the cumulative experience gained led to refinements and improvements within the Army.

These operations, once again, demonstrated the significance of the five reasons for prowess. The common military training resulted in technical excellence, common standards and adaptive, cohesive military capabilities for a wide range of short-notice and unpredictable tasks. Many such operations required close cooperation with others – often the RAAF with its C-130 Hercules aircraft.

The regimental and corps identity and the focus on combined-arms battle groups and brigades facilitated a remarkable cross-matching of subunit elements with specific and complementary skill sets, tailored for specific missions. The ties with allies and regional partners facilitated rapid collaboration in places as varied as PNG and Lebanon. In Sierra Leone, for instance, ties with Britain impelled Australia’s involvement in the first place. In Bali and Sumatra, Australia’s long-term investment in the bilateral relationship opened doors. In Nauru and Niue Australia’s compassion and sense of obligation to fellow South Pacific partners motivated the Australian Government to action.

The Army’s links with society continued to influence the government’s own sense of what missions were important and what forces could and should be called upon in response. Involvement in domestic operations, for instance, reflected the priority on supporting the local community. Involvement in a range of humanitarian assistance operations also reflected widespread community goodwill and compassion. Given the ADF’s capacity to mount and support such operations as Sumatra

Assist and the lack of concern about negative political fallout, there was scope for such operations to continue to feature prominently.

The emphasis on field training exercises, including mission rehearsal exercises and battlefield evaluation, enabled forces to prepare adequately for the tasks faced, particularly working alongside police forces as well as a range of other civil society organisations. The Army's conduct of exercises was an important precursor to effective military operations and an important contributor to its prowess. The military exercises regime undertaken under the auspices of Army's Field Force Command (subsequently known as Land Command, then Forces Command) and Special Operations Command marked the Australian Army as an organisation striving for excellence and increased learning. Although by no means perfect, these exercises built upon the individual training undertaken by Army's Training Command and reinforced close ties with allies and regional partners.

Australia's military exercises contributed significantly to the development and fine-tuning of the Army. In the eyes of some senior officers, notably Vietnam veterans, command of a brigade on a field exercise was seen as a more professionally useful experience than a command of a peacekeeping mission, which some considered to be not sufficiently challenging or demanding.³⁴ To maintain a force ready to deploy on a wide range of contingencies at short notice, the Army had to maintain a schedule of exercises, too numerous to list entirely here, at the subunit (company and below), unit (battalion level) and formation (task force or brigade) levels.

The wide range of field training exercises reflected their significance. These exercises demanded a high level of proficiency across the amphibious, urban, mechanised, airborne, special, coalition, joint and inter-agency domains. The professionalism of the Army as it conducted these exercises helped to develop proficiency in a range of settings. To be sure, there was always room for improvement and allied armies often had innovative adaptations for the Australian Army to learn from. But overall, the legacy of these experiences was an adaptable land force with a level of capability arguably unprecedented in the history of the Australian Army.

CHAPTER | 12

ADAPTATION EARLY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

With the Army called upon for so many contingencies far and wide, the Army made a conscious effort to wrest back some of the debate about the significance of land forces. That debate was effectively lost for several years in the era of the 'Defence of Australia' policy of the late 1970s through to the mid-1990s. That policy emphasised resourcing the RAAF and RAN in order to operate more effectively in the so-called sea-air gap. The trouble was that the sea-air gap was actually a sea-air-land gap, which generated as much if not more work for the Army than for the other two services.

EXPERIMENTATION AND CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Articulating the simple clarity of the utility of land forces took time and effort. Along the way the Army established the Land Warfare Development Centre and fostered experimentation for conceptual development and equipment trials. Lieutenant General Sanderson established the Land Warfare Studies Centre, which was initially headed by Colonel David Horner as a conceptual think tank. The Army also fostered the Army History Unit as well as the Centre for Army Lessons to provide an avenue for meaningful reflection. Following on from the work of Sanderson, Lieutenant General Frank Hickling deserves much of the credit for establishing and fostering these organisations, thus providing the right environment for intellectual and conceptual development.

COMBAT TRAINING CENTRE AND COMMAND BATTLE WING

One particularly prominent development was the establishment in 1999 of the Combat Training Centre with a Command Battle Wing (for battalion headquarters command-post exercises) and a live, force-on-force Combined Arms Battle Wing in Townsville.

The Combat Training Centre represented continuity and change, performing the function that Canungra and exercises at Shoalwater Bay had performed for forces preparing to deploy to Vietnam a generation earlier. With the Combined Arms Battle Wing, however, rifle companies from the infantry battalions faced more realistic free-play exercises to sharpen their skills. By 2004 the Combat Training Centre's procedures were becoming routine. Colonel (later Major General) Stuart Smith, who was then Chief of Staff of the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters (DJFHQ), observed that with the ADF involved in more than five coalition operations around the globe at that time, planners and commanders needed to take part in multinational training exercises. This training ultimately contributed to enduring relationships between Australians and members of regional forces.¹

SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

One development of particular significance to the Army was the expansion and upgrading of the Army's special forces directorate under the charge of a brigadier to become Special Operations Command, commanded by a major general, in December 2002. With additional funding allocated by the Australian Government, this organisation built on the experience of providing security support for the Sydney Olympics in 2000 and was established following the Bali bombings of October 2002. Under the new arrangement, Special Operations Command incorporated the SAS Regiment, 4 RAR (Cdo),² the Army Reserve's 1st Commando Regiment, the Special Forces Training Centre (SFTC), the Special Operations Logistics Squadron (SOLS) and the Incident Response Regiment (IRR). All of this was commanded by a major general. The establishment of this command as a 'two-star' or major general's command reflected the increased frequency with which special forces were deployed to conduct a wide range of tasks, reflecting the growing significance of the special forces within the Army.

Special Operations Command, naturally enough, benefited from being better resourced when resource constraints inhibited training and, hence, professional standards in the remainder of the Army. Arguably this phenomenon continued apace in the early years of the twenty-first century, further consolidating the gap between the conventional forces and the special forces and also ensuring that the special forces remained the government's force of choice for a range of tasks, some of which other armies assigned to conventional forces. The deployment of special forces was preferred because it presented a safer option to risk-averse governments eager to minimise the prospect of casualties in so-called wars of choice (i.e. wars in which a government chooses to participate rather than being compelled to participate) remote from Australia's shores.

COMPLEX WARFIGHTING

Informed by the range of challenges experienced on recent operations, the Australian Army refined its conceptualisation of the military's operational environment. As a result, in 2004 the Army published a seminal paper entitled *Complex Warfighting*, which sought holistically to address the subject of warfare for the Australian Army. The paper described war as a fundamentally human, societal activity rather than a technical or engineering one. *Complex Warfighting* articulated a comprehensive overview of the nature of warfare in the early twenty-first century and outlined an appropriate posture for modern armies. That paper sparked considerable debate. Dr (then Lieutenant Colonel) David Kilcullen was the lead author for this original and innovative exposition on the nature of modern war. Yet to many Australian military officers, Kilcullen's work was surprisingly uncontroversial. Perhaps this was because he managed to articulate what was a deeply ingrained part of the Australian Army's culture. This, in part at least, was due to the fact that his writing echoed the Australian experience of warfighting in Vietnam, the training approach largely retained by the Army in the immediate post-Vietnam War years, and the operational experience in the years following the end of the Cold War. Arguably the Australian Army never really moved away from a counter-insurgency mindset following the Vietnam War, even when defining training scenarios in terms of the defence of Australia.³

Subsequently Kilcullen left the Army and worked for US Army General David Petraeus, becoming influential in the formulation of US counter-insurgency doctrine.⁴ There he faced institutional inertia and opposition to the ideas he expounded due to opposition to counter-insurgency

doctrine in US military circles. In the face of a massive insurgency in Iraq from late 2003 onwards, however, the US Army slowly came to understand the essence of *Complex Warfighting* and its manifestation in Iraq. But the US Army's mindset was dominated by the air-land battle concepts of conventional air and land combat operations applied in the Gulf Wars of 1990-91 and 2003. It would take several years before the US Army changed gear (arguably too late) and adapted to a counter-insurgency approach consistent with *Complex Warfighting*. Even then, there was significant institutional resistance and once the United States decided to pull out of Iraq and draw down in Afghanistan, the US Army would largely revert to type, preferring to focus on developing conventional warfighting concepts.

HARDENED AND NETWORKED ARMY

Meanwhile, in December 2005, after much deliberation within the Army, Prime Minister Howard endorsed the Hardened and Networked Army (HNA) initiative as part of the launch of the *Strategic Update 2005*. This and other initiatives reflected the concerns raised by the Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Peter Leahy, who argued that the Army needed to be 'hardened' (i.e. largely provided with additional armoured protection) to be able to survive in an environment where every potential adversary had access to highly lethal, hand-held anti-armour weapons. There was a need 'to be networked to be able to operate in small, semi-autonomous teams that are as agile and flexible as our opponents'.⁵

SMALL, AGILE TEAMS

Leahy explained that this expansion and modernisation would permit the Army to deploy small, agile combined-arms teams mounted behind armour and with access to an array of joint direct and indirect fire. The ideal was that ultimately each soldier would be a 'node in a seamless network of sensors and shooters'. Although this sounded futuristic, it was a scheme of manoeuvre that Australia's special forces soldiers had already mastered. Leahy believed that, over time, the Army's conventional forces also would master it.⁶ His observations reflected experience on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, but had application for potential developments closer to Australian shores. Leahy contended:

Our conventional forces are likely to be confronted by vaguely defined militia or terrorists, which will hug population centres, and culturally sensitive infrastructure. They will attempt to provoke us into the indiscriminate use of our superior killing power to mistakenly harm civilians, or damage religious or cultural sites. This is calculated to undermine our centre of gravity – namely the respect and trust of the population that we are trying to persuade or protect. This is the classical application of asymmetry to warfare.

Placing precision in the hands of a highly trained, culturally sensitive soldier provides discrimination, which in the complex environment is the indispensable support to our centre of gravity. This is what the great Australian General Monash referred to as ‘orchestration’. However, in the wars of the 21st Century, the orchestra conductors are as likely to be a private or a corporal as a major or lieutenant colonel.⁷

Leahy’s remarks slightly misrepresented the situation as Monash’s ‘orchestration’ referred to the application of combined-arms effects to win battles of the First World War. Still, the fact that orchestration was seen to occur at the lowest levels pointed to a degree of convergence between special and conventional forces. Historically, small-team actions involving three or four people had tended to be the domain of the special forces. But with the new circumstances, conventional forces appeared likely to confront such challenges as part of a dispersed small team as well.

ACQUISITION OF ABRAMS TANKS

Complementing the debate about a hardened and networked Army built around small and agile teams was the recognition that the Army’s Leopard 1 tanks were obsolete and needed to be replaced or disposed of. But there were detractors who argued that purchasing replacement tanks was not necessary and noted that the tanks they would replace had never deployed on operations. Detractors argued that such heavy tanks would not be able to function on many of the rudimentary roads and bridges in the region; they also felt that such a purchase exposed Australia to the political risk of potentially being drawn into making a force contribution to an unforeseen future war simply because modern capable tanks had been acquired.⁸

Leahy discounted these arguments as hypothetical and unfounded, and pushed hard for replacement tanks. To bolster his position he enlisted

the support of Paul Monk and David Kilcullen. Monk mapped the tank debate, making a dispassionate argument about the enduring utility of tanks for plausible warfighting scenarios that the Australian Army conceivably could face in a regional context.⁹ Similarly David Kilcullen addressed what he called the 'ten tank myths'. In essence, he argued: 'In the Australian context they operate primarily as part of a combined-arms team with artillery, light forces and air power.' Stressing the utility of tanks for the close support of infantry in a tactical situation in jungles or built-up areas, he declared 'Long-range *Blitzkrieg* in open terrain is largely irrelevant to this reality and would anyway require far more than the 59 replacement tanks being procured. Our new tanks are instead, agile, well-armed, well-protected additions essential to the effective manoeuvre of a balanced joint team.'¹⁰ Leahy won his argument and acquired 59 Abrams tanks for the Army – far fewer than the 101 Leopard 1 tanks they replaced, but enough to ensure that tanks would be available if necessary to support an infantry-centric Army operating in the region.

Problems persisted, however, as the rapid acquisition occurred without close consideration of the support requirements that would be required. New aircraft and trucks had to be purchased as well, adding to the costs incurred. In the end, however, the capability was raised and the army set about incorporating the new tanks into its training program.

ADAPTIVE CAMPAIGNING

Beyond the concepts of hardening and networking and complex warfighting, the tempo of operations stimulated additional conceptual work. Reflections on the implications of developments on operations led in 2007 to the follow-on concept of Adaptive Campaigning, described as 'actions taken by the Land Force as part of the military contribution to a Whole of Government approach to resolving conflicts'.¹¹ Adaptive Campaigning had five interdependent and mutually reinforcing 'lines of operation', which could be seen at work in such places as Afghanistan in 2007:

- 1 'Joint Land Combat' meant actions to secure the environment, remove organised resistance and set conditions for the other lines of operation. In Oruzgan, for instance, teams worked closely with air elements to engage the enemy decisively while discriminating with some certainty between combatants and non-combatants. Australians had not perfected this highly challenging task, but they understood the implications of miscalculation. Furthermore, with precision weapons, backed

- up with quality intelligence support, commanders could engage targets with a confidence unimagined previously.
- 2 'Population Support' meant actions intended to establish, restore or temporarily replace the necessary essential services in effected communities. This built on Australia's experience in Vietnam, Somalia, East Timor and elsewhere. This line of operation was akin to the 'hearts and minds' approach as identified during the Malayan Emergency and was recognised as an essential part of winning the post-battle contest for the legitimacy of the cause in the minds of the people Australians were operating among.¹²
 - 3 'Indigenous Capacity Building' meant actions taken in conjunction with other agencies to nurture civilian governance. This line of operation recognised that initial success could evaporate if indigenous capacity was not there to take over when the forces left. Australia's experience in East Timor in 2006 served as an example. The departure from and prompt return to East Timor illustrated the dangers of inadequately nurturing indigenous security capacity before declaring a mission completed.
 - 4 'Population Protection' meant actions to protect and secure threatened populations to help re-establish law and order. In Afghanistan, this was a greater task than any nation could address alone.
 - 5 'Public Information' (or 'information actions') meant actions that inform and shape the perceptions, attitudes, behaviour and understanding of target population groups, particularly in the area of operations.
- The conceptual work behind Adaptive Campaigning and the five lines of operation was informed by engagement in counter-insurgency operations in Malaya, Borneo and Vietnam during the Cold War. It was also informed by the wide range of peacekeeping operations, particularly in the post-Cold War 1990s. In addition, it drew upon Australia's experience in dealing with vastly different operations in Solomon Islands, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the lessons learned from coalition partner armies. Yet, in many ways, these lines of operation reflected continuity more than change. As a one-time CO of the 1st Australian Civil Affairs Unit in Vietnam, former Chief of the General Staff (1984–87), then Chief of Defence Force (1987–93), General Peter Gration, pointed out, 'There is nothing substantive here that Australia wasn't doing in Vietnam anyway.'¹³ While the conceptual work reflected continuity, distilling it in a digestible manner in this way was seen as helpful in ensuring that its concepts were widely understood and put into practice.

Adaptive campaigning also recognised five factors that were seen to be adding to the complexity of the modern operating environment. The first

was the increasing lethality of weapons. The hitting power of ammunition, the increased calibre of weapons, the greater precision of accuracy and surge in the volume of fire that could be delivered and received all combined to make survival on the battlefield more challenging. This in turn prompted calls for increased protection in body armour and armoured vehicles – hence the emphasis on a *hardened* and networked Army.

The second factor was the ‘emptying of the battle space’, whereby force densities diminished due to increased lethality and improved communications. In other words, improved communications (including intra-section personal radios) meant that soldiers did not need to bunch up so much to generate the same desired effect in battle. Similarly, with heightened lethality, dispersal of troops to avoid multiple casualties from a single enemy hit was reinforced.

The third factor concerned the identification of multiple actors, most of whom were not clearly discernible in the traditional way with uniforms and insignia. The operations encountered in Timor-Leste, Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrated the difficulty in identifying friend from foe. So-called Blue Force Tracker technology was introduced to assist. But the judgement of individual soldiers distinguishing between targets and those worthy of protection in the heat of battle remained particularly challenging. Improved technology was helpful, but it was not a ‘silver bullet’ that could overcome all difficulties. A lot was riding on soldiers’ shoulders, with potentially lethal tasks in an increasingly legally fraught context.

The fourth factor was improving ISTAR capabilities; ISTAR being an acronym for intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance. The introduction of unmanned aerial reconnaissance vehicles (UAVs) added significantly to the amount of real-time information available to identify targets. In addition, the domains of human, signals and imagery intelligence were refined and made more responsive. Lieutenant colonels commanding task groups in Iraq and Afghanistan had access to an unprecedented amount of intelligence support for planning and decision-making. This conversely increased the challenge of grappling with the masses of information now available.

The fifth factor concerned the retreat of adversaries into complex, often urban, terrain, ‘among the people’ whom Australian forces sought to protect. Conscious of Australia’s improved intelligence resources, as well as heightened weapon lethality and accuracy, adversaries sought to avoid rising above the detection threshold of ISTAR assets. Hiding in villages increased the difficulty for soldiers of accurately identifying legitimate

targets and engaging them before they escaped or retaliated while also avoiding inadvertently killing or wounding innocent bystanders.

The conceptual work was driven largely by these imperatives, which generated increased complexity. General Gratton was right to point to continuity. Yet these five factors demanded attention and warranted a close reconsideration of the basic principles for applied modern-day military operations.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL MANOEUVRE

The predisposition to evaluation and reflection that was prompted particularly by the post-1999 surge in operations culminated in 2007 in the ADF's adoption of a 'future joint operating concept' known as 'Multidimensional Manoeuvre', an overarching term to describe non-military and military options to 'reach, know and exploit'. The simplicity of the phrase belied the complexity it encapsulated. The ability to 'reach' concerned the capacity to operate across physical, virtual and human domains as part of an integrated 'whole-of-government' approach, drawing on resources from various government bodies. The ability to 'know' concerned the capacity to capture and apply information from civil and military sources and convert it into timely, accurate and 'actionable' knowledge. The ability to 'exploit' involved integrating ADF capabilities with other elements to achieve effects in support of national objectives.

The three abilities were predicated on the ADF operating with 'speed, agility and simultaneity', to prevent an adversary from adequately responding.¹⁴ To be fair, while there were insiders with the kind of flexible mindset spoken about in the paper, the Defence bureaucracy itself, incorporating the Army, still needed improved flexibility and adaptability for the concept truly to become a reality.

