

## **NORTHERN COMMAND & NORTH WEST MOBILE FORCE**

### **Headquarters Northern Command**

2.1 On 15 July 2003, the Defence Sub-Committee was met at Headquarters Northern Command (HQNORCOM), Larrakeyah Barracks, by Captain Norman Banks, RAN, Deputy Commander of Operations (JO1). Captain Banks subsequently briefed the sub-committee on the following:

- the structure and function of HQNORCOM;
- the military surveillance and response operations conducted;
- Defence Aid to the Civil Community (DACC) and Defence Force Assistance to the Civil Authorities (DFACA);
- the maintenance of operational and military links with Eastern Indonesia;
- responsibilities as the single point of contact for ADF and Northern territory Government;
- facilitation of industry and commercial support to ADF operations; and
- support for current ADF operations.

2.2 HQNORCOM was established in 1988 as an operational level joint Australian Defence Force (ADF) Headquarters. The Commander NORCOM (COMNORCOM) reports directly to the Commander Australian Theatre (COMAST) and is responsible for the planning,

practice and conduct of surveillance, reconnaissance, protection and civil support operations within the Command's Area of Operations (AO). That AO covers Queensland and the Northern Territory above 19 degrees south, and the Kimberley and Pilbara Districts of Western Australia.

- 2.3 COMNORCOM is currently Air Commodore Steven Walker who has approximately 130 personnel from the Navy, Army and Air Force that form his Headquarters staff. HQNORCOM is centrally located at Larrakeyah Barracks in close proximity to the Darwin CBD. COMNORCOM passed on his apologies for not being able to personally brief the committee, but was called away from Darwin on pressing work matters.
- 2.4 During the inspection the sub-committee was briefed on the vastness and operational complexity of HQNORCOM's AO which includes terrain and geography of remarkable diversity, ranging from arid to semi-arid desert, mangrove swamps, dense tropical jungle to open woodland and savannah.
- 2.5 HQNORCOM's mission is to plan for, practice and conduct the defence of Northern Australia as part of the Australian Theatre campaign, and to conduct other Defence operations and tasks in the NORCOM AO.
- 2.6 HQNORCOM's roles and responsibilities include the following:
- the conduct of military surveillance and response operations;
  - direct, coordinate and support all DACC activities;
  - facilitate support to DFACA;
  - re-establish and maintain military operational links with military counterparts in Eastern Indonesia;
  - act as the ADF single point of contact for, and coordinate ADF liaison with the NT Government;
  - coordinate ADF liaison with Commonwealth, State, Territory and Local Govt Agencies, NGOs, other agencies and organisations, and the community; and
  - facilitate industry and commercial support to ADF operations and exercises.
- 2.7 The sub-committee was also briefed on HQNORCOM's role in the coordination of the various surveillance efforts conducted in northern Australia, as well as the important role undertaken in the prevention of various illegal activities such as fish poaching, people smuggling and

other violations of Australia's immigration laws, and customs related issues.

2.8 During the brief, the sub-committee discussed a number of specific issues including:

- the role of HQNORCOM in regional engagement;
- the extensive work carried out to create effective civil/military cooperation in the North;
- current support for ADF operations, in particular OP GABERDINE, OP RELEX II, and OP CRANBERRY;
- current surveillance operations across the north of Australia, and the excellent working relationship with the Australian Customs Service, Coastwatch; and
- the use of the ADF in DACC and DFACA situations.

Figure 2.1 Members with Captain Norman Banks and Lieutenant Colonel Clay Sutton



## North West Mobile Force

2.9 Following the HQNORCOM brief, the sub-committee was introduced to the Commanding Officer of the North West Mobile Force (NORFORCE), Lieutenant Colonel Clay Sutton, who subsequently briefed the committee on:

- the roles and responsibilities of NORFORCE,

- the unique features of the Unit including the special relationship with isolated indigenous communities and the vast area that makes up NORFORCE's area of responsibility (AR),
- the history of the Unit,
- the Unit's equipment, and
- current issues.

2.10 NORFORCE was raised in 1981 as the first of three Regional Force Surveillance Units (RFSU) in northern Australia. The unit traces its history back to the 2<sup>nd</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> North Australia Observer Unit which was a bush commando unit conducting surveillance in northern Australia during World War 2. NORFORCE is a high readiness unit that is not structured or intended to be deployed away from its current AR. While it remains a direct command unit of the Land Commander – Australia (LCAUST), NORFORCE may be placed under Operational Command of COMNORCOM for specific operations.

Figure 2.2 NORFORCE members on patrol



2.11 NORFORCE generally recruits, trains and operates in a number of local areas across northern Australia. The majority of the regiment's some 550 personnel are Reservists drawn from the local indigenous communities in its AR. Although headquartered in Darwin, most of NORFORCE's full-

time staff are situated at over 30 different locations throughout their AR across the north of Australia.

Figure 2.3 NORFORCE distribution and areas of operations



2.12 The Regiment maintains squadrons in the Pilbara, Alice Springs and Gove. These are Kimberley Squadron, situated at Broome; Arnhem Squadron, located at Nhulunbuy; and Centre Squadron, stationed in Alice Springs. NORFORCE conducts surveillance and reconnaissance operations in northern Australia within an AR that covers over 1.8 million square kilometres and stretches from the Gulf of Carpentaria in the east to the Kimberley in the west.

Figure 2.4 NORFORCE observers in operation



- 2.13 As a regional force, the unit provides a permanent surveillance presence enhanced by a civilian reporting network which is widely supported by the local indigenous communities. The regional nature of the unit allows access to what would be otherwise closed communities, engenders strong community support for their operations and facilitates access to unparalleled local knowledge. NORFORCE is the largest employer of indigenous people in both the Northern Territory and the Kimberley region.
- 2.14 NORFORCE has 73 permanent ARA members out of a total compliment of 597 with an Establishment of 530. Approximately 60% of Patrolmen are indigenous, with a female representation of 44 soldiers. The Unit has the capacity to field 48 patrols, each of six personnel, and is capable of conducting wide area land surveillance for the operational level.
- 2.15 Patrols are deployable by air, land and sea and are equipped with vehicles, high technology based surveillance and communication equipment including: Night Vision Equipment (NVE), ground surveillance radar (GSR), thermal sighting systems (TSS), unattended ground sensors (UGS), and image capture and transfer systems (ICATS).

Figure 2.5 NORFORCE deployment by land and sea



- 2.16 The sub-committee was briefed on a number of initiatives being undertaken by NORFORCE including:
- the implementation of an information management system (IMS) to assist in patrol planning and to provide information whilst on patrol;
  - the creation of a patrol database, to also assist with patrol planning, and to provide ready information whilst on patrol in a personal digital accessory (PDA – PalmPilot), and to allow for an Automation Patrol Report System;
  - the development and implementation of a capability management system to hold the current status and qualifications of the members of NORFORCE; and

- the eventual creation of a real time, fully integrated, distributed communications and information system that would allow the downloading of imagery and data to appropriate level throughout the organisation.