ARMY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

In the meantime, the work behind Adaptive Campaigning was reinforced by ongoing efforts to develop and implement the 'Army Learning Environment'.¹⁵ This was an initiative of the Land Warfare Development Centre in 2005, implemented initially by Army Training Command in 2007 and designed to make the system work as intended.¹⁶

For several years, the Army maintained the Centre for Army Lessons (CAL) at Puckapunyal, but its significance increased as operational commitments surged. The centre's title did not presuppose that lessons

observed had been learned. Indeed, the CAL's focus was on capturing issues of intrinsic value to the Army without the remit to ensure that the lessons became truly learned. But they certainly were being shared through the dissemination of reports and publications such as pre-deployment handbooks and the periodical *Smart Soldier*, which was widely read by soldiers. It included tips and lessons on equipment, tactics and procedures derived from experience on operations and often included suggested improvements. Pre-deployment, mission-specific information booklets contained unclassified country- and mission-specific information concerning local signs, symbols, cultural 'dos and don'ts', language tips and so on that soldiers could put in their pockets and take with them.

Under the new learning rubric, however, the intention was to be a 'genuine learning organisation where shared, timely knowledge and flexible, blended learning' became the norm. Ironically, this approach mirrored that used at the height of the First World War, suggesting that some 'new' ideas echo developments from the past and that such ideas gain traction at times of high operational tempo. The 'learning organisation' approach recognised the need to ensure that lessons were not just observed but also truly learned. The intention was to put institutional mechanisms in place that would enable grappling with emerging challenges, no matter how unsettling they were.¹⁷

There was still room for further improvement. A 2005 Defence inquiry into the ADF learning culture, for instance, judged that the ADF was not a 'best practice learning organisation at this stage' and that there was 'considerable room for improvement in investment in staff training and engagement'.¹⁸ Elsewhere, concerns were expressed that professional military education was being diminished by the doctrinal treatment of war as an ordered problem accompanied by the dogmatic application of a formatted appreciation process that, to a certain extent, straitjacketed conceptual thinking within the Army.¹⁹ But the fact that these studies were undertaken and that solutions were being identified within the ADF was reflective of the healthy and constructive space available for reflection and further adaptation to take place.

CORE BEHAVIOURS

In 2007 the Army identified nine 'core behaviours' that were intended, in part at least, to reinforce a learning disposition. The 'core behaviours' were mandated by the Chief of Army and came to be accepted widely

within the Army as being 'truisms'. The nine core behaviours were used as the basis of the 'I'm an Australian Soldier' initiative, which stated:

- 1 every soldier is an expert in close combat (involving direct-fire weapons against recognised individuals)
- 2 every soldier is a leader (able to face the complex demands of leading a small team)
- 3 every soldier is physically tough (encompassing a systematic approach to developing physical strength and endurance)
- 4 every soldier is mentally prepared (intellectually, emotionally and psychologically)
- 5 every soldier is committed to continuous learning and self-development (to ensure mastery of complex warfighting)
- 6 every soldier is courageous (to face danger and to do what is right and fair with a sense of duty and compassion)
- 7 every soldier takes the initiative (exploiting opportunity even in the absence of orders, and improvising to make the most of equipment and resources)
- 8 every soldier works for the team (supporting equality, tolerance and friendship), and
- 9 every soldier demonstrates compassion (able to cross cultural divides with awareness, enhanced language skills and a solid grounding in ethical decision-making).²⁰

These nine points were announced as 'core behaviours' for all Australian soldiers. In reality, this was an aspirational statement drawing on what had already become apparent over the years: that is, smaller elements, with increased capabilities, could be given increased responsibilities. Consequently, tasks that once were held at division or brigade level could be devolved to brigades and battalions and battalions down to companies. Soldiers had to understand the changed dynamics, and this statement was intended to make their roles clear.

In South Vietnam, for instance, operations controlled at battalion level were the norm, with company-level operations subsumed. Occasionally company-level operations demonstrated the upper limits of capability. For instance, D Company 6 RAR withstood the assault of a Communist Vietnamese regiment during the Battle of Long Tan largely because of the excellent and reliable tactical reach-back to the task force base for accurate and 'danger-close' indirect fire support from the task force's artillery, helicopter support and armoured personnel carriers that reinforced the stranded company. Such reach-back was facilitated by a rugged and reliable portable VHF radio communications system that at the time was state

of the art.²¹ In Vietnam only special forces elements tended to operate in small teams remote from their base, where they operated with their own unique communications equipment. This was partly due to their skills and intense training as well as specialised tactics and equipment that set them apart from their conventional forces colleagues.

In contrast, the Army of 2007, with its soldiers inculcated in the nine core behaviours, faced different circumstances and challenges. Special forces soldiers were as well trained as before but even better equipped and connected, with more capable and integrated intelligence enabling rapid response with even greater precision. But the conventional forces could also operate in small teams confident that they were equipped and trained to draw on similarly extensive, timely and precise support, including from networked intelligence assets and available air and naval platforms when required. For many outside the special forces, however, the main frustration was that while they felt equipped and prepared for such small-team operations, policy constraints prevented them from routinely engaging in such practices. For operations taking place far from Australia's shores seen as 'wars of choice', such circumspect policies left soldiers frustrated, but kept casualties to a minimum.

'JOINTERY'

By 2007 the Army benefited from the considerable closeness between the three armed services of the ADF. The Army's operational challenges involved working closely with the Navy and Air Force, particularly in Australia's region, where Australia's role was either a leading one or at least a prominent supportive one. In earlier conflicts the three armed services tended to work largely independently, being drawn to work more closely with their British, American or New Zealand colleagues than with their Australian counterparts because of the nature of coalition operations undertaken.²²

What had changed was that a closeness emerged partly thanks to shared experiences in joint training institutions, notably the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) in Canberra, the ADF Warfare Centre at Williamstown, and the Australian Command and Staff College in Weston Creek, Canberra. It also came about by working together as a team to achieve assigned missions in which Australia was in the lead.

Critics would argue that the ADF had never been good at jointery and that, where high-end warfighting was involved, the Army operated

largely independently of its sister services. In terms of operations closer to Australia's shores, the events in East Timor/Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands attested to an enviably high level of jointery within the ADF, at least on operations considered only partially warlike or non-warlike. Critics would retort, saying that the East Timor deployment was a 'non-combat deployment based on administrative logistics'.²³ Once the initial lodgement was completed, the moves were primarily administrative. But the initial phases of the force deployment to East Timor in September 1999 were not planned as simple administrative moves. They employed joint 'effects', drawing on the resources of the three armed services and supporting government and coalition elements, demonstrating a fairly sophisticated level of jointery wherein combat operations were thankfully avoided. The fact that conflict was avoided speaks, in part at least, to the lack of the adversary's resolve to fight. But it also speaks to the efficacy of Australian jointery in this instance – particularly if, as Sun Tzu once noted, the acme of military skill is to 'subdue the enemy without fighting'.

Still, in operations more remote from Australia's shores (such as in Afghanistan and Iraq), Australia's land-based task forces continued to be integrated with allied 'environmental components'. In other words, maritime forces worked with allied maritime components and land forces with allied land components rather than with the other services of the ADF. Some also would highlight that the defence force had yet to experience joint combat operations (i.e. fighting a 'hot' war together as a defence force team).²⁴ To a certain extent this was a fair observation, particularly concerning deployments in the Middle East. But Australia's engagement in the Middle East, from 2001 onwards, was in some respects more discretionary than in operations closer to Australia's shores, whereas in the large number of operations experienced closer to Australia's shores the cooperation between the RAN, RAAF and Army was very close. Furthermore, the extensive joint exercises and training undertaken together indicated that, notwithstanding the absence of hot wars to prove the point, the ADF had displayed many of the hallmarks of a capable joint team.

The flexibility and resourcefulness of the ADF's relatively small ground force indicated what made the Australian Army so impressive. Soldiers capitalised on this and maximised the strengths of the 'modern system'. In essence, the modern system of military force was recognised as combining manoeuvre, and combined arms at the tactical level, as well as depth, reserves and differential concentration of forces (i.e. the concentration of

one's strength against an opponent's point of weakness to achieve victory) at the operational level of war.²⁵

Beyond 'jointery', the Army also recognised the need to formalise arrangements with other government agencies as part of the 'whole-of-government' approach to security operations. Consequently, by the end of 2007 the ADF was preparing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Interoperability between the ADF and the AFP and an MOU between the ADF and AusAID. The Army was moving into an approach to operations that included other government bodies and the Army's people were doing the same wherever they were deployed.²⁶ As mentioned earlier, such an approach led some to talk about the militarisation of aid. But in many circumstances, close collaboration between the ADF and such organisations as AusAID was a reasonable and responsible path for Australian Government authorities to follow.

HEADQUARTERS AUSTRALIAN THEATRE

One of the most significant developments related to jointery was the establishment of Headquarters Australian Theatre (later renamed Joint Operations Command) in Sydney announced by CDF General John Baker in January 1996.²⁷ This headquarters was tasked to command and control the ADF's deployed forces, but proved to be inadequately resourced and structured for the operational surge following 11 September 2001. Consequently, a decision was made to co-locate the operational headquarters of the three services as a tri-service headquarters at Bungendore, just outside Canberra. This was followed by a review undertaken by Major General Richard Wilson in 2005 to explore further rationalisation and integration of the single-service component headquarters. Wilson's model was endorsed by the government. Subsequently, the ADF's new command and control arrangements were established in its new integrated command and control node known as Headquarters Joint Operations Command (HQ JOC) with transitional facilities for 2007 and 2008 in Potts Point, Sydney, and Fairbairn, Canberra.

For operations close to Australia, the employment of joint effects was crucial as Australia often played the lead role. Exercising that lead role reinforced the importance of having an appropriately configured and resourced headquarters to manage such complex operations. The creation of HQ JOC set a sound framework to reinforce jointery for the years ahead.

The HQ JOC project created a new, integrated, operational-level joint headquarters intended to provide the CDF with a more effective means of commanding the ADF. The new headquarters brought together for the first time in an integrated environment the Chief of Joint Operations in Canberra, the Deputy Chief of Joint Operations and joint staff, Maritime, Land, Air and Special Operations staff, the Joint Operations Intelligence Centre, and the 1st Joint Movement Group based in Sydney, as well as a portion of the Headquarters Joint Logistics Command staff based in Melbourne. By bringing together staff and agencies at the strategic and operational levels, the new HQ JOC was postured to improve further the effectiveness of joint planning, the allocation of resources for military operations, and the command and control of operations. The new headquarters complex was designed to accommodate around 750 military and civilian Defence staff, while able to augment staff when necessary.²⁸

In recognition of the heavy workload and the importance of the new arrangements, in September 2007 the role of VCDF was separated from that of Chief of Joint Operations. The split saw Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie remain VCDF and Lieutenant General David Hurley appointed Chief of Joint Operations. The split reflected the greater workload and operational imperative for a commander focused on operational matters as well as the growing need for a VCDF able to focus on joint aspects of raising, training and sustaining deployed forces. The split also enabled Hurley to act as 'campaign manager' for the ADF's numerous operations.

The creation of this new headquarters, with a dedicated commander of three-star rank, reflected Defence's growing organisational maturity and the extraordinary operational tempo that led to forces being committed to places ranging from Tonga, Solomon Islands and East Timor to Sudan, Egypt, Israel, Palestine and Lebanon as well as Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan and other states in the Persian Gulf. The new headquarters enabled the ADF finally to reach a high level of proficiency in commanding and controlling forces undertaking multiple, tactical-level operations.

CAPABILITY ENHANCEMENTS

Complementing the increased proficiency facilitated by HQ JOC, the Defence Capability Development Group introduced a range of new or enhanced capabilities for the Army through a program called 'Rapid Acquisition'. The program was introduced to circumvent the cumbersome and drawn-out routine process of acquisition of new equipment, which could take more than a decade to be completed. In fact, with long lead

times, significant staff overheads and budget blowouts, questions could be asked about why Australia should retain its traditional acquisition process.

With the operational imperatives pressing, calls were heeded for improved responsiveness to acquire essential items rapidly. In many ways the operational tempo accelerated the modernisation of the Army. For instance, it was under this program that 59 fully refurbished, state-of-the-art Abrams tanks were delivered to the Army. An upgrade to the Army's 257 light armoured vehicles was underway in 2007 to increase protection against ballistic and explosive threats while maintaining their speed and manoeuvrability. New lightweight body armour, thermal weapon systems and individual radios were slated for introduction. A vehicle not to be forgotten was the Bushmaster protected mobility vehicle. Once the 'ugly duckling', this Australian-made vehicle saved lives in the Middle East, and became a key component of the Hardened and Networked Army and Enhanced Land Force initiatives.²⁹ These enhancements were in direct response to the lessons learned on operations around the world.

There remained plenty of scope for the ever-critical soldier to point out deficiencies and additional areas for improvement. But increasingly those criticisms were muted in the face of a more responsive system that had demonstrated a focus on delivering tangible and timely benefits to deployed troops on operations.

CHANGED WARFIGHTING TECHNIQUES

Considerable debate also took place within the Army as practitioners reflected on their experience and the implications of recent trends in warfare. The realm of 'unconventional warfare', in particular, had been the exclusive domain of special forces. But this domain increasingly became the conventional form of modern warfighting with complex counter-insurgency operations and 'war among the people' featuring prominently.³⁰ In addition, while many of the tasks faced in Iraq and Afghanistan, for instance, were associated with special forces, they increasingly became the remit of conventional forces as well. As Brigadier (later Major General) Michael Krause pointed out, 'This is not just a job for special forces but has to become the norm for all land forces.'³¹

Similarly Brigadier (Retd) Justin Kelly and Dr Mike Brennan argued that the nature of warfare and the interplay of modern technology pointed to the defence being intrinsically stronger than the offence in recent

conflicts. Kelly and Brennan argued that the tactical defensive was ascendant and that only with small, highly capable and dispersed teams could a force emerge victorious from the employment of offensive action. Kelly and Brennan noted the US Marine Corps' 'Distributed Operations' concept as one example whereby a number of relatively small teams, akin to skirmishers in earlier times, could exploit 'micro-terrain' to infiltrate into and through a distributed defence, using excellent communications to direct precision fire at enemy positions as they were disclosed.³² Indeed, small teams with special forces-like characteristics were, by implication, critical for any successful attempt to regain the initiative for offensive operations under such circumstances. But inter-agency cooperation, not just traditional warfighting skills increasingly came to be seen as critical for success on the modern battlefield. Both conventional and special forces also needed to be able to collaborate with other non-military organisations.

OVERLAP BETWEEN CONVENTIONAL AND SPECIAL FORCES CAPABILITIES

The debates over the future of warfighting and the roles of special and conventional forces echoed earlier experience. In Borneo in the early to mid-1960s, for instance, both 3 RAR and 4 RAR, as standard light infantry battalions, conducted cross-border operations not dissimilar from the patrols conducted by their special forces counterparts.³³ Fearing casualties and adverse publicity from complications, and seeking to contribute niche and calibrated force elements, such politically fraught actions today would likely be preserved for special forces.

A former Deputy Commander of Special Operations Command and, before that, Commanding Officer of the SAS Regiment, Brigadier Don Higgins, explained the special forces-like characteristics of the conventional forces this way:

There is a case to be made that the conventional element has a number of SF [special forces]-like features but I would contend that these are features that existed in our special forces in the late 1970s–1980s. And this is not surprising as it mirrors the developments in most Western armies. That is, as the SF masters new techniques and equipment these then flow into the conventional part of Army in order that the SF can move onto even newer equipments and master the techniques required for the next battlefield. SF will

always develop faster than the rest of Army – largely due to our small size, flat command structure and because we carefully select individuals.³⁴

He perhaps could have added: ‘... and because of better funding’.

The argument was made that special forces represented the ‘harbinger for change’.³⁵ Another former SAS Regiment CO, Major General Rick Burr, agreed. He observed that early entry forces and testing of tactics, techniques, procedures and equipment is often done within Special Operations Command, then handed over to the larger force. The special forces are a test bed for ideas and equipment that ultimately benefit all of the Army. ‘They validate it, iron out the risk and hand it off. You increasingly see that.’ According to Burr, often the question of choosing forces for operational tasks simply comes down to readiness. The special forces will often be used not just for special operations tasks but also because they are the best fit for the job. ‘It is often not that a conventional force cannot do a task, it just might be that given a certain context, a smaller, better trained force is preferred for more strategic reasons.’³⁶

Higgins’s and Burr’s perspectives stand in contrast to others who are concerned that mechanisms were not placed adequately to ensure that knowledge and skills from the special forces’ experience cascaded through the rest of the Army. One to express concern was former Commander of the 1st Division and later Commander Forces Command, Major General Michael Slater. Slater argued that since the creation of Special Operations Command there had been only a limited trickle-down effect in terms of skills and equipment in the way envisaged by the then Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Peter Leahy, when he announced the creation of Special Operations Command. Instead, Slater argued, the expansion of the number of special forces units had in effect reduced the gap between special and conventional forces.³⁷

In 2011 Special Operations Command’s head of development, Brigadier Roger Noble, wrote *The Future Special Operations Concept 2030*, which argued that Australia’s special forces needed to be prepared for a future in which there is no peace or war, just constant competition. Noble argued that state war had not gone away and that surprise at the strategic level seemed one of the only constants. Special Operations Command was therefore the ‘hedge force’ to fill the gaps to allow the main force to adapt to come in behind if necessary.³⁸ His arguments had significant implications for not just the special forces but the conventional forces as well.

Leahy observed that in the types of environments the Australian Army was likely to be involved in the special forces 'should be seen as the "vanguard" with the rest of the Army taking the lead and then pushing hard at their heels'. Leahy made the point that the gap between the conventional and special forces had blurred around the edges, but he said, 'I fear it is because the [special forces] have come back to the pack just as much as the conventional forces catching up to them. This is because we have chosen to use the [special forces] in a disruption role rather than a strategic surveillance role. We need to keep pushing them forward.'³⁹ As if to illustrate their closeness to the conventional Army, special forces recruiting from within the Army itself described what it offered as only a graduated change – 'taking it to the next level'.⁴⁰

A former SAS Regiment CO, Lieutenant Colonel (Retd) James McMahon, observed that the ability to adapt at all levels and with all enabling functions was critical to success – from procurement to intelligence functions to force structure. McMahon said: 'In future, whatever we do, our ability to adapt will be crucial not just at the tactical and operational level but also concerning the enabling functions and in the way we procure equipment. Commanders can be successful on operations if they are given the ability to adapt their force structure to what the environment requires.'⁴¹ His observations pointed to the need for the nimble-minded approach of the special forces to imbue not just the Army's conventional forces but the rest of the Defence organisation as well.

The question was not so much about capability as about government preference, noting that this had been heavily influenced by military advice. That preference remained consistent with the approach taken since Australian forces withdrew from Vietnam: where forces were to be deployed, the risk of casualties had to be kept to a minimum, the force 'footprint' contained, and the mission constrained in scope and time. Arguably this risk aversion related to the government's political reckoning of the risks and benefits of exposing the Army to additional dangers and potential loss of life remote from Australia's immediate neighbourhood. The political reasoning was that the Army would suffer fewer casualties with the special forces than would be the case with conventional forces. It so happened also that special forces, often enough, best fitted these requirements. Luck also was a key: special forces had demonstrated that they could be spectacularly successful, but in high-risk and high-stakes operations there remained the potential for catastrophic failure. The Australian Army continued to train for warfighting and, when authorised to engage in operations involving firefights, Australian soldiers performed creditably.

UNSETTLING ASPECTS

There was a downside to the heightened operational tempo. Many soldiers served on operations in two or three theatres of operations, and some served in several more than that. Clearly, much experience and knowledge were accrued. But as the Army recognised, retaining good people who had already made repeated sacrifices abroad for their country became increasingly challenging. The government recognised this and sought to compensate financially and provide appropriate psychological and other support where needed.

Another unsettling dimension was the turbulence of postings, whereby officers and senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs) could be posted from one unit to another unit far away and with few direct ties to the one from which the member was posted. The breaking-up of informal personal networks added to the challenges generated by the disruption. This turbulence resulted in considerable challenges, particularly for the families of Defence Force members. To mitigate this effect, the Army tried to give its members as much advance notice as possible of upcoming moves. Although short-notice moves could not always be avoided and operational deployments themselves could arise at very short notice, on the whole, the Army strived to give six months or more prior notice of a move and, wherever possible, give its people a choice of posting options that would meet the Army's needs while also satisfying career aspirations and family needs.

The unsettling nature of this turbulence, with its discontinuities and short-term loss of corporate memory, had a positive flip-side. In effect this turbulence led to a rapid proliferation of new ideas and generated a conceptual and organisational dynamism. The Army was successful at this largely because it was sufficiently small to be conceptually nimble, yet large enough to generate the critical mass to implement meaningful and timely change to tactics, techniques and procedures as well as organisational structures and equipment suites. Certainly, there remained scope for improvement in the Army's flexibility to deal with emerging challenges but, overall, the level of adaptation was impressive. Logistically, this approach resulted in the rapid and timely acquisition of sophisticated military technology (principally existing American-designed and -built equipment) such as enhanced combat body armour for deployed soldiers, night vision equipment, Blue Force tracker equipment, world-class armoured mobility vehicles and tanks, and a range of highly capable helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles.

Despite these developments, there remained plenty of scope for improvement. The Army's institutional response to the threat of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that emerged in Iraq and Afghanistan, for instance, could have been faster. The existence of that threat was an operational surprise, but it should have been obvious even from reports emerging in 2002 or from the Soviets' experience in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Indeed, as early as 2001 the Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO) consulted participants in the UN Mine Clearance Training Team (UNMCTT) mission for their knowledge of mine techniques and locations in Afghanistan. Yet the institutional response (in the establishment of the Counter-IED Task Force) did not occur until early 2006.⁴² Similarly, the project for a rapid route-and-area mine-neutralisation system was well developed by 2002, following the guidance outlined in the Defence White Paper, 2000. But the project was shelved, against the advice of the engineers, just when the threat was developing in Afghanistan.⁴³

Perhaps the most unsettling issue concerned what in earlier conflicts was known as 'shell shock' or, in its modern iteration, 'post-traumatic stress disorder', known by its acronym PTSD. Vietnam veterans were known to have experienced it as well. Consequently, the Army and the ADF made a concerted effort in the 1990s to improve the level of psychological support and counselling for soldiers deployed on operations. Psychological debriefings became a standard part of the protocols for soldiers to complete before they were allowed to return home after an operational deployment. Sometimes these debriefing sessions were instrumental in addressing some of the latent issues. But more often than not, soldiers returning from operations maintained their composure, sense of self-confidence and belief in the cause. It was only after they went home and, often enough, only after leaving the defence force, that they felt they could completely let go of the internal mental strictures that held back the waves of emotional and psychological issues pent up from being involved in or having witnessed harrowing scenes.

By 2007 there were signs of a growing number of soldiers and ex-soldiers experiencing PTSD as a result of the surge in the operational tempo, particularly from 1999 onwards. But the numbers would increase dramatically in the years that followed. Such organisations as Soldier On would emerge to help people affected by PTSD, and such people as Major General (Retd) John Cantwell would write about it and help bring the issue well and truly into the open. With many experiencing PTSD after leaving the Army, the Department of Veterans Affairs would come to have an important role in managing PTSD, much as it had done for those

returned from earlier conflicts. But for those most strongly affected, the sense of hope and aspirations for a bright future would be undermined by the obstacle that PTSD would present to their reintegration into civilian society.

COMBINED-ARMS WARFIGHTING

Meanwhile, for most soldiers, PTSD was far from their minds. Other issues consumed their thinking instead. For some, their thinking would gravitate towards the application of combined-arms effects, holding ground and battlefield manoeuvre as cornerstones of conventional forces' capabilities. Concerns remained about the Army's ability to fight in combat situations, particularly without proven combat enablers often provided by allies. One senior and combat-experienced officer expressed concern about the Army's ability to handle high-intensity conflict. He observed:

Of course there are things that are good, but an army exists to fight as well as to do all the adaptive things that we do in East Timor, Solomons, the non-fighting in Iraq, and the non-SF things in Afghanistan. I look for proof that the Army can fight in anything that approaches a modern fight, and except for the SF (and they are supported by combat-experienced enablers, not our tanks, aircraft etc), I have trouble finding it. Perhaps the commanding officers all have Infantry Combat Badges, but do they have combat experience? Good armies are armies that fight or who faithfully simulate fighting in their training.⁴⁴

Such hard-hitting observations addressed an enduring issue of concern expressed by others, such as Major Jim Hammett. His concerns resonated with many and pointed to the need to continue to ensure that the Army refined its warfighting capabilities in order to be able to adequately face high-intensity combat. The Army needed to resist the temptation to rest on its laurels in light of its successes in the field and continue to learn and adapt, ever striving for improvements.

Fortunately for the Army, there were a number of opportunities for selected officers to be involved in running high-intensity operations as Australian Army officers were in demand by allied counterparts. Australia's Major General Jim Molan and Brigadiers John Cantwell, Andrew Nikolic and Stephen Day, among numerous others, notably a range of

colonels and lieutenants colonels, were 'parachuted' into US, British and Canadian division and higher-level headquarters in Iraq and Afghanistan and performed with distinction, being commended for their competence, ability to coordinate and execute complex, formation-level operations and for their critical concern to avoid taking undue chances with people's lives. As Day explained, 'It worked because of how my Army prepared me.' Indeed the average Australian Army officer deployed to any of these positions was seen as the 'cream of the crop'.⁴⁵

Deployments on peace-enforcement and warfighting operations, particularly from 1999 to 2007, increasingly validated the concept of combined arms and services teams (i.e. infantry teams working alongside the other combat arms of the Army as well as other land-force elements) and joint (i.e. Navy, Army and Air Force) teamwork.

During these operations, increasing reliance also came to be placed on working as part of an inter-agency team, including in particular the AFP, the UN, AusAID and other non-government and civil organisations. To cap it off, these operations required an ability to work extensively as 'combined' teams with forces from other nations. To do so, units of the Australian Army required an unprecedented degree of flexibility to adjust to different circumstances and cultures. Their performance was testament to the character of the Army's soldiers that, when coupled with thorough training, had proven to be adaptable and successful in a wide range of circumstances.

Another dimension that grew in prominence was the domain of intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance, or ISTAR. ISTAR was playing a more prominent role as the available spectrum of ISTAR assets increased significantly with the advent of new and better-networked technologies and platforms. But the demand also grew for the delivery of 'fused' ISTAR-derived information down to the lowest tactical levels. The prominence of ISTAR stemmed from the complex and volatile nature of the conflicts faced against adversaries who were difficult to distinguish from non-combatants. That prominence also stemmed from increased expectations for precision, accountability and casualty minimisation.⁴⁶

The heightened significance of ISTAR pointed to the need for ISTAR to be repositioned more centrally in Army's intellectual construct. Indeed, the circumstances that led to the development of the Hardened and Networked Army as well as the Adaptive Army initiatives also led to the increased significance of ISTAR for land-based operations. That

significance was reinforced by the growing demands to maintain awareness of the battle space. This awareness included understanding events in order to know when and how to respond.

In the meantime, the Army had very high expectations of its soldiers. As part of a smaller force that faced frequent media scrutiny, soldiers needed not only to behave in an exemplary manner but also to understand the role of the media and to engage with it appropriately when required. The effect of the so-called information age on the military triggered the description by an American Marine Corps general of what he called the 'strategic corporal' effect, whereby the actions of a corporal, or junior team leader, on a battlefield can have strategic effects, particularly given the media's pervasiveness.⁴⁷ But in the Australian context, the combination of these pressures gave rise to the notion of the 'strategic private', whereby not only the actions of subunit team leaders, or corporals, had strategic consequence but so too did the individual actions of the lowest ranking soldiers, the army's privates.⁴⁸

PEACE AND STABILITY OPERATIONS

In the past, Australian military leaders stressed the need to retain conventional warfighting as the benchmark for training. To be fair, no sensible strategist would discount the need to be prepared for conventional warfighting. But the underlying assumption was that peacekeeping and stability operations, such as counter-insurgency, were operations with a lesser order of complexity. Yet experience contradicted this view. In writing on the lessons of the Army's experiences in 2006, for instance, Colonel John Hutcheson observed: 'Army has discovered that the battlespace in which soldiers operate is complex, diverse, lethal and diffused, regardless of the perceived level of intensity. Success in this conflict environment requires Army to be able to orchestrate the required effects as part of whole-of-government responses.'⁴⁹ Hutcheson's views pointed to the need for the Army to continue to focus its energies on further adaptive learning.

The orchestration of the 'whole of government' approach to operations to which Hutcheson referred reflected an emerging emphasis on collaboration with other government agencies. This recognition contributed to the establishment in 2008 of the Asia Pacific Civil-Military Centre of Excellence, under Major General (Retd) Michael G. Smith.⁵⁰

Kelly and Brennan observed that counter-insurgency consumed the Army's thinking in 2006 and 2007. With only fleeting advantage accrued

from any technological edge, the Army of the early twenty-first century needed to develop what they called 'distributed manoeuvre': a tactical system able to overcome the strengths of the tactical defensive in a way, and at a speed, that promised to be useful to strategists.⁵¹ Arguably, this approach required even greater emphasis on the development of skills for the Army's conventional forces that had been associated mostly with special forces.

In the meantime, Major General (Retd) Tim Ford, argued that peace operations would continue to be core business for the Australian Army in future. He argued: 'We must train our leaders at all levels for this very difficult role (and I would argue that many aspects of peace operations are more difficult to teach than warfighting). We need to be clear that often in the future the Army will operate in difficult and complex post conflict environments as part of an Australian response (whole of Government) and as part of an integrated multinational, multicultural and multi-dimensional international or regional response. An Adaptive Army must be able to do this as well as the many other tasks Government will ask it to tackle.'⁵²

Ford's observations reflect the principles and guidelines found in the booklet *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, released in 2008, which described peacekeeping as having evolved into a complex, global undertaking covering a spectrum of operations that had become increasingly broad. The booklet provided a normative framework for UN peacekeeping operations. Ford's observations and the UN's framework pointed to the unprecedented level of flexibility and adaptability the Army was required to maintain in the face of such a wide array of tasks, be it under a UN mandate or some other multilateral construct.

NEW BENCHMARK OF CONVENTION?

By 2007, if not before, the Army had become a relatively adaptive, learning organisation. But as it contemplated the future, with additional complexity almost guaranteed, the Army needed to continue to adapt in the face of unrelenting change. Surviving the resulting turmoil would require the Army to be intellectually and organisationally agile. Critics would argue that this was not a core strength of such a hierarchical and male-dominated institution as the Army. But in reality many of those who were elevated to senior ranks in the Army acquired a fairly nimble-minded approach to problem-solving along the way. The agility required would involve remaining conscious of the five reasons for prowess and the great

legacy inherited from earlier generations of Australian Army soldiers, but not unduly constrained by tactics and strategies of the past. Indeed, the Army would need to remain responsive to emerging threats and opportunities, across the spectrum of military operations. The observations made in this review suggest that increasingly complex warfighting against irregular or distributed forces in challenging environments should be the new benchmark of 'convention' for the land forces of Australia.

With a force considerably smaller than the one available in the 1980s, let alone during the Vietnam War era, a small volunteer Army, consisting of professional and dedicated personnel, continued to deliver a well-trained and versatile capability. Partly as a consequence of the operational tempo, this force adapted rapidly to changing circumstances and responded with initiative and accuracy, using the smallest of dispersed teams. Hence it was important for the government to understand that it could have confidence that not only its special forces but also its conventional forces are well placed to face a range of challenging assignments.

THE ARMY'S STRUCTURE AT THE END OF 2007

In the meantime, at the end of Howard's term as prime minister, the Army of 2007 consisted of only 26 000 regular troops (nearly one-twentieth of Australia's land forces under arms in the Second World War). It would grow back to 30 000 by 2011.⁵³ The deployable forces were primarily in Land Command and in the (considerably smaller) Special Operations Command. The Army's troops in Land Command were primarily in a regular force formation called the 1st Division, with supporting elements in the 16th Aviation Brigade and the 17th Combat Services Support Brigade. These supporting brigades held all the aviation assets as well as most of the Army's medical assets, all the Army's water transport, most of the Army's heavy-lift capabilities, and parachute support personnel. In addition, the Army's Reserve forces were mostly held in the 2nd Division, a significantly under-strength Reserve formation, albeit with niche high-readiness force elements.

THE ADAPTIVE ARMY INITIATIVE

The Adaptive Army initiative was announced in 2008 under the leadership of the Chief of Army from 2008 to 2011, Lieutenant General

Ken Gillespie. This saw the Army restructure its higher command and control arrangements to better array its force elements to deal with the ADF's evolved command and control structures, to conduct force generation and preparation more efficiently and, simultaneously, to master the different learning loops that enhanced its adaptive capacity. In essence, the Adaptive Army initiative sought to make learning and adaptation more integral to the structure and culture of the Army, consolidating the progress made in the preceding years.

At the same time as operations were driving adaptation in that area, adaptation became more institutionalised in Australia as well, particularly through organisational reform and a rigorous training exercise regime. Significant additional reform was imminent as a result of reflection on how best to structure the forces in light of the evolving tasks and priorities. In 2009 the elements of Land Command and Training Command would merge to create Forces Command, which, in addition to the existing components of Land and Training Commands, would include a Command Support and ISTAR Brigade (6th Brigade) as well as a Command Support Training Centre. The creation of Forces Command and the incorporation of individual training tasks (previously assigned to Training Command) with collective training tasks (previously managed within Land Command and Special Operations Command) were intended to manage soldier training more holistically and in a manner more responsive to the lessons learned on operations.

One of the collective effects of the scale and nature of military exercises, particularly when combined with the nature of the operations faced by the Army in the years following 1999, was a renewed emphasis on adjusting the Army's structure to make it more capable of facing operational challenges. Experience in the Middle East and in Australia's region demonstrated the need for a greater resilience and depth for all of the Army's capability domains. This also reflected the influence of the Army's links with society and the expectation that Australia's soldiers would receive the most advanced and robust equipment available and in sufficient quantity.

With this in mind, force deployment preparation required particular focus. Consequently, at the same time as Forces Command would be created, HQ 1st Division would be separated from Forces Command and retained as a force preparation and deployment-focused headquarters. This arrangement would leave Army Headquarters (under a lieutenant general) directly commanding three 2-star commands (i.e. under major generals), Special Operations Command, Forces Command and HQ

1st Division. This configuration was seen as the best way to optimise training to generate a land force that could carry out assigned tasks at short notice and in varying operational scenarios. It also was seen as best enabling the Army to work with Headquarters Joint Operations Command alongside the RAN and the RAAF.

REFLECTIONS

Although the Army had worked closely with the RAN and RAAF on operations in Australia's region, joint operations in high-intensity combat operations, as an Australian team, had not featured prominently for the ADF in the period covered. Some expressed concern about the tactical tradition of the Australian Army and its lack of focus on generalship (generalship being the conduct of operations in the battlefield by senior officers) and Australian-managed joint-force operations. This lack of focus reflected the tactical tradition of the Army, which some suggested had the potential to bring it 'seriously unstuck' in the future.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, although Australian contributions in the Middle East tended to be tailored forces that relied on a number of coalition-supplied enabling capabilities, the Army and the ADF continued to manage inter-agency teams on operations in Australia's region, requiring the exercise of considerable skills of generalship.

The Army's adaptation of the Hardened and Networked Army and Enhanced Land Force initiatives as well as the increased focus on learning and adaptation reflected, in part at least, the five reasons for prowess at work. First, the enduring common individual training and education institutions, such as ADFA, were instrumental in facilitating the acceptance of jointery. Officer trainees who would formerly have been interservice rivals became classmates and life-long friends. Some people disparage the place of ADFA but rarely factor in the immense intangible benefits of common friendship in weighing up the degree of 'jointery' achieved. ADFA and the other joint training and education facilities have made a major contribution towards effective jointery.

Second, the emphasis on collective field-training exercises pointed to the need for adaptive initiatives. Those initiatives were particularly spurred by the stimulus of a high operational tempo. Furthermore, armed with a wide range of operational experiences, the Army was able to argue for and receive government support and funding to make these initiatives come to fruition.

Third, the regimental or corps identity and the focus on combined-arms battle groups and brigades came to be epitomised by the battalion groups in the conventional forces and the Special Operations Task Group, with its range of supporting elements drawn from across the Army. The Hardened and Networked Army and Enhanced Land Force initiatives, which particularly affected the Army's conventional forces, reflected the centrality of this premise of a combined-arms and -services team. These developments facilitated interaction and integration of complementary capabilities down to the lowest levels of all the Army's arms and services.

Fourth, the significance of the historic and enduring ties with close allies (particularly Britain and the United States, as well as with New Zealand and Canada) and regional partners (notably Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, PNG and Pacific island states) continued to be influential in shaping the Australian Army. The Hardened and Networked Army and Enhanced Land Force initiatives were home-grown initiatives. But they were informed by the multilateral sharing of information among the ABCA armies. As a result, the Australian Army's initiatives were the beneficiary of the trials, errors and successes experienced by ABCA partner armies. Similarly, developments in terms of jointery, particularly the creation of HQ Joint Operations Command and the follow-on reorganisations within the Army, were informed by parallel developments, particularly in Britain and New Zealand, where HQ JOC's most comparable organisations were created.

Fifth, the Army's links with society were important in driving innovation that would result in greater protection for exposed Australian soldiers. Indeed, the concern for casualty minimisation was an important factor in the Hardened and Networked Army initiative. This reflected the government's concern for the welfare of the Army's people exposed to danger on operations and the concomitant political risk that would accompany increased casualties. Moreover, similarly significant determinants of the Enhanced Land Force initiative were the need for reasonable respite for operationally stretched forces. Managing the consequences of PTSD would also emerge as a high priority for the Army. This occurred in the face of growing expectations that the Army could be available for whatever crisis emerged to which the Australian Government and people felt compelled to respond.

CONCLUSION

AN ADAPTIVE ARMY

This book has reviewed the more than a hundred offshore operational deployments, scores of domestic response operations conducted, and major initiatives undertaken that affected the Army's ability to operate since the end of the Vietnam War, when Gough Whitlam became prime minister, through to the end of 2007, when John Howard's term as prime minister came to an end. The post-Vietnam War period was marked by one particular policy continuity concerning the nature of operational deployments: throughout these years governments placed a high priority on casualty avoidance. Their concern was to minimise the risk that Australia would find itself in the politically untenable position in which it found itself for the latter years of the Vietnam War. The major protests and mounting casualties associated with that war were seen as having significantly eroded the then government's domestic political support.

LEARNING AND ADAPTATION AS THE OPERATIONAL TEMPO RISES

More than three decades after the end of the Vietnam War, and 50 years after the raising of the Special Air Service Company in 1957, the Army of 2007 had conducted a range of operations far and wide, many of them very small and some more substantial ones, particularly closer to Australia. But they all were framed by a carefully calibrated calculation of Australia's national interests and what needed to be done in support of them.

Operations in the latter years of the Cold War presented few significant challenges for the Army and, in turn, few opportunities to test, learn and adjust from operational experience. To be sure, there was the occasional small and short-time-frame deployment to Africa, largely spurred by Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser's interests in seeing decolonisation and democratisation in former British colonies in Africa such as Zimbabwe.

These were not years during which the Army could best be described as a learning organisation. This was not all the Army's own fault. After all, the strategic guidance at the time placed emphasis on a doctrinaire maritime strategy that prioritised resourcing for the RAN, the RAAF and infrastructure projects, including 'bare' air bases from northern Queensland across to northern Western Australia. These were intended to better posture the ADF for operations in and from the north of Australia. That investment was painful for the Army, leaving few resources for it to do much more than mark time. But, given the benign strategic circumstances and government imperatives to constrain defence spending, few better options were apparent. In essence, the funding thought to be available politically drove strategic policy priorities. Notwithstanding this constraint, the investment would stand the ADF relatively in good stead when the tempo of regional operations (in such places as Bougainville, East Timor, Solomon Islands, Irian Jaya and Aceh) increased following the end of the Cold War. Then the investment in infrastructure in the north, particularly in such places as Tindal and Darwin, would come in to its own.

Following the end of the Cold War, the tempo of operations began to increase, with deployments to Namibia, Cambodia, Rwanda, Somalia and elsewhere. These deployments reflected the government's increased willingness to engage in multilateral operations in support of UN objectives and strategic priorities that Australia shared with the United States. They were particularly popular under the prime ministership of Bob Hawke, notably when Gareth Evans was Foreign Minister. These deployments provided excellent opportunities for the Army to regain its operational focus. They also proved relatively uncontroversial for the government with few, if any, casualties and considerable goodwill engendered with key international partners, particularly the United States and the United Nations. Still, these remained largely operations of choice, relatively far removed from Australia's immediate region: its 'area of direct military interest', as Australia's immediate neighbourhood was defined in the mid-1980s. Given that these operations were not central to the strategic guidance of the time, the Army and the wider ADF did not capitalise

sufficiently on the operational experience to learn key lessons on how to deploy and sustain such forces on future operations. But the politicians and the non-uniformed components of the Defence bureaucracy were equally slow to learn. Changes to the strategic guidance and increased operational imperatives closer to home would be required before the Army and Defence Force more generally became more of an adaptive learning organisation.

Events in the late 1990s helped to prod the Defence organisation into a more proactive posture to support deployed contingents. Experience in Bougainville and Irian Jaya, for instance, helped to challenge command and control arrangements and procedures and to induce the logistics support elements of the Defence organisation to rethink priorities towards the needs of deployed contingents.

For the Army, the most cathartic event came with the crisis in East Timor in September 1999. For the first time in its history, Australia was called upon to lead a multinational force with contingents from 22 countries in an intervention abroad. The experience seriously stretched the capacity of the ADF, exposing significant areas of risk that would need attention in the coming months and years. The deployment was politically risky for the Howard Government and constituted a significant departure from the approach taken over decades of engagement with Indonesia. Considerable effort would be required effectively to manage the mission in such a way as to contain the damage and to help speedily resuscitate the bilateral relationship. Major General Peter Cosgrove masterfully pulled it off with a combination of military excellence and media savvy.

Shortly after the deployment to East Timor, Australian forces, alongside Pacific partners, deployed to Solomon Islands in what would turn out to be a long-term operational commitment over more than a decade. The experience on operations in Solomon Islands and East Timor helped the Army and the ADF adjust from a peacetime orientation to a more operationally focused footing. Politically, the Solomon Islands intervention likely would not have been possible had the East Timor intervention not been so successful in 1999 and early 2000. The Australian Government gained a sense of confidence about its place as a middle power. No longer was it so constrained by its erstwhile small-power pretensions. With middle-power capabilities, aspirations and obligations, Australia was able to exercise military power to good effect, particularly among its much smaller neighbouring Pacific island and Melanesian nations.

With the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 and the subsequent onset of the 'war on terror', Australians supported the

government's commitment of troops to the ousting of the Taliban from Afghanistan. The speed and extent of the initial victory gave the government a sense of confidence that such operations could be undertaken with few, if any, casualties and with little in the way of political risk, yet with considerable benefits in terms of alliance relations.

That experience led the Howard Government to have greater confidence in considering support for the United States' plans for a much more controversial conflict in Iraq. After all, the Afghanistan mission had been apparently accomplished in a short time, with relatively small force commitments yet overwhelming superiority by the allies; and all with remarkably few casualties. Australia gained praise from the United States and other partners for its contribution in Afghanistan. Australian air, land and maritime combat forces, therefore, would deploy for the invasion of Iraq. But even there, Howard was seeking to follow a key principle for Australian offshore deployments remote from the immediate defence of Australia. By keeping the contingent relatively constrained and with a clearly defined end state, at which point the Australia forces would return home, Howard was following a principle established as early as the period of the Whitlam Government.

Initially Howard's strategy appeared to have worked, with Australian operations successfully conducted and troops subsequently extracted uneventfully. Even after the situation deteriorated in Iraq from late 2003 onwards, and with the United States looking to Australia to recommit forces, the Howard Government studiously avoided commitments that would put its troops in a situation likely to generate large numbers of casualties or risk unduly eroding the government's domestic political standing. Hence, while a number of air, maritime and land contingents deployed, they were mostly based in relatively benign areas. Credible but carefully measured force contributions were made. The key priority was to support the United States by Australia's presence as much as anything else.

In the meantime, Australia was called upon to respond to a range of short-notice contingencies elsewhere. Many of them would be much nearer to home, in such places as Aceh in Indonesia, Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Niue and Nauru as well as further away in such places as Lebanon, Pakistan and Iran. These reached a peak in 2006, when the operational tempo was as high as it had ever been since the Second World War. These deployments required the investment of far less political capital for the government than the more controversial commitments in the Middle East and East Timor. Essentially they were mostly uncontroversial commitments that were in accord with a broad bipartisan willingness to

see Australian forces committed in support of internationally sanctioned humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations. But the intensity and number of the operations seriously stretched the Army and the ADF. The challenges of 2006 pointed to the need for greater investment in, and an expansion of, the RAAF's cargo transport capabilities (leading to the acquisition of C-17 aircraft) and to the expansion of the Army's combat forces through the Enhanced Land Force initiative.

During this period the commitment to Iraq wound up, but the commitment to operations in Afghanistan continued. These deployments had a transformative effect on the Army. Soldiers experienced multiple deployments and gained immense operational experience. In addition, the Army became much better at capturing and disseminating the lessons learned from these operations. The Army, it would seem, had become a learning organisation.

The experience of continuous and multiple operations meant the Army became particularly adept at handling the range of contingencies it was facing. Concerns were aired, however, that the Army might learn the wrong lessons from its experiences. Concerns also mounted about the psychologically damaging effects of repeated deployments in confronting circumstances. In Afghanistan and Iraq, for instance, the Army contributed only selected forces. It left allies to provide a number of key enabling capabilities considered essential components for an all-arms and -services team (incorporating the three services and the Army's various combat and combat support forces) operating independently.

Some pointed to the belief that Australia's decision not to commit tanks or self-propelled artillery, for instance, to Afghanistan meant that there was no such need for these in the Army of the future. But such critics overlooked the fact that Australia's strategic cousins, the Canadians, in neighbouring Helmand province found the use of such artillery and tanks virtually essential for the effective conduct of the battles they faced there. In fact the Canadians were on the cusp of completely eliminating tanks from their order of battle when the experience in Afghanistan led them to reverse the decision.

Another concern was that Australia's decision not to commit to commanding and controlling the forces in Oruzgan province as a solely or primarily Australian enterprise was a mistake. Such critics argued that this decision left the Australian Army lacking the experience higher tactical and operational levels command. In other words, Australia's three principal regular land force brigade headquarters (1st, 3rd and 7th Brigades) remained untested in this kind of operational setting. To be sure, there

were embedded officers in key appointments on coalition headquarters in Baghdad and Basrah in Iraq, and Kandahar and Kabul in Afghanistan. But they were not commanding Australian forces directly, and formation-level headquarters in Australia missed the opportunity to refine their procedures and capabilities in such a context. From the government's perspective, however, operations in Afghanistan and Iraq remained far removed from Australia's immediate region, and therefore any contribution had to be carefully weighed and measured against other strategic priorities. Australia was prepared and structured to lead an operation when such an operation emerged that truly required Australian leadership in its immediate region. The most prominent example of this was the International Force in East Timor (INTERFET). Then Australia was prepared and relatively well placed to undertake the task.

Another concern was that the operations in the Middle East had distracted the Army and the ADF from closer engagement with, and understanding of, its immediate neighbourhood in the South Pacific and South-East Asia. Commitments in the Middle East, for instance, left the Army struggling to maintain its level of engagement on bilateral and multilateral exercises and exchanges with its FPDA partners and other regional security partners. In turn, Australia's understanding of and personal connections in the region withered. Considerable reinvestment in regional relationships would be required to make up for this shortfall.

There certainly was plenty of scope remaining for the Army to be subject to further criticism and introspection, as these concerns attest. Arguably, this is one of the reasons the Army so successfully managed to restore its image in the post-Vietnam War years.

GENDER, EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

Being a predominantly male organisation, the Army would continue to grapple with the challenge of not only accommodating women in the workplace but also looking to best capitalise on the often underutilised resource of women in uniform. Responding to reform initiatives that stressed respect for gender and diversity would become critical issues as the Army looked beyond its focus on current operations as well. Criticisms of misogyny were hard to discount and had to be grappled with.

Reviews undertaken after the period covered here pointed to a range of concerns about the treatment of women in the ADF that stretched back through the years covered. Those reviews pointed to the need for the military's culture to adapt further, in line with society's expectations.

Mechanisms to ensure the avoidance of discrimination had been in place since before the disbandment of the WRAAC in the mid-1980s, and they had been incrementally refined over the years. But there was evidence that they had not been implemented enthusiastically in places. There remained deeply felt concerns about the difficulty women faced in being treated respectfully and fairly in a male-dominated environment. The government insisted on zero tolerance of inappropriate conduct. The Army had to do better, and most soldiers and senior commanders readily accepted that.¹

REFLECTIONS ON THE ARMY IN 2007

A review of the Army's operations from 1972 to 2007 also demonstrates the significance of the five reasons for prowess. This book has shown that it is helpful to consider the Army's adaptability and effectiveness on operations in terms of those reasons. The common individual training, collective field training, the Army's regimental or corps identities, its ties with close allies and regional partners, and its links with Australian society all combined to generate the proficiency and adaptation required as the Army recuperated from its post-Vietnam War nadir to restore its image as a highly respected national institution.

Increased operational tempo played a prominent role in making that happen. But each of these deployments was carefully weighed up by the government of the day to ensure the strategic effect was achieved without undue domestic political costs that might arise from an open-ended commitment that exposed the Army to large numbers of casualties. The further away from Australia's direct defence and security interests, the more measured and carefully calibrated such contributions had to be. The closer to home they were, the likelier it was that the government would see the operation as being something in which Australia had to play a prominent or leading role.

In terms of its predisposition to reflect, evaluate and learn from its experience, the Army passed the tipping point in 1999. While momentum had been building before that point, the heightened operational tempo from 1999 onwards saw evaluation and reflection spur significant adaptation. This adaptation took place in the face of unprecedented challenges on a wide spectrum of operations undertaken by elements of the Australian Army around the globe. That adaptation included a number of characteristics emerging in the Army's conventional forces that were formerly the exclusive domain of the special forces.

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

As Australia's mission in Afghanistan approached completion there was some benefit to be gained at looking back at the Army's past in considering potential future challenges. Admittedly, making assessments about possible future events has always been, at best, educated guesswork. And with the lag time inherent in defence decision-making on expensive and long-lasting items of equipment, caution about change certainly remained justified. With this in mind, a considered reflection on the post-Vietnam experience has hopefully helped to illuminate part of the path ahead for the Army as it sets about preparing for its post-Afghanistan experience.

Amid growing uncertainty that emerged over the fluctuating dynamics of the great powers of the Asia-Pacific or 'Indo-Pacific' region, there was a need to reinvest in skills to enable closer and more effective engagement in Australia's region. Indeed, engagement over regional security challenges was expected to feature for the Army. Emergent amphibious capabilities were expected to facilitate such engagement, although the Army would need to work to ensure that its engagement was not seen as brash and insensitive. This meant that in addition to grappling with the challenge of increased 'amphibiosity', the Army would need to continue to work on improving its 'soft' skills – in particular its intelligence, language and cultural awareness capabilities, attuned to regional requirements. The special forces had tended to excel in this domain, but the conventional forces would need to work on their soft skills as well.

With constant demands for efficiency dividends, and justification for expenditure, the Army could not afford to rest on its laurels. There remained criticisms to be made and scope for even further improvement – notably including the haphazard nature of government resourcing. As Brigadier Roger Noble argued, the Army needed to remember that state war had not gone away and that surprise at the strategic level could be viewed as one of the only constants. This meant that the special forces needed to remain on the leading edge of technology and capability, retaining the highest levels of agility, preparedness and responsiveness. It also meant that the conventional forces needed to continue to hone capabilities required for high-end warfighting while also finding the time to work on the wide range of other skills required to operate across the spectrum of likely and possible contingencies.

In terms of individual and combined training, the challenge remained to continue to learn, adapt and remain engaged in the face of ongoing uncertainty in Australia's region and emerging challenges. There remained

scope for greater use of simulation and increased emphasis on jointery and inter-agency collaboration and mutual understanding. This requirement for jointery would be accelerated by the introduction into service of substantially larger and more capable amphibious ships.

With the purchase of Australia's two new landing helicopter dock ships (LHDs) critics would come to question their justification, their utility, their protection, and the appropriateness of developing an amphibious capability like that of the US Marine Corps for the Army and Navy. To be sure, these questions were important ones. But the answers were easy to find and, in a time of political uncertainty and unprecedented environmental challenges, pointed to some surprising benefits for Australia and the region.

Experience in East Timor in 1999 and 2006 as well as in Aceh following the 2004 tsunami and other security and humanitarian challenges in the Pacific and South-East Asian region repeatedly demonstrated the utility of an LHD-like capability. The LHDs, as part of a balanced force, could be expected to provide some of the most versatile platforms for operating in and around Australia's vast coastline and beyond. Consider Cyclone Tracy in Darwin on Christmas Eve 1974: one of the most useful platforms in the ADF's inventory to deploy to assist was the aircraft carrier. The new LHDs offered considerably greater flexibility and capability than did the old carrier HMAS *Melbourne*. The challenge for the Army and the Navy would be to ensure that they were best prepared to capitalise on what their capabilities offered to government.

In terms of regimental or corps identities, there was a continuous need to foster niche capabilities for use by both the special and conventional forces. At the same time, there was scope for more work to ensure that each of the regiments and corps worked to the common goal and reduced the prospect of corps or regimental identity being a hindrance rather than a help to improved combined-arms operations.

Exercises abroad and in Australia would prove critical for fostering closer ties with close allies and regional partners. Working within the non-threatening and non-traditional security domain (associated with humanitarian assistance and disaster relief) in the past had helped to build confidence. As Australia looked to refocus on its region, greater engagement in multilateral confidence-building activities would demonstrate Australia's reburnished regional security credentials with the countries of ASEAN and other close allies.

In terms of links with society, the Army would need to continue to press for recruitment from across the spectrum of Australian

society – particularly as it sought to engage with regional security partners with different cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. One thing would remain for certain as it looked to retain its place as an iconic national institution: for future operations the Army would need to draw on the diversity, versatility, ingenuity and resolve of the Australian people.

In the end, the experience from Whitlam to Howard demonstrated that the Army, along with the RAN and RAAF, had to continue to work hard to develop and maintain a broad set of capabilities that could be used to generate a wide range of response options for many contingencies. Maintaining these capabilities in a manner acceptable to the Australian people would require continuous investment and resourcing, enabling the Army and the other services to continue to hone and refine their skills while incrementally improving capabilities. Those capabilities would provide the government with options to respond to a broad range of contingencies from short-notice disaster response through to stabilisation operations and, if need be, contributions to high-end warfighting.

APPENDIX

OPERATIONS, 1972–2007

Start	End	Mth	Op name	Country	Nature of tasks
Jan 49	Dec 85	444	UN Military Observer group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP)	India, Pakistan	Military observers
1956	Current		UN Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO)	Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan	Military observers
May 76	Jul 79	38	United Nations Emergency Force II (UNEF II)	Egypt, Sinai	Military observers
Apr 72	Aug 72	5	Op Gading II – Sumatra	Indonesia	Army Survey & Aviation/RAAF det with Indonesian Army survey
Apr 73	Sep 73	6	Op Gading III – Sumatra	Indonesia	Army Survey & Aviation/RAAF det with Indonesian Army survey
Jan 74	Feb 74	2	Brisbane Flood Recovery	Australia	Flood recovery
Apr 74	Apr 74	1	Queensland Locust Control	Australia	Locust eradication

Start	End	Mth	Op name	Country	Nature of tasks
Apr 74	Aug 74	5	Op Gading IV – Sumatra	Indonesia	Army Survey & Aviation/RAAF det with Indonesian Army survey
May 74	May 74	1	Victorian Flood Recovery	Australia	Flood recovery
Jun 74	Jun 74	1	Op Tropic Angel	PNG	Malaria survey
Jun 74	Feb 75	8	UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)	Israel, Syria	Monitor ceasefire
Dec 74	May 75	5	Op Cleanup – Cyclone Tracy Disaster Relief	Australia	Support to Cyclone Tracy recovery
May 75	Aug 74	5	Operation Gading V – Sumatra	Indonesia	Army Survey & Aviation/RAAF det with Indonesian Army survey
Aug 75	Oct 75	3	ADF medical support to ICRC	East Timor	HA/DR – Medical spt, Dakota, Hercules & Caribou evac flights, Dili, Baucau – RAAF
Jul 76	Nov 76	4	Op Cenderawasih 76 – Irian Jaya	Indonesia	Army Survey & Aviation/RAAF det with Indonesian Army survey
Dec 76	Dec 76	1	Queensland Flood Recovery	Australia	Flood recovery
Mar 77	Dec 77	8	Op Jubilee Salute	Australia	Queen's silver jubilee celebrations
May 77	Oct 77	5	Op Cenderawasih 77 – Irian Jaya	Indonesia	Army Survey & Aviation/RAAF det with Indonesian Army survey
Dec 77	Dec 77	1	NSW Bushfires	Australia	Bushfire fighting and recovery
Feb 78	Feb 78	1	Hilton Hotel bomb and Bowral CHOGRM	Australia	Route security Defence Force Aid to the Civil Power

(cont.)

Start	End	Mth	Op name	Country	Nature of tasks
Apr 78	Sep 78	5	Op Cenderawasih 78 – Irian Jaya	Indonesia	Army Survey & Aviation/RAAF det with Indonesian Army survey
1978	1978	12	UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)	Lebanon	Monitor cease fire
Apr 79	Jun 79	2	Op Spearline	Fiji	Topographical survey – Army
Jul 79	Oct 79	3	Op Pattimura 79 – Moluccas	Indonesia	Army Survey & Aviation/RAAF det with Indonesian Army survey
Dec 79	Dec 79	1	NSW Bushfires	Australia	Bushfire fighting and recovery
Dec 79	Mar 80	4	Op Damon Commonwealth Monitoring Force (CMF)	Rhodesia / Zimbabwe	Monitor ceasefire, cantonment of guerrillas and refugee relocation
Apr 80	Jul 80	4	Op Pattimura 80 – Moluccas	Indonesia	Army Survey & Aviation det with Indonesian Army survey
May 80	May 80	1	Surveillance Operation	Vanuatu	Army Aviation and EW detachment
Jun 80	Jun 80	1	South Australia Flood Recovery	Australia	Flood recovery
Oct 80	Oct 80	1	Victorian Bushfires	Australia	Bushfire fighting and recovery
Oct 80	Dec 80	3	Op Cenderawasih 80 – Irian Jaya	Indonesia	Army Survey & Aviation det with Indonesian Army survey
Dec 80	Dec 80	1	NSW Bushfires	Australia	Bushfire fighting and recovery
Dec 80	Dec 80	1	Queensland Flood Recovery	Australia	Flood recovery
Jan 81	Mar 81	2	Op Cenderawasih 81 – Irian Jaya	Indonesia	Army Survey & Aviation det with Indonesian Army survey
Apr 81	Jun 81	2	Op Pattimura 81 – Moluccas	Indonesia	Army Survey & Aviation det with Indonesian Army survey
Jul 81	Sep 81	2	Op Assurv 81	Fiji	Army Survey & Aviation det

Start	End	Mth	Op name	Country	Nature of tasks
Sep 81	Dec 81	3	Op Tonga 81	Tonga	Army Survey & Aviation det
Aug 81	Nov 81	3	Op Cenderawasih 81 – Irian Jaya	Indonesia	Army Survey & Aviation/RAAF det with Indonesian Army survey
Feb 82	Feb 82	1	Tasmanian Bushfires	Australia	Bushfire fighting and recovery
1982	1986	48	Multinational Force and Observers (MFO)	Egypt	Helicopter support
Sep 82	Oct 82	2	Brisbane Commonwealth Games	Australia	Support to Commonwealth Games (6 RAR & SAS)
Sep 82	Oct 82	3	Op Algom	Vanuatu	Army Survey & Aviation det
Mar 82	Mar 84	48	Commonwealth Military Training Team in Uganda – CMTTU	Uganda	Training government security forces – Army (four teams of five)
Nov 82	Dec 82	1	Op Nusa Timur 82 – South China Sea	Indonesia	Army Survey & Aviation/RAAF det with Indonesian Army survey
Dec 82	Dec 82	1	Op Assurv 82	Tonga, Western Samoa	Army Survey & Aviation det
May 83	Aug 83	3	Op Nusa Timur 83 – South China Sea	Indonesia	Army Survey & Aviation/RAAF det with Indonesian Army survey
Jun 84	Aug 84	2	Op Nusa Barat 84 – Islands West of Sumatra	Indonesia	Army Survey & Aviation/RAAF det with Indonesian Army survey
Jun 84	Oct 84	4	Op Anon 84	Kiribati, Nauru, Fiji & Tonga	Topographical survey – Army
Jun 84	Sep 84	3	Op Algom 84	Vanuatu	Topographical survey – Army

(cont.)

Inquiry into Australia's defence relationships with Pacific island nations
Submission 1 - Attachment 1

370 APPENDIX

Start	End	Mth	Op name	Country	Nature of tasks
Jun 85	Sep 85	3	Op Algum 85	Vanuatu	Topographical survey – Army
Jun 85	Sep 85	3	Op Anon 85	Kiribati, Cook Islands	Topographical survey – Army
Jun 86	Nov 86	3	Op Algum 86	Vanuatu	Topographical survey – Army
May 87	Jun 87	1	Op Morris Dance	Fiji	Evacuation operation
May 88	May 88	1	Op Sailcloth	Vanuatu	Potential NEO: standby to react to violence – RAN, Army
Aug 88	Dec 90	28	Op Sailcloth – UN Iran–Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG)	Iran, Iraq	Monitor cease fire – Army – five six-month contingents
Mar 89	Apr 90	14	Op Picaresque – UN Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG)	Namibia	Engineering support, monitor ceasefire, support election
Mar 89	May 89	2	Op Kumul 89	PNG	Topographical survey – Army
Jul 89	Jun 93	47	Op Salaam UN Mine Clearance Training Team (UNMCTT)	Pakistan, Afghanistan	Landmine clearance – Army (10 teams of 6–9 people)
Feb 90	Feb 90	1	Cyclone Ofa disaster relief	Western Samoa, Tuvalu	RAAF Hercules & Army helicopters
Sep 90	Sep 91	12	First Gulf War – Desert Shield and Op Desert Storm	Persian Gulf	Evict Iraq forces from Kuwait – RAN, Army, RAAF
Oct 90	Nov 90	1	Op Kumul 90	PNG	Topographical survey – Army
May 91	Jun 91	2	Op Habitat – Op Provide Comfort	Northern Iraq	Medical and humanitarian assistance – Army & RAAF
May 91	Dec 98	90	Op Blazer – UN Special Commission (UNSCOM)	Iraq	Inspections, monitoring and destruction of NBC weapons – Army, RAAF & RAN
Nov 91	1992	24	Op Goodwill UN Advance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC)	Cambodia	Communications support

Start	End	Mth	Op name	Country	Nature of tasks
Sep 91	1994	40	UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)	Western Sahara	Communications support – Army – five six month contingents
1991	1991		Op Kumul 91	PNG	Topographical survey – Army
Apr 92	May 92	1	Op Belama 92	Solomon Islands, Vanuatu	Topographical survey – Army
1992	1993	48	Op Gemini – UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC)	Cambodia	Communications support
Jun 92	Sep 92	1	Op Kumul 92	PNG	Topographical survey – Army
Oct 92	Jan 93	3	UN Operation in Somalia I (UNOSOM I)	Somalia	Movement control
1992	1992	12	UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR)	Former Yugoslavia	Monitor ceasefire
Jan 93	May 93	4	Op Solace – Unified Task Force (UNITAF)	Somalia	Humanitarian assistance, public security
May 93	Nov 94	18	UN Operation in Somalia II (UNOSOM II)	Somalia	Movement control and SAS protection det
Oct 92	Present	238	Op Mazurka – Multinational Force and Observers (MFO)	Egypt	Monitor ceasefire
May 93	Jun 93	1	Op Nasiko 93	Vanuatu	Topographical survey – Army
Jul 93	Aug 93	2	Op Kumul 93	PNG	Topographical survey – Army
Aug 93	Oct 93	2	Op Belama 93	Solomon Islands / Vanuatu	Topographical survey – Army
Oct 93	Dec 93	3	Op Banner – UN Military Liaison Team	Cambodia	Landmine clearance
Jan 94	Jul 97	43	Op Banner – Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC)	Cambodia	Landmine clearance
Jan 94	Feb 04	121	Op Osier – NATO Stabilisation Force (SFOR)	Balkans	Aust contribution to UN SFOR & KFOR – monitor ceasefire, facilitate peace process

(cont.)

Start	End	Mth	Op name	Country	Nature of tasks
Jun 94	Oct 94	2	Op Kumul 94	PNG	Topographical survey – Army
Jul 94	Sep 94	2	Op Belama 94	Solomon Islands, Vanuatu	Topographical survey – Army
1994	2002	96	UN Accelerated Demining Program (ADP)	Mozambique	Landmine clearance
Jul 94	Jun 96	47	Op Uphold Democracy (US)	Haiti	Humanitarian assistance, public security
Jul 94	Mar 96	43	Op Tamar – UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda II (UNAMIR II)	Rwanda	Medical and humanitarian assistance
Jun 94	Mar 02	22	Op Coracle – UN Operation in Mozambique (UNOMOZ)	Mozambique	Landmine clearance
Sep 94	Oct 94	1	Op Lagoon – South Pacific Peacekeeping Force (SPPKF)	PNG	Provide security for a peace conference
Feb 97	Sep 97	4	Op Fresia – UN Observers in Guatemala (MINUGUA)	Guatemala	Monitor cease fire
Aug 97	Jul 06	107	Op Cranberry	Nth Australia	civil military surveillance and response operations – Army
Sep 97	Sep 97	1	Op Sierra	PNG	Humanitarian assistance
Oct 97	Jan 98	3	Op Terrier (support to TMG)	PNG	Bougainville
Dec 97	Apr 98	13	Op Bel Isi – Truce Monitoring Group (TMG)	PNG	Monitor ceasefire, facilitate peace process
Jan 98	Jan 98	1	Op Usherette (support to TMG)	PNG	Bougainville
Apr 98	Jun 03	54	Op Bel Isi II – Peace Monitoring Group (PMG)	PNG	Monitor ceasefire, facilitate peace process
Feb 98	Oct 01	44	Op Pollard	Iraq	ADF contribution to US-led coalition against Iraq (dormant Feb 99 to Oct 01)

Start	End	Mth	Op name	Country	Nature of tasks
Mar 98	Jul 98	4	Op Castanet / AUSINDO JAYA	Indonesia	ADF assistance to AUSAID & Indonesian food/drought relief in central Irian Jaya
Apr 98	Apr 98	1	Op Ples Draï	Indonesia	Humanitarian assistance
Jul 98	Nov 98	4	Op Themis	Cambodia	ADFG support to Aust Embassy during Cambodian elections
Jul 98	Aug 98	2	Op Shaddock – PNG north coast tsunami relief	PNG	Emergency medical and humanitarian assistance
Aug 98	Jul 06	95	Op Mistral	Southern Ocean	ADF support to Fisheries (AFMA) and Customs
Sep 98	Sep 98	1	Op Corbeil (support to PMG)	PNG	Bougainville
1999	2000	12	Op Gold	Australia	Support to 2000 Sydney Olympic and Para-Olympic Games
Apr 99	May 00	13	Op Safe Haven (Kosovo)	Australia	ADF support to displaced people from Kosovo in Australia
Jun 99	Sep 99	4	Op Faber – UN Assistance Mission in East Timor (UNAMET)	East Timor	Facilitate referendum
Jun 99	ongoing		Op Allied Force (US) & Joint Guardian (UK)	Kosovo	Monitor ceasefire (integrated personnel in US & UK units)
Sep 99	Sep 99	1	Op Spitfire	East Timor	NEO
Sep 99	Dec 99	3	Op Safehaven (East Timor)	East Timor	Assistance & accommodation to displaced persons in Dili and Darwin
Sep 99	Feb 00	6	Op Stabilise / Warden – International Force East Timor (INTERFET)	Timor-Leste	Public security and humanitarian assistance

(cont.)

Start	End	Mth	Op name	Country	Nature of tasks
Jan 00	May 02	28	Op Tanager – UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET)	Timor-Leste	Public security in conjunction with civilian police
Feb 01	Feb 01	1	Op Abseil (support to PMG)	PNG	Bougainville
Jun 00	Aug 00	2	Op Plumbob	Solomon Islands	evacuation of Australians and foreign nationals
Sep 00	Oct 00	1	Op Dorsal	Solomon Islands	ADF presence and safe haven for peace talks
Sep 00	Oct 00	1	Op Orbit – Townsville	Australia	AS-NZ assistance to Solomon Island peace process
Sep 00	Nov 01	14	Op Centenary	Australia	ADF support to Centenary of Federation celebrations
Oct 00	Feb 02	17	Op Trek – International Peace Monitoring Team (IPMT)	Solomon Islands	Monitor peace process
2001	Mar 02	4+	Op Guardian I and II	Australia	Support to 2002 Brisbane CHOGM March 2002
Jan 01	2005	60	Op Pomelo – UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE)	Ethiopia / Eritrea	Monitor peace process
Jan 01	Feb 03	26	Op Husky – International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT)	Sierra Leone	Monitor peace process
Jun 01	Jun 04	36	Op Gaberdine	Australia	Logistic support to Immigration for unauthorised boat arrivals
Oct 01	Dec 02	15	Op Slipper – US-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)	Afghanistan	Defeat Al Qaeda and Taliban forces
Oct 02	Nov 02	2	Op Bali Assist	Indonesia	Support to Indonesian Government – evacuation counselling, support and forensic identification

Start	End	Mth	Op name	Country	Nature of tasks
2002	2003	48	UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission for Iraq (UNMOVIC)	Iraq	Weapons inspections
Sep 02	Mar 03	6	Op Bastille	Middle East	Deployment in preparation for combat in Iraq
Apr 03	Apr 03	1	Op Tartan	Australia	ADF support to Coastwatch apprehension of MV <i>Pong Su</i> off NSW coast
Oct 03	Oct 03	1	Op Miata	Australia	Support to 2003 US President Bush visit
Oct 03	Oct 03	1	Op Fluent	Australia	Support to 2003 Chinese President Hu visit
2003	2003		Op Scrummage	Australia	Support to 2003 Rugby World Cup
Mar 03	Jul 03	4	Op Falconer	Iraq	Defeat Iraqi forces and disarm Iraq
Apr 03	Present	114	Op Palate & Op Palate II – UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)	Afghanistan	Humanitarian assistance
May 03	Present	109	Op Anode – Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI)	Solomon Islands	Public security in conjunction with Solomon Islands civilian police
Jul 03	Jul 09	72	Op Catalyst	Iraq	Public security in conjunction with Iraqi security forces, training of Iraqi security forces, protection of offshore oil terminals
Feb 02	May 04	27	Op Citadel – UN Mission in Support of East Timor (UNMISET)	Timor-Leste	Public security in conjunction with civilian police
Jan 04	Jan 04	1	Op Niue Assist	Niue	Disaster assistance after Cyclone Heta – RAAF & Army

(cont.)

Start	End	Mth	Op name	Country	Nature of tasks
Jan 04	Feb 04	1	Op Celesta (HIMIEEZ)	Heard Island, Macquarie Island	Sovereignty enforcement, fisheries patrol and apprehension – RAN & RAAF
May 04	May 06	48	Op Spire – UN mission in Support of Timor-Leste (UNMISSET)	Timor-Leste	Public security in conjunction with civilian police
2003–4	2003–4	1	Op Render Safe; Op Nauru Assist	Nauru	Unexploded ordnance clearance
Oct 04	Nov 04	1	Op Valient	Fiji, Australia	Training support to RFMF deploying to Iraq
Dec 04	Jan 05	1	Op Thai Assist	Thailand	Interpreter support Phuket
Dec 04	Mar 05	4	Op Sumatra Assist	Indonesia	Medical and humanitarian assistance
Feb 05	Feb 05	1	Op Caber	Australia	Support to Military Tattoo
Apr 05	Sep 11	77	Op Azure – UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS)	Sudan	Monitor peace process
May 05	May 06	12	Op Chiron – UN Special Political Mission in Timor-Leste (UNOTIL)	Timor-Leste	Monitor peace process
Aug 05	Present	80	Op Slipper – International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)	Afghanistan	Counter-insurgency, reconstruction, training of Afghan forces
Oct 05	Nov 05	2	Op Bali Assist II	Indonesia	Support to Indonesian Government – evacuation counselling, support and forensic identification
Nov 05	Apr 06	6	Op Pakistan Assist	Pakistan	Medical and humanitarian assistance
2006	Apr 06	?	Op Acolyte	Australia	Support to 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games

Start	End	Mth	Op name	Country	Nature of tasks
Mar 06	Apr 06	2	Op Larry Assist	Australia	Support to Cyclone Larry Recovery
May 06	Present	73	Op Astute – International Stabilisation Force (ISF)	Timor-Leste	Public security in conjunction with UN civilian and indigenous police
Jul 06	Present	70	Op Resolute	Australia	Border protection
Jul 06	Sep 06	2	Op Ramp	Lebanon	Defence Supplementation Staff, evacuation of 1500 Australians & 1300 others
Aug 06	Present	69	Op Tower – UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT)	Timor-Leste	Public security in conjunction with UN civilian and indigenous police
Nov 06	Dec 06	1	Op Quickstep	Fiji	NEO
Nov 06	Nov 06	1	Op Quickstep	Tonga	Public security in conjunction with indigenous police
Nov 07	Nov 07	1	Op Deluge	Australia	Support to 2007 Sydney APEC
Nov 07	Dec 07	2	Op PNG Assist	PNG	Medical and humanitarian assistance
Jun 07	Oct 08	16	Op Outreach	Australia	Support to NT National Emergency Response

NOTES

Introduction

- 1 Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt is quoted as having declared in 1966 that Australia would go 'all the way with LBJ' (i.e. with the US President, Lyndon Baines Johnson) in support of the war in Vietnam.
- 2 'First order' refers to self-sustaining forces with a spectrum of capabilities deployable from home shores to successfully accomplish a spectrum of military operations.
- 3 See Pedersen, *Monash as Military Commander*, and Blaxland, *Amiens*.
- 4 This premise was argued in Blaxland, *Strategic Cousins*.
- 5 See Hill, *Chauvel of the Light Horse*, and Long, *To Benghazi*.
- 6 See Horner, *High Command and Strategic Command*, Long, *The Six Years War*, Dean, *The Architect of Victory*, and Pratten, *Battalion Commanders in the Second World War*.
- 7 Beaumont, *Australian Defence*, p. 306.
- 8 A division in the Second World War consisted of about 15 000 personnel. See Dennis et al., *Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, p. 215. Special forces are 'specially selected military personnel, trained in a broad range of basic and specialised skills, organised, equipped and trained to conduct special operations'. See Australian Defence Glossary. For the antecedents to the SAS in Australia, see 'Towards special forces' in Horner, *SAS: Phantoms of War*.
- 9 Horner in Evans, *The Tyranny of Dissonance*, p. 65.
- 10 Palazzo, *The Australian Army*, pp. 282–3, and Khosa, *Australian Defence Almanac 2011–2012*, p. 61.
- 11 See Dennis & Grey, *Emergency and Confrontation*, p. 259.
- 12 See 'Australian casualties in the Vietnam War, 1962–72', and 'Korean War 1950–53', both at www.awm.gov.au.
- 13 Conscription was introduced because of fears about adventurism by Soekarno's Indonesia. But involvement in Vietnam perpetuated conscription after the original rationale expired.
- 14 See Edwards, *A Nation at War*.
- 15 The Regular Army had 31 000 in 1973, rising to 34 000 by 1976, although numbers hovered around 32 000 until 1989 and dropped to 27 000 in the mid-1990s. Lowry, *The Last Knight*, p. 163.
- 16 Bassingthwaite, *Adaptive Campaigning Applied*, pp. 5–6.
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- 18 The usage of the English term 'East Timor' and the Portuguese 'Timor-Leste' has alternated in official Australian Government usage over the years. The term in use at the time is the one used in this work.
- 19 See Tange, *Defence Policy-making*, pp. 66 & 119–22.
- 20 The argument also applies to other like-minded countries such as the United States, Canada and New Zealand.
- 21 See Lindsay, *Cosgrove*, and Cosgrove, *My Story*.
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- 28 For a more detailed discussion on the impact of the Pentropic organisation on the CMF see Blaxland, *Organising an Army*.
- 29 Nikolic, correspondence.
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- 33 Brewer, correspondence.
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1 *The last years of the Cold War, 1972–89*

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- 2 See Breen, *First to Fight*.
- 3 See Pemberton, *All the Way*, Edwards with Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments*, and Sexton, *War for the Asking*.

- 4 See Breen, *First to Fight*; Frost, *Australia's War in Vietnam*; and McNeill, *To Long Tan*.
- 5 See Hopkins, *Australian Armour*.
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Part 3 *The Middle East area of operations*

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Conclusion: An adaptive army

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Andrew Smith, 2007
Stuart Smith, 2006 and 2013
Glen Steiner, 2007
Andrew Stevens, 2010
Anthony Vella, 2008
Joanne Wallis, 2013
Rod West, 2007
Adam Wienert, 2011

INDEX

- 1 RAR, 35, 63, 104, 105, 110, 147, 148, 169, 185, 201, 202, 205, 233, 314
 - B Company, 65, 153
 - Battalion Group, 53, 172–3, 178–9
 - C Company, 193
- 1 RNZIR, 158
- 104 Signal Squadron, 39, 49
- 10th Battalion, 245
- 10th Force Support Battalion, 284, 313, 324
- 11th Battalion, 245
- 121 Signal Squadron, 26
- 125 Signal Squadron, 29
- 12th Battalion, 245
- 12th/16th Hunter River Lancers, 307
- 131 Locating Battery, 176
- 14th Field Troop, 76
- 15 Royal Australian Artillery, 274
- 161st Reconnaissance Squadron, 305
- 162nd Reconnaissance Squadron, 39, 40
- 16th Air Defence Regiment, 88, 202–3, 305
- 16th Aviation Brigade, 352
- 173rd General Support Squadron, 42
- 17th Combat Services Support Brigade, 313, 352
- 17th Construction Squadron, 75, 304
- 17th Signal Regiment, 324
- 1st Armoured Regiment, 38, 63
- 1st Australian Task Force, 20, 264, 279
- 1st Brigade, 59, 63, 146, 258
- 1st Combat Engineer Regiment, 258, 293
- 1st Combat Service Support Battalion, 293
- 1st Division, 352
- 1st Engineer Regiment, 39
- 1st Field (Artillery) Regiment, 49
- 1st Field Engineer Regiment, 29, 35
- 1st Field Hygiene Company, 38
- 1st Field Regiment, 180
- 1st Health Services Support Battalion, 293, 298, 300
- 1st Intelligence Company, 130
- 1st Military Police Battalion, 229
- 1st Task Force, 49
- 2 RAR, 134, 148, 149, 153, 154, 155, 158, 161, 187, 199, 201, 227, 229, 312, 320
 - A Company, 148, 149, 155
 - B Company, 155
 - Battalion Group, 175–6, 190, 205
 - C Company, 148, 155
 - Commando Company, 38
 - D Company, 154
- 2/4 RAR, 33, 63
 - A Company, 68
- 20 STA Regiment, 131 Surveillance and Acquisition Battery, 237
- 21st Construction Regiment, 38
- 21st Supply Battalion, 39
- 25th Infantry Division, 33
- 28 ANZUK Brigade, 26
- 2nd Cavalry Regiment, 35, 49, 63, 219, 222, 227, 229, 233, 242, 305, 320
 - A Squadron, 237
- 2nd Combat Engineer Regiment, 311, 324
- 2nd Division, 284, 352
- 2nd Field Hygiene Company, 38
- 2nd Health Support Battalion, 180, 294
- 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment, 237, 250, 320
- 3 CER, 204

- 3 RAR, 35, 40, 148, 149, 153, 154, 155, 158, 201, 232, 233, 303, 306, 312, 318, 343
 - A Company, 230
 - B Company, 146, 147, 158, 191
 - Battalion Group, 176–7
 - C Company, 156
 - Para, 63
- 3/4 Cavalry Regiment, 148
- 3rd Airfield Defence Squadron, 284
- 3rd Brigade, 63, 104, 105, 119, 122, 134, 155, 156, 159, 164, 178, 185, 191, 308, 312, 320
 - Administrative Support Battalion, 106
 - Operational Deployment Force, 61
 - Ready Battalion Group, 147
- 3rd Combat Engineer Regiment, 106, 134, 159, 229, 311, 312
- 3rd Combat Services Support Battalion, 312
- 4 RAR, 343
 - Battalion Group, 173–5
 - Commando, 173–5, 201, 225, 257, 265, 284, 287, 306, 328
- 41st Battalion, 307
- 4th Field (Artillery) Regiment, 106
- 4th Field Regiment, 158, 274
- 5 Aviation Regiment, 149
- 5 RAR, 243, 318
- 5/7 RAR, 33, 35, 39, 40, 49, 236, 305, 318
 - B Company, 34, 233
 - Battalion Group, 158–61, 169, 177–8
 - C Company, 190, 237
 - D Company, 242
- 5th Aviation Regiment, 124, 132, 149, 154, 181, 193, 201, 262, 284, 293, 306, 323
- 5th Field Survey Squadron, 42
- 6 RAR, 38
 - A Company, 303
 - Battalion Group, 170–2, 179–81, 202
 - D Company, 259, 337
- 65th Engineer Battalion, 122
- 6th Brigade, 353
- 6th Task Force, 38
- 7 Field Regiment (artillery), 307
- 7 RAR, 318
- 7th Brigade, 293, 321
 - 25/49th Battalion, Royal Queensland Regiment, 192, 193
 - 9th Battalion, Royal Queensland Regiment, 192, 193
- 7th Signal Regiment, 305
- 8 Combat Engineer Regiment, 307
- 8 Combat Services Support Battalion, 307
- 8/12th Medium Regiment, 193, 274
- 8/9 RAR, 318
- 8th Field Survey Squadron, 42
- 9th Construction Troop, 77
- Abigail, Brig Peter, 119
- Abrams tanks, 331–2
- Adaptive Army initiative, 352–4
- Adaptive Campaigning
 - lines of operation of, 332–3
 - modern operating environment and, 333–5
- Afghan National Army, 266
- Afghan National Security Forces, 271
- Afghanistan, operations in, 2001–02, 213–17
- Afghanistan, operations in, 2005–06, 256–80
 - Australian casualties in, 269
 - Canadian experience, 277–8
 - Chinook helicopters and, 262–4
 - embedded staff in, 272–3
 - media coverage of, 279
 - return of Special Forces to, 264–70
- Al Muthanna Task Group, 233, 319
- Al Qaeda, 209, 213
- Alexander, Lt Steve, 76
- America Britain Canada Australia Armies Standardisation Program, 12, 35, 61, 70, 145, 157
 - Coalition Operations Handbook*, 166
- Antarctica, Australian Army support in, 41
- ANZAC Battle Group, 204, 206
- ANZAC Special Operations Force, 219
- ANZUK Brigade, withdrawal from Singapore, 26

- ANZUS Alliance, 211, 213, 285
- APEC Forum, Sydney 2007, 321
- Apprehension Task Group to
Timor-Leste, 203
- Armitage, Richard, 215
- Armstrong, Maj Ron, 292
- Army Aboriginal Community
Assistance Program, 322
- Army History Unit, 327
- Army in the 1980s, The*, 55
- Army Presence in the North, 59
- Army Reserve, 63, 125, 170, 177
- 1st Commando Regiment, 307,
328
- 25th/49th Battalion, Royal
Queensland Regiment, 304
- 2nd Division, 321
- 51st Far North Queensland
Regiment, A Company, 312
- Enhanced Land Force initiative and,
318
- Operational Search Battalion, 284
- Regional Assistance Mission to
Solomon Islands and, 192, 193–4,
195
- Regional Force Surveillance Unit,
60
- Reserve Ready Response Force, 307
- Army Training Command, 335
- Army's Ethos and Values, 94
- Army-21 study, 124, 125–6
- Arnison, Maj Gen Peter, 40, 110
- Asia Pacific Civil–Military Centre of
Excellence, 350
- ASP90, 72, 85
- ASP97, 126, 164
- Association of South-East Asian
Nations, 24, 135, 183, 364
- Attleir, Sgt Steven, 230
- AusAID, 129, 132, 186, 340, 349
- AUSBAT III, 185
- AUSBATT II, 172
- AUSBATT III, 172–3
- AUSBATT IV, 173–5
- AUSBATT IX, 179–81
- AUSBATT V, 175–6
- AUSBATT VI, 176–7
- AUSBATT VII, 177–8
- AUSBATT VIII, 178–9, 293
- Australia, defence of
Australia's Strategic Policy and, 126
- Complex Warfighting* and, 329–30
- continentalist strategy, 17, 24, 55,
62, 64, 68, 69, 70, 72, 127, 136
- 'Defence of Australia' strategy, 28,
59, 63–4, 69, 80, 124, 209
- Defence White Paper, 1987 and,
59–60, 68
- emphasis on conventional
operations, 60
- Enhance Land Force initiative and,
318–19
- forward defence strategy, 17, 24,
56, 70, 73, 209
- jointery and. *See jointery*
- non-offensive defence approach,
87
- peacekeeping operations and, 80–1
- planning, 1980s, 55–6
- post-Vietnam War focus, 24–7, 59
- 'protect-detect-respond' concept,
124
- Scholes statement, 1984 and, 56–7
- shift to multi-agency operations,
196
- Australia's Defence Cooperation
Program, 181
- Australia's Regional Security, 1989,
85
- Australian Agency for International
Development, 10
- Australian Army
- 1960s legacy of, 19–22
- acquisition of Abrams tanks by,
331–2
- adaptation and learning in increased
operational tempo and, 356–61
- Adaptive Army initiative and,
352–4
- Adaptive Campaigning and, 238,
332–5
- amphibious and airborne exercises
and, 306
- Antarctic support, 41
- armoured exercises and, 305–6
- as purely voluntary force, 4–5, 6,
209
- battle groups, 2006, 317–18
- capability enhancements and,
341–2
- changed warfighting techniques
and, 342–3

- collaboration with Papua New Guinea Defence Force, 36
- collective field training and, 9–10, 69, 139, 207, 354
- Combined Arms Training Activity and, 319–20
- combined-army warfighting and, 348–50
- Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meeting, 1978 and, 48–50
- compartmentalisation and, 120
- Complex Warfighting* and, 329–30
- concept-led and capability-based, 126, 127
- conventional and special forces capabilities overlap and, 343–5
- core behaviours of, 336–8
- counter-terrorism exercises and, 306–7
- Cyclone Tracy disaster relief, Darwin 1974 and, 29–31
- defence amalgamation under Tange and, 27–9
- deployable formation control and, 307–8
- deployment, World War II, 3
- desert warfare and, 2
- distant operations by, 296–302
- early United Nations observer missions and, 22–4
- East Timor medical and evacuation support and, 31
- effect of Vietnam experience on, 4–6
- engineer support in Papua New Guinea by, 47
- Enhanced Land Force initiative and, 318–19, 354, 355
- ethos of, 86–7, 94, 96
- evolution of land forces, world wars and, 2–3
- exchange arrangements, 1980s, 60–1
- exchanges with Canadian Army, 35
- exercises with British Army, 20, 34, 233–4, 273–4
- exercises with Indonesia, 43–4
- exercises with Malaysian Army, 46–7
- exercises with United States, 320
- experimentation and conceptual development trials by, 327–30
- force size, 2007, 352
- force size, East Timor, 145
- force size, Iraq, 240
- force size, post Vietnam War, 17
- force size, post World War II, 4
- force size, Vietnam War, 4
- force-on-force simulation and, 308
- functional command reorganisation under Whitlam, 25–6
- future challenges for, 363–5
- gender equity and diversity and, 361–2
- group reciprocal exercises, Hawaii and, 33
- Hardened and Networked Army initiative and, 319, 348, 354, 355
- Hickling reforms and, 126–7
- history of Middle East operations, 210
- Howard government reviews and restructures and, 123–4
- individual training and, 7–9, 164, 207
- integration of women and, 58
- intelligence surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance elements, 93, 261, 334, 349–50
- intensive familiarisation training, Fort Bliss, Texas, 33
- International Force East Timor operations. *See* [International Force East Timor](#)
- jointery and. *See* [jointery](#)
- jungle warfare and, 3
- Learning Environment, 335–6
- links with Australian society, 13–15, 48, 70, 140, 252, 253, 355
- '*Little Red Book, The*', 55
- live instrumentation and, 319
- Manoeuvre Operations in the Littoral Environment doctrine and, 166, 308
- 'manoeuvre theory' and 'protected mobility' and, 93
- maritime concept of strategy and, 127
- military technology, post-Gulf War, 1990–91, 92

- Australian Army (*cont.*)
 ‘Multidimensional Manoeuvre’ and, 191, 335
 natural disasters and, 37–41, 86, 132–3, 134, 193, 291–5, 299–302, 312–13, 323–4
 peace and stability operations by, 350–1
 Pentropic organisation and, 10, 125
 personnel exchanges and, 12
 post-traumatic stress disorder and, 348
 post-Vietnam War, 5–7
 prowess of, reasons for, 7–15, 69, 71, 139, 195
 public pride in, 6, 7
 ‘Rapid Acquisition’ program and, 341
 recruiting system, 14
 refining of command arrangements, 1990s, 110–11
 refocus on defence of Australia and, 24–7
 regimental identities and, 10–11
 regional engagement and exercises by, 302–8
 regional operations by, 289–96
 relationship with Indonesia, 12
 relationship with Papua New Guinea, 13
 relationship with Thailand, 13
 relationship with the Philippines, 13
 significance of Olympic Games 2000 experience to, 285–6
 small, agile teams and, 330–1
 structure, end 2007, 352
 survey operations, Pacific and Indonesia, 41–3
 tactical proficiency and innovation in 1980s, 61
 ties with allies and regional partners and, 11–13
 training, Fort Carson Colorado 1977, 33
 unsettling aspects of heightened operational tempo of, 346–8
 Australian Army Training Team Iraq, 245–9
 Australian Army Training Team Vietnam, 245
 Australian Command and Staff College, 69, 139, 338
 Australian Corps, 2
 Australian Counter-IED Task Force, 243
 Australian Defence Force Academy, 7, 69, 139, 165, 182, 338, 354
 Australian Defence Force Warfare Centre, 69, 307, 338
 Australian Defence Liaison Group Singapore, 26
 Australian Federal Police, 10, 186, 201, 290, 340, 349
 Liaison Officers, 196
 Australian Force Somalia, 106
 Australian Institute of Police Management, 196
 Australian Joint Warfare Establishment, 69, 307
 Australian Labor Party
 1972 electoral victory, effect of Vietnam War on, 22
 2007 electoral victory, effect of Iraq war on, 253
 Australian light armoured vehicle, 153, 154, 161, 171, 227, 229, 230, 232, 235, 259, 267
 Australian Medical Support Force, 112, 115
 Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions, 41
 Australian Security Detachment, Baghdad, 228–33
Australia’s Strategic Planning in the 1990s, 72, 85
Australia’s Strategic Policy, 126
 Babington, Lt Col Glen, 173, 179
 Bainimarama, Cdr Frank, 314
 Baker, Gen John, 28–9, 32, 111, 340
 Balhannah flood, 1981, 40
 Bali bombing, 2002, 187, 290, 328
 Bali bombing, 2005, 264, 295–6
 Barnard, Lance, 25
 Bassingthwaighe, Maj Michael, 239, 271
 Battle of Long Tan, 337
 Battle of Takur Ghar, 216
 Bavadra, Timoci, 64
 Beazley, Kim, 59, 64, 73, 75, 221
 Bennett, Gen Sir Phillip, 55, 62, 165

- Bien Hoa province, 20, 21
bin Laden, Osama, 213
Bingley, Capt Mark, 314
Black Hawk helicopters, 98, 123, 132,
146, 149, 154, 156, 165, 171,
176, 201, 204, 225, 300, 306,
311, 314, 316, 321, 323
Blake, Maj Gen Murray, 33
Blamey, Gen Sir Thomas, 8
Blue Mountains bushfires, 39
Boag, LCpl Charles, 193
Border Protection Command, 59, 289
Borneo campaign, 3, 4
Bornholt, Lt Col Mark, 147
Bottrell, Lt Col Andrew, 312
Bougainville Revolutionary Army, 128
Boullaut, Sgt Matthew, 216
Bowral, military occupation of, 48–50
Boyce, Maj Terry, 40
Boyd, Lt Col Peter, 78
Brewer, Brig Mark, 12, 273
Brisbane River flood, 1974, 37
Britain, British forces, and Australian
Army, 11–12, 20, 34
in Afghanistan, 273–4
in Iraq, 233–4
Operation Herrick, 273–4
British Commonwealth Far Eastern
Strategic Reserve, 26
Brogan, Lt Gen Sir Mervyn, 25
Bryant, Maj Jim, 148, 155
Buffel (vehicle), 76
Burnett, Col Kevin, 157
Burr, Maj Gen Rick, 187, 220, 344
Bushby, Col Richard, 242
bushfire fighting, 39–40
Bushmaster protected mobility vehicle,
76, 85, 235, 240, 242, 259, 342
Butler, Brig David, 49
Byles, Brig Gary, 284

Caligari, Maj Gen John, 172, 173,
185, 320
Cambodia, operations in, 96–100
Cambodian Mine Action Centre,
100
Campbell, Cpl K.T., 174
Campbell, Lt Col Darryl, 304
Campbell, Maj Gen Angus, 175
Canada, Canadian forces, and
Australian Army:
in Afghanistan, 216, 273, 277–8,
360
exchanges with, 35, 349
in former Yugoslavia, 101
and Gulf War, 88
and INTERFET, 145, 151, 157,
161, 167
as ‘strategic cousins’, 35, 360
Cantwell, Maj Gen John, 12, 348
Carroll, Lt Vince, 298
Caughey, Brig Shane, 179
Centre for Army Lessons, 127, 137,
327, 335
CGS exercises, 103
Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff
Committee, 28
Chalmers, Maj Gen David, 292, 322
Chan, Sir Julius, 42, 118
Chauvel, Gen Sir Harry, 2
Chief of Defence Force Staff, 28
Chinook helicopters, 49, 53, 132, 225,
262–4, 265
Citizen Military Forces, 23, 25
Clark, Maj Paul, 130
Clark, Pte Jamie, 192, 233
‘CNN effect’, 104, 140
Coalition Forces Command –
Afghanistan, 257
Coalition Joint Special Operations
Task Force, 257
Coalition Joint Task Force – 7, 249
‘coalition of the willing’, 89
Coates, Lt Gen John, 49, 84
Cocks, Cpt Rodney, 291
Cole, Col Kevin, 51
Combat Battle Wing, 328
Combat Team Hammer, 270
Combat Team Spear, 271
Combat Team Tiger, 233
Combat Training Centre, 127, 169,
183, 328
Combined Arms Battle Wing, 319
Combined Arms Training and
Development Centre, 126
Combined Army Training Activity,
319–20
Combined Forces Command Task
Force Knight Hawk, 262
Combined Joint Task Force, 187
Command and Staff College, 8
Command Battle Wing, 319

- Command Support Training Centre, 353
- Commercial Support Program, 95
- Commonwealth Games, Brisbane 1982, 50, 53–4
- Commonwealth Games, Melbourne 2006, 310–12
- Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meeting, Bowral 1978, 48–50
- Commonwealth Military Training Team in Uganda, 55
- Commonwealth Monitoring Force, 50, 51
- Complex Warfighting*, 329–30
- Condon, Col Andrew, 313
- Connolly, Maj Gen Jim, 120
- Connor, Lt Col Peter, 194
- conscription, 3, 209
 abandonment of by Whitlam, 5
 referendums, First World War, 2–3
 Vietnam War and, 4–5, 22
- cooperative security, 95
- Cosgrove, Maj Gen Peter, 8, 144, 145–6, 154, 156, 165, 218, 220, 358
- Coughlan, Lt Marc, 40
- Crane, Maj Gen Mick, 158, 261–2
- Crean, Simon, 221
- Crocker, Col John, 78
- Cruikshank, Lt Col Ian, 245
- Cunningham, WO Jack, 41
- Currie, Lt Gen Sir Arthur, 2
- Cyclone Guba, Papua New Guinea 2007, 323
- Cyclone Heta, South Pacific 2004, 291
- Cyclone Larry, Queensland 2006, 193, 312–13, 325
- Cyclone Ofa, Western Samoa and Tuvalu, 1990, 86
- Cyclone Peter, Queensland 1979, 39
- Cyclone Ted, Queensland 1976, 39
- Cyclone Tracy, Darwin 1974, 29–31, 364
- Cyprus, offer of peacekeepers to, 27
- D'Hage, Col Adrian, 65
- Daly, Cpl Benjamin, 241
- Darwin Reconstruction Commission, 30
- Day, Maj Gen Steve, 159, 348
- de Somer, Lt Col Greg, 110, 287
- Deane, Sir William, 173
- Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, 166
- Defence Cooperation Program, 41–2
- Defence Efficiency Review, 152
- Defence Force and the Community: A Partnership in Australia's Defence*, 85
- Defence Imagery and Geospatial Organisation, 324
- Defence Intelligence Training Centre, 130
- Defence Reform Program, 95
- Defence Science and Technology Organisation, 125, 261
- Defence White Paper, 1987, 59–60, 68, 86, 125, 210
- Defence White Paper, 2000, 166
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 81, 95, 129, 186, 201, 290, 295, 313, 316
- Deployable Joint Force Headquarters, 106, 133, 144, 308, 316
- Deployed Forces Support Unit, 183
- desert warfare, 2
- Dewhurst, Maj Terry, 154
- Dibb Report, 59
- Dibb, Dr Paul, 59
- Dilger, Sgt Mike, 40
- Directorate General of Future Land Warfare, 127
- Dixon, WO2 Andrew, 273
- Domin, Cpt Ty, 273
- domino theory, 24
- Donnell, Cpl Carl, 230
- Downer, Alexander, 186, 187
- Dunne, Maj Gen Marytn, 159
- Dunning, Adam, 191
- East Timor
 Australian Army operations in, 1999–2000, 31, 168
 Defence Force, 181, 198, 199, 203
 medical and evacuation support from Australian Army and, 31
 referendum on self-determination, 143, 144, 146
 United Nations operations in, 1999–2000, 169–84

- Egypt, offer of peacekeepers to, 27
 Ellwood, Lt Col Jake, 243, 244
 Enhanced Land Force initiative, 318–19, 354, 355
 Evans, Brig Mark, 153, 154
 Evans, Gareth, 56, 64, 85, 88, 95, 97, 98, 111, 357
 Evans, Lt Col Paddy, 312
 Evatt, Dr Herbert Vere ('Doc'), 23
 Exercise Arnhem, 306
 Exercise AusCan Bond, 35
 Exercise Bersama Lima, 304
 Exercise Crocodile, 320
 Exercise *Croix du Sud*, 303
 Exercise Dawn Panther, 135
 Exercise Long Look, 34, 217
 Exercise Mercury, 306
 Exercise Night Panther, 135
 Exercise North Star, 34
 Exercise Pacific Bond 1974, 33
 Exercise Pacific Bond 1978, 33
 Exercise Platypus, 45
 Exercise Predators Gallop, 305
 Exercise Puk Puk, 304
 Exercise *Rebus*, 307
 Exercise Scorpion, 46
 Exercise Sea Lion, 306
 Exercise Southern Cross, 34
 Exercise Southern Safari, 34, 45
 Exercise Strike Anchor, 307
 Exercise Suman Warrior, 45, 304
 Exercise Swift Eagle, 124, 308
 Exercise Swift Foot, 53
 Exercise Talisman Sabre, 320
 Exercise Tandem Thrust, 133, 320
 Exercise Tasman Exchange, 61–2
 Exercise Temple Jade and Chapel Gold, 134
 Exercise Timor Dawn, 169
 Exercise Timor Dusk, 169
 Exercise Timor Prelude, 169
 Exercise Triad, 53
 Exercise Wyvern Sun, 135, 307
 Fahey, Maj John, 307
 Farrands, John, 25
 Faulkner, John, 253
 Fegan, Maj Kahlil, 230–1
 Felsche, Maj Susan, 96
 Ferguson, Maj Gen David, 111
 Ferndale, Maj Steve, 172
 Field Force Command, 25, 26
 Field, Brig Chris, 191, 316
 Fielding, Col Marcus, 12, 122
 Fiji, military coup, 1987. *See* Operation Morris Dance, Fiji 1987
 First Reconstruction Task Force, 258–62
 Fitzpatrick, Brig Peter, 126
 Five Power Defence Arrangements, 13, 44–5, 135, 207, 217
 exercises, 304–5
 Flawith, Maj Gen Ian, 36, 193
 Flowers, Lt Col Quentin, 176
 Force Communications Unit, 98
Force Structure Review, 86, 94
 Forces Command, 353
 Ford, Maj Gen Tim, 24, 351
 Forward Operating Base Rhino, 215
 Fraser government
 raising of Tactical Assault Group by, 50
 Fraser, Malcolm
 Army response to 1978–79 flood and fire season and, 39
 interest in Commonwealth affairs by, 55
 involvement in African affairs by, 51, 52, 74, 357
 Frewen, Brig John, 112–14, 115, 187, 189, 190, 191
 Future Special Operations Concept 2030, The, 344
 Gabriel, Maj Shane, 162
 Galea, Capt Paul, 122
 Gallaway, Lt Col Andrew, 185, 193, 203, 205
 Garraway, Maj Mick, 233
 Gillespie, Lt Gen Ken, 78, 81, 162, 173, 198, 214, 225, 341, 353
 Gillian, Brig David, 88
 Gilmore, Maj Gen Peter ('Gus'), 215, 216, 242
 Goddard, Lt Col Scott, 202
 Gordon, Dr Sue, 322
 Gordon, Maj Gen Ian, 24, 95
 Gould, Brig Simon, 158, 161, 162
 Gould, Lt Col John, 257
 Grace, Maj Stephen, 146, 158

- Gration, Gen Peter, 21, 63, 64, 65, 66, 70, 86, 333, 335
- Gregs, Capt John, 43
- Grey, Lt Gen John, 63, 73, 86, 94, 103–5, 107
- Griffiths, Cpl John, 172
- Guam doctrine, 24
- Gulf War, 1990–91, operations during, 87–92
- Gurkhas, 149, 153, 158, 296
- Gusmão, Xanana, 159, 200
- Habibie, Pres B.J., 143
- Haiti, operations in, 122
- Halleday, Lt Peter, 155
- Hamer, Rupert, 38
- Hamilton, Maj Bob, 155
- Hamilton, Maj Christian, 249
- Hammett, Col James, 277, 314, 348
- Hanson, Lt Col Janet, 64
- Hanson, Lt Col Jeremy, 248
- Hardened and Networked Army initiative, 319, 330–48, 354, 355
- Harley, Maj Jason, 244
- Harwood, LCpl Wayne, 170
- Hassett, Maj Gen Frank, 25
- Hatton, WO1 David, 239
- Hawke government
 commitment to United Nations Assistance Group for Namibia by, 75
 contribution to Gulf War 1990–91 operations, 88
 Fiji military coup, 1987 and, 64
 Multinational Force and Observers mission, Sinai and, 56
 peacekeeping commitments and, 56–7
- Hawke, Bob, 56, 64, 75, 88, 112, 357
- Hawkins, Cpl David, 170–1
- Hayden, Bill, 56
- Headquarters 3rd Brigade, 166, 320
- Headquarters Australian Theatre, 340–1
- Headquarters Joint Operations Command, 316, 354
- Headquarters Northern Command, 59
- Hickling, Lt Gen Frank, 126–7, 169, 327
- Higgins, Brig Don, 110, 343–4
- Hill, Robert, 190
- Hill, Sgt Matthew, 204
- Hilton Hotel bombing, Sydney 1978, 48–50, 54
- Hindmarsh, Maj Gen Mike, 218, 219, 258, 265
- HMAS *Adelaide*, 149
- HMAS *Jervis Bay*, 147, 148
- HMAS *Kanimbla*, 201, 293, 294, 314
- HMAS *Manoora*, 189, 201, 311
- HMAS *Melbourne*, 30, 31, 64, 364
- HMAS *Parramatta*, 65
- HMAS *Stalwart*, 30
- HMAS *Stuart*, 287
- HMAS *Success*, 65
- HMAS *Sydney*, 65
- HMAS *Tobruk*, 34, 64, 65, 66, 106, 131, 166, 201
- HMAS *Warramunga*, 311
- Hobbs, Maj Paul, 304
- Hodgskiss, Pte Peter, 266–7
- Hogan, Brig Gary, 88
- Holliday, Maj Peter ('Doc'), 133
- Holloway, Maj Dick, 191
- Horner, Col David, 126, 327
- Houston, Air Chief Marshal Angus, 265, 315
- Howard government
 Afghanistan operations, 2005–06 and, 264
 Enhanced Land Force initiative and, 318
 strategic reviews and restructuring and, 123–4
 support in Sudan and, 298
 suspected illegal or irregular entry vessels and, 289
- Howard, John, 123
 approval of request for military assistance to East Timor, 2006, 198
 commitment to Middle East operations by, 209
 commitment to RAMSI and, 186–7
 consequences of commitment to Afghanistan and, 215
 endorsement of Hardened and Networked Army initiative by, 330
 Enhanced Land Force initiative and, 318–19

- invocation of ANZUS Alliance by, 211, 285
- invocation of ANZUS Treaty by, 213
- Iraq intervention and, 219, 222, 233
- letter to Habibie by, 143
- military commitment to
 - Afghanistan and, 213–14
 - MV *Tampa* incident and, 288
 - ‘9/11’ terrorist attack and, 285
- Humphreys, Lt Col Kevin, 263
- Humphreys, Lt Michael, 171
- Hurley, Gen David, 14, 105, 107, 109, 120, 128, 170, 172, 341
- Hutcheson, Brig John, 196, 204, 205, 350

- Incident Response Regiment, 265, 287, 328
- Indonesia
 - Australian army survey operations in, 42–3
 - evacuation contingencies for Australian expatriates, 1998, 134, 363
 - exercises with Australian Army, 43–4
- International Force East Timor, 172, 174, 176, 181, 199, 202, 206, 210, 308, 316
 - Australian Army operations with, 144–8
 - coalition partners in, 151–2
 - complexity of, 152–3
 - deployment of, 148–53
 - formation-level manoeuvre and, 153–4
 - lessons from participation in, 163–5
 - logistic shortfalls of, 152
 - naval and air components of, 150–1
 - New Zealand’s role in, 157
 - Oecussi enclave and, 158, 165
 - redeployment to border and, 154–7
 - special forces actions in, 149–50
 - transfer to United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor, 161–3, 169
 - United States support for, 151
- International Force in East Timor Response Force, 148, 154–5, 156, 159, 161
- International Force in East Timor Western Forces, 157, 159, 162, 167
- International Security Assistance Force, 265
- inter-service cooperation. *See* jointery
- Iraq, war in, 2003–07, 218–55
 - Baghdad security detachment rotations and, 228–33
 - British squaddies and, 241–2
 - civil–military cooperation projects and, 244
 - concerns over Australia’s involvement in, 221
 - criticism of, 251–2
 - embedded staff in, 249–50
 - forces in southern Iraq, 233–45
 - training teams and, 245–9
- Iraqi Army Support and Services Institute, 248
- Iraqi Security Forces, 238, 241

- James, Lt Col Neil, 126
- Japanese Iraqi Reconstruction Support Group, 235
- Jarvie, Lt Col Harry, 84–5, 266
- Jeffrey, Maj Gen Mike, 36
- John, Lt Col Anthony, 307
- Johnson, Maj Robyn, 181
- Johnstone, Maj Andrew, 204
- Joint Combined Training Centre, 320
- Joint Incident Response Unit, 284
- Joint Offshore Protection Command, 59, 288
- Joint Operations Command, 340
- Joint Services Staff College, 69
- Joint Task Force 109, 134
- Joint Task Force 112, 284, 285
- Joint Task Force 114, 284
- Joint Task Force 504, 146
- Joint Task Force 631, 204
- Joint Task Force 634, 321
- Joint Task Force 636, 311, 316, 324
- Joint Task Force 641, 322
- jointery, 28, 62–8, 69, 148, 182, 195, 338–40, 354
- International Force in East Timor and, 165

- Jones, Cpl Stuart, 171
 Jungle Training Centre, Canungra, Queensland, 10
 jungle warfare, 3
- Kahn, Maj Vance, 288
 Kangaroo exercises, 31–4
 Kangaroo 1, 32, 33
 Kangaroo 1981, 34
 Kangaroo 2, 26
 Kangaroo 2 and 3, 33–4
 Kangaroo 81, 43
 Kangaroo 83, 57–8
 Kangaroo 95, 122–3
 Kashmir, 27, 56
 Keating, Maj Gen Mike, 124, 201
 Keating, Paul, 94, 118
 Kelly, Brig Justin, 60, 61, 126, 319, 342
 Kennaway, Maj Sean, 292
 Kent, Capt Mick, 294
 Kilcullen, Lt Col David, 329, 332
 Kokoda Trail, 323
 Kokoda, battle of, 3
 Korean War, Australian casualties in, 4
 Kovco, Pte Jacob ('Jake'), 232–3
 Krause, Maj Gen Michael, 342
- Lancaster House Agreement, 50
 Land Command, 352
 Land Warfare Development Centre, 126, 137, 327, 335
Land Warfare Doctrine I
 Fundamentals of Land Warfare, 127
 Land Warfare Studies Centre, 137, 327
- Leach, Sgt Ian, 40
 Leahy, Lt Gen Peter, 14, 134, 177, 187, 276, 330–1, 344, 345
 Lewis, Maj Gen Duncan, 162, 216
 'Little Redbook, The', 55
 Locke, Sgt Matthew, 267–8
 locust plague, central Queensland, 1974, 38
 Logistic Support Force, 292, 300
 Logistics Command, 25
 Lombok Treaty, 44
 Lome Peace Agreement, 296
- London bombing, 2005, 264
 Lyddiard, Sgt Michael, 268
- Mahy, Brig Mick, 237, 239, 241
 malarial survey, Papua New Guinea 1974, 38
 Manning, Pte Leonard, 171
 Manoeuvre Operations in the Littoral Environment doctrine, 166, 308
 Mansell, Col John, 223
 Mansford, Maj George, 38
 Maribyrnong River flood, 1974, 38
 McCaffery, Maj John, 170
 McCarthy, Lt Nick, 241
 McDonald, Maj Lachlan, 190
 McGuire, Lt Col David, 293
 McLaughlan, Ian, 123
 McLennan, Pte Rodney, 171
 McMahan, Lt Col James (Jim), 146, 147–8, 149–50, 154–5, 199, 214, 222, 227–8, 257, 258, 345
 McNarn, Maj Gen Maurie, 214, 219, 222–3
 McOwan, Lt Col Tim, 146, 147, 149, 159
- Mellor, Col Bill, 106–7, 109–10
 Membrey, Maj Graeme, 83
 Middle East, history of Australian Army operations in, 210
 Military Information Support Team, 130, 174
 military schools, 8, 9, 61
 Millar Report, 25
 Millar, Dr Tom, 25
 Miller, Capt Shane, 77
 Molan, Maj Gen Jim, 36, 137, 275, 348
- Monash, Gen Sir John, 2, 331
 Monk, Paul, 332
 Moon, Lt Col Mick, 170, 172, 305
 Moore-Wilton, Maj Simon, 193
 Moriarty, Capt Greg, 88
 Morrison, Lt Gen David, 134
 Morshead report, 27–8
 Morshead, Lt Gen Sir Leslie, 27–8
 Mortlock, Brig Roger, 128
 Multinational Force and Observers, Sinai, 23, 56, 111
 Multi-National Division (South East), 235
 Mumford, Lt Col Mick, 173, 201, 232

- Murphy, Chaplain Glynn, 134
 MV *Pong Su*, apprehension of, 287
 MV *Tampa* incident, 288
- national agency liaison officers, 236
 National Armed Forces for the
 Liberation of East Timor, 149,
 198
 national service, 3
 Natural Disasters Organisation, 29
 Navy, Royal Australian, 7
 Nelson, Brendan, 240, 242, 243,
 250
 New Guinea campaign, 3
 New Iraqi Army, 2nd Brigade, 248
 New Iraqi Army, 4th Brigade, 245
 New Iraqi Army, 8th Brigade, 247
 New Zealand Defence Force, 128,
 129, 195, 206
 Nikolic, Brig Andrew, 214, 234, 348
 ‘9/11’ terrorist attack, United States,
 187, 209, 340
 Niumpradit, Lt Gen Boonsrang, 162
 Nixon, Richard M, Guam statement
 by, 24
 Noble, Brig Roger, 214, 233, 235,
 236, 344, 363
 Nolan, Maj Terry, 39
 Norris, Maj Spencer, 232
 Northern Territory National
 Emergency Intervention, 31,
 321–3
 North-West Mobile Force, 289, 322
- O’Donnell, Lt Gen Laurie, 81
 Officer Cadet School Portsea, 7
 Olympic Games, Sydney 2000, 50,
 283–5, 311, 328
 Operation Acolyte, 310–12
 Operation Anaconda, 216
 Operation Anode, 187, 190, 191, 194
 Operation ANZAC Aviation Task
 Group, 204
 Operation Aslan, 298
 Operation Astute, Timor-Leste,
 198–207
 establishment of force presence,
 199–201
 force composition of, 201–2
 force rotations during, 202–3,
 205–6
 long-term commitment to, 202
 specialised support for, 203–5
 Operation Azure, Sudan, 298–9
 Operation Badcoe, 178
 Operation Bali Assist, 290–1
 Conspicuous Service Cross awards
 from, 290–1
 Operation Bali Assist II, 295–6
 Operation Banner, 100
 Operation Bastille, 214
 Operation Bel Isi, Bougainville,
 128–32, 133
 Australia–New Zealand cooperation
 during, 128, 129, 131
 Operation Blazer, 91–2
 Operation Catalyst, 250
 Operation Cenderawasih (Bird of
 Paradise), 43
 Operation Chermside, 155
 Operation Citadel, 179
 Operation Claret, 4, 150
 Operation Coracle, Mozambique,
 121–2
 Operation Cosgrove, 178
 Operation Damon,
 Zimbabwe–Rhodesia, 50–2, 69
 Operation Deluge, 311, 321
 Operation Desert Storm, 88
 Operation Diamantina, 173
 Operation Faber, 143–4
 Operation Falconer, 214
 Operation Fluent, 286
 Operation Fresia, Guatemala, 124
 Operation Fullback, 174
 Operation Gading Four, 42
 Operation Gold, 284, 285, 286
 Operation Guardian, 286
 Operation Habitat, 90–1
 Operation Helpem Fren. *See* Regional
 Assistance Mission to Solomon
 Islands
 Operation Herrick, 273–4
 Operation Husky, Sierra Leone, 296–7
 Operation Iran Assist, 298
 Operation Jubilee Salute, 1977, 48
 Operation Lagoon, Bougainville 1994,
 116–21, 130
 Operation Larry Assist, 312–13
 Operation Lavarack, 154
 Operation MacGregor, 178
 Operation Manau, 42

- Operation Marson, 178
- Operation Morris Dance, Fiji 1987, 64–8, 69, 72, 175, 186, 197, 314
 - Advance Company Group and, 65
 - criticism of, 65–6
 - importance of Australia–New Zealand collaboration and, 69–70
 - planning, logistic and intelligence issues, 66
 - shortfalls identified by, 66–8
- Operation Nauru Assist, 292
- Operation Niue Assist, 291–2
- Operation Outreach, 321–3
- Operation Pakistan Assist, 299–302, 310
- Operation Picaresque, Namibia, 74–81
- Operation Ples Drai, 133
- Operation Plumbob, 185–6
- Operation PNG Assist, 323–4
- Operation Pollard, 218–19
- Operation Pomelo, Ethiopia–Eritrea, 297
- Operation Quickstep, 314–17
- Operation Ramp, 313
- Operation Relex, 288
- Operation Render Safe, 292
- Operation Resolute, 289
- Operation Restore Hope, Somalia 1993, 130
- Operation Sailcloth, Vanuatu, 68, 73
- Operation Salaam, Pakistan and Afghanistan, 81–5
- Operation Scrummage, 286
- Operation Shaddock, Papua New Guinea, 134
- Operation Sierra, 132–3
- Operation Slipper, 213, 214, 256–8
- Operation Solace, Somalia, 104–10, 120
- Operation Spin Ghar, 268, 270–2
- Operation Spire, 181
- Operation Spitfire, 144, 146, 147, 149
- Operation Stabilise, 163
- Operation Strand, 156
- Operation Sumatra Assist, 292–5
- Operation Takht, 272
- Operation Tamar, Rwanda, 112–16
- Operation Tartan, 287–8
- Operation Trek, 186
- Operation Tsunami Assist, 194
- Operation Uphold Democracy, 122
- Operation Valiant, 172
- Operational Deployment Force, 52–3
 - Fiji military coup, 1987 and, 64
- Operational Support Squadron, 293
- Orme, Maj Gen Craig, 74
- Overwatch Battle Group, 238, 239, 240, 242, 243, 244, 250, 252, 319
- Papua New Guinea
 - Australian Army engineer support in, 47
 - Australian Army survey operations in, 42
 - exercises in, 303–4
- Papua New Guinea Defence Force, 13, 35–6
 - Preventive Medicine Platoon, 38
- Parker, Maj Dick, 148
- Parrott, Col Ross, 73–4
- Patten-Richens, Lt Col Jamie, 172, 294
- Pattimura project, 43
- Peace Monitoring Group, 129
- Pearce, Tpr David, 267, 268
- Petraeus, Gen David, 243, 329
- Phuoc Tuy province, 20, 21, 279
- Pilbara Regiment, 289, 322
- Pine Gap, 32
- Porter, Tpr Joshua, 314
- post-traumatic stress disorder, 347–8
- Powell, Mag Gen Roger, 162
- Power, Lt Col Peter, 248
- Power, Lt Gen Ash, 316, 320
- Prascevic, Cpl James, 266
- Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, 215
- Proctor, Lt Col Michael, 323
- Quirk, WO1 Tony, 269–70
- Rabuka, Lt Col Sitiveni, 64
- Ramos-Horta, José, 204
- Ramsey, Col Wayne, 112
- Rawlins, Brig Anthony ('Changi'), 242
- Ray, Robert, 85, 86, 110, 112
- Read, Maj David, 290

- Reconstruction Task Force,
Afghanistan, 84, 264–71
- Regional Assistance Mission to
Solomon Islands, 186–94, 207
- Army Reserve and, 195
- composition and profile of,
187–9
- force rotations during, 191–2
- ‘Multidimensional Manoeuvre’,
191
- Participating Police Force and, 188,
195, 196
- reinforcements for, 191
- Reserve force rotations and, 193–4
- riots, 2006 and, 192–3
- scale-back of forces to, 190–1
- span of command, 190
- technological edge of, 189–90
- Reid, Maj D, 38
- Republic of Fiji Military Forces, 178,
314
- Rerden, Brig Mal, 202, 205
- Restructuring the Army* trial, 124, 125
- Revolution in Military Affairs, 92, 94
- Reynolds, Brig Gavan, 88
- Reynolds, Maj Mick, 39
- Reynolds, Maj Tim, 293
- Rickerby, Maj Brad, 218
- Rifle Company Butterworth, 45
- Roach, Col Don, 202
- Rose, Maj David, 156
- Ross, Lt Col Rod, 22
- Royal Australian Air Force, 7
- Cyclone Tracy disaster relief,
Darwin 1974 and, 30
- International Force East Timor and,
165
- withdrawal of helicopters from
Sinai by, 56
- Royal Australian Corps of Transport,
41
- Royal Australian Corps of Transport
Centre, 38
- Royal Australian Electrical and
Mechanical Engineers, 41
- Royal Australian Survey Corps, 42
- Royal Canadian Regiment
3rd Battalion, 277
- Royal Malaysian Regiment, 9th
Battalion, B Company (Airborne),
305
- Royal Military College Duntroon, 8,
182
- Royal New South Wales Regiment,
177, 307
- Royal New Zealand Infantry
Regiment
- 1st Battalion, 156, 157, 158
- 1st Battalion, V Company, 157
- 1st Battalion, W Company, 203
- Royal Pacific Islands Regiment, 2nd
Battalion, 304
- Royal Thai Armed Forces, 307
- Royal Thai Army, 135
- Royal Victoria Regiment, 177
- Rugby World Cup 2003, 286
- Russell, Sgt Andrew, 215, 267, 268
- Ryan, Brig Mick, 258, 260, 261
- Ryan, Maj Jim, 147
- Sanderson, Lt Col Grant, 199,
200
- Sanderson, Lt Gen John, 97, 98, 100,
126, 327
- SAS Regiment, 104, 134, 173, 187,
257, 265, 284, 286, 328
- 1 Squadron, 224
- 152 Signal Squadron, 146
- 1st Squadron, 215
- 3 Squadron, 110, 146
- Special Forces Task Group in Iraq,
219, 224, 228
- training with US SEALs, 33
- Scholes, Gordon, 56
- Schollum, Lt Col Keith, 169
- search and rescue missions, 40
- Second Reconstruction Task Force,
261
- Sengleman, Maj Gen Jeff, 173, 174
- Serong, Brig Ted, 248
- Shephard, Col Mark, 322
- Short, Brig Peter, 236, 237
- ‘SIEV X’ incident, 288
- Simeoni, Lt Col John, 319
- Sims, Col Andrew, 301
- Sinai, 56, 111–12
- Skylark miniature unmanned aerial
vehicle, 237
- Slater, Maj Gen Michael, 148, 193,
199–200, 201–2, 312, 344
- Smedley, Sgt Paul, 176
- Smethurst, Brig Mark, 218, 257–8

- Smith, Brig Andrew ('Boomer'), 311, 312, 321
- Smith, Maj Gen Michael, 162, 350
- Smith, Maj Gen Stuart, 178, 293, 328
- Soaki, Sir Fred, 186
- Solomon Islands
Australian Army operations in, post 2000, 185–97
See also Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
- Solomon Islands Peace Monitoring Council, 186
- South African Defence Force, 76
- South East Asian Treaty Organisation, 13
- South Pacific Peacekeeping Force, 118
- Sowry, Lt Pat, 77
- Special Forces Training Centre, 328
- Special Operations Command, 54, 135, 142, 175, 287, 288, 306, 326, 328–9, 352
- Special Operations Command and Control Element, 146, 219
- Special Operations Logistics Squadron, 328
- Special Operations Task Group, 256–8, 264, 355
- Speter, WO1 Rod, 162
- Stanner, Lt Andrew, 77
- Stehouwer, Cpt Alasdair, 290
- Steinbeck, Maj Jonathan, 290
- Stevens, Maj Andrew, 241
- Stone, Maj Gary, 65
- Stooke, Capt Laurie, 41
- Strategic Basis, 1975, 24, 26, 37
- 'strategic cousins', Canada and Australia as, 35, 360
- Strategic Review*, 1993, 92
- Strategic Update 2005*, 330
- Stretton, Maj Gen Alan, Cyclone Tracy disaster relief, Darwin 1974 and, 29–30
- Stuart, Lt Col Russell, 97
- Sullivan, Gen Gordon, 104
- Sumatra earthquake, 2005, 292
- survey operations, Pacific and Indonesia, 41–3
- suspected illegal or irregular entry vessels, 288
- Swinbourn, Chaplain Haydn, 291
- Sydney bushfire, 1979, 39
- Tactical Assault Group, 50, 175, 287
- Taliban, 209, 213, 258, 260, 262, 264, 265, 266, 269, 270, 272
- Tange, Sir Arthur, defence amalgamation under, 27–9
- Tarin Kowt, 257, 258, 260, 261, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 272
- Task Force Eagle, 234
- Task Force Uruzgan, 258
- Tasman Bridge collapse, 1975, 38
- Tasmanian bushfire, 1982, 40
- Tentara Nasional Indonesia*, 148, 154, 159
- Teong, Cpl Paul, 155
- Thailand, exercises with, 134–5
- Thompson, Col Neil, 290
- Thorp, Capt Mark, 298
- Thorpe, Lt Steve, 172
- Thorpe, Maj Peter, 39
- Tidey, WO2 Blair, 249–50
- Tink, Lt Col Rowan, 216
- Tinley, Maj Peter, 224–5
- Tongan Defence Service, 314
- Townsend, Lt Col Colin, 170
- Townsville Peace Agreement, 186
- Training Command, 26
- Tran, Capt Tam, 90
- Truce Monitoring Group, 128, 129
- tsunami, Boxing Day 2004, 292
- Tucker, Lt Col Mike, 177
- Tulley, Lt Col Stephen, 248
- United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia, 97
- United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor, 143, 146
- United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda, 112
- United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda II, 112
- United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone, 296
- United Nations Development Programme, 121
- United Nations Disaster Relief Organisation, 86
- United Nations Emergency Force II, 27

- United Nations Good Offices
 - Commission to Indonesia, 22–3
- United Nations Iran–Iraq Military Observer Group, 73–4
- United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan, 22, 27, 56
- United Nations Mine Clearance Training Team, 81–5, 215, 243, 268, 347
- United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, 95
- United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, 297
- United Nations Mission in Sudan, 298
- United Nations Mission in Support of East Timor, 176, 177, 181
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid in Afghanistan, 84
- United Nations Office in Somalia, 105
- United Nations Operations in Mozambique, 121
- United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, 351
- United Nations Police Force, 201
- United Nations Protection Force, 101
- United Nations Security Council, 148
- United Nations Transitional Assistance Group for Namibia, 74
 - Australian contingent to, 76–80
- United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia, 96
- United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor
 - transfer from International Force in East Timor, 169
 - transition from International Force East Timor, 161–3
- United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation, 23–4, 27, 56
- United States of America
 - relations with Australia, 32–3
 - support for International Force East Timor, 151
- US Army, 329, 330
 - in Afghanistan, 215–16
 - exercises with Australian Army, 33, 320
 - in Iraq, 230, 249
 - in Vietnam, 20, 21
- US Marine Corps, 214–15, 343, 364
- US Navy, and INTERFET, 151
- US 10th Mountain Division, 215
- US 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate), 20
- US 2nd Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment, 230
- Van Malenstein, Staff Sgt, 42
- Vanuatu deployment, 52
- Vaughan-Evans, Maj Carol, 146
- Victorian bushfire, 1980, 39–40
- Victorian floods, 1974, 38
- Vietnam War
 - approach to conduct of war in Phuoc Tuy province, 21
 - Australian Army reaction to US tactics in, 20, 21
 - Australian casualties in, 4, 22
 - conscription and, 4–5, 22
 - effect on Australian consciousness of, 4
 - Moratorium protests against, 4
 - public support for, 20
 - reasons for Australian commitment to, 19–20
 - significance to Australian public of, 5
 - specialist support roles and, 21
 - tactics in, 20
 - tank deployment in, 20
- Wainwright, Lt Col David, 270
- Wallace, Brig Jim, 68, 125
- ‘war on terror’, 142, 187, 290, 358
- War, Spr Tim, 204
- Warren, Col Richard, 76, 77
- Watkins, Cpl Dave, 40
- Websdane, Lt Col Chris, 250
- Welch, Lt Col Nick, 148
- Wesley-Smith, Capt Terry, 39
- West, Lt Col Rod, 134
- Western Sahara, operations in, 95–6
- Whelan, Lt Col Georgina, 293
- Whitebread, Cpl J.C., 174
- Whitlam government
 - functional command reorganisation and, 25–6

- Whitlam government (*cont.*)
independence of Papua New Guinea and, 36
integration of women and, 58
peacekeeping offers for Egypt, Cyprus and Kashmir and, 26–7
- Whitlam, Gough, 22
abandonment of conscription by, 5
exposure of 121 Signal Squadron by, 26
withdrawal of Australian battalion from Singapore and, 26
- Wilkins, LCpl Brad, 171
- Wilson, Col John, 101
- Wilson, Maj Gen Richard, 162, 340
- Winter, Lt Col Susan, 290
- women, integration into Australian Army, 58
- Women's Royal Australian Army Corps, 58, 362
- Wood, Cpl Wesley, 241
- Woolfe, Cpl Damien, 230
- Worsley, Pte Luke, 268
- Wright, Maj Beverley, 112
- Wrigley, Alan, 85, 86
- Yugoslavia, former, operations in, 101–3
- Zaharias, Lt Col Jack, 22