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This is a superb historical account of Australia’s first victory against Japan on land. Had Japan captured the eastern tip of Papua, it could have controlled the northern approaches to Australia.

This D-Day ‘operations manual’ focuses primarily on the science, technology and engineering which underpinned key aspects of the Allied invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944.

FRONT COVER:
The Background Briefing at p. 5 discusses, inter alia, the provision by military forces of ‘aid to the civil power’, such as assisting police forces counter terrorism; and the Essay at pp. 17 – 19 is about World War II Royal Australian Navy commandos. The cover photo depicts 21st century naval commandos (RAN clearance divers attached to 2nd Commando Regiment) preparing to board a ship underway during maritime counter-terrorism training in Jervis Bay, NSW, on 24 September 2019. [Photo: ABIS Ryan McKenzie, Department of Defence].
President’s Column

Welcome to the Winter 2020 issue of United Service, a highly professional journal that is now in its 73rd year of continuous publication. This issue contains a diverse range of topics including: a briefing on military assistance to the Australian community during the recent bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic; an assessment of the reforms of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army; the strategic challenges facing the South Pacific island nations; and the role of Royal Australian Navy beach commandos in World War II.

Shortly after the bushfire crisis over the Christmas period, we were faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, where, at the direction of the Federal and State Governments, we were required to undertake a significant period of social isolation, not experienced since the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1919.

Some 2000 Australian Defence Force personnel were utilised in Operation COVID-19 Assist in augmenting State planning and contact tracing teams, assisting police in monitoring health orders and running an emergency ward in Tasmania.

Associated with the self-isolation, our cultural institutions closed, including the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park. Whilst this meant that our members were not able to attend our stimulating programme of lunch-time lectures on defence and security issues in the Anzac Memorial Auditorium, we have been able to record a number of presentations and these are accessible on the RUSI NSW YouTube channel – http://www.rusinsw.org.au/YouTube.

I am aware that for many of our members, the extended period of self-isolation has been difficult and many have not been able to participate in key events including family birthdays and Anzac Day marches. Members that I have spoken to express great stoicism and determination in these trying times.

I am pleased to advise that the restrictions are being eased and that our home in the Anzac Memorial will re-open on 8 June 2020.

The work to revitalise the Board of our national body, the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies – Australia, is ongoing. All RUSIs across Australia are now represented on the National Board, except for WA and the ACT. Communication between the National Board and the RUSIs has improved. I strongly support this work – a strong national body is essential for the long-term viability of the RUSIs.

Finally, I wish to congratulate, our Vice-Patron, Rear Admiral Jonathan Mead, AM, RAN, Commander Australian Fleet, who will be appointed as Chief of Joint Capability on promotion to Vice Admiral from November 2020.

Paul Irving

AC, QC, Governor of New South Wales
The compulsory call-out of Army reservists in January 2020

As detailed on p. 7, on 3 January 2020, Senator the Honourable Linda Reynolds CSC, Minister for Defence, herself an Army Reserve brigadier, announced that the National Security Committee of Cabinet had recommended, and the Governor-General had approved, the compulsory call-out of up to 3000 Army reservists from the 4th, 5th, 9th and 17th Brigades to play a key role in Operation Bushfire Assist 2019-20.

The Minister stressed that the compulsory call-out powers had never been invoked previously, but she did not explain why it was necessary to invoke them on this occasion. Given that it is expected that some reservists will deploy voluntarily on all operations and that this call-out was well short of a call-out of all reservists, the Minister's announcement led to speculation that the compulsory call-out may have been motivated by factors other than operational necessity.

While I am not privy to the National Security Committee's deliberations, I can think of several reasons why a compulsory call-out might have been necessary for this particular operation:

- the Army Reserve's standing commitment for immediate voluntary call-out under Army's three-year readiness cycle (Plan Beersheba) is only one battalion group, whereas it was assessed that three brigade groups were needed urgently on this occasion;
- there likely was a desire, indeed a necessity given the urgency, to call out complete formation headquarters, units and sub-units rather than individual volunteers from which ad hoc headquarters, units and sub-units could be formed;
- there were already many Army reservists fighting the fires or providing disaster relief in their civilian capacities as firefighters, police officers, emergency services staff, hospital medical staff, Red Cross workers and the like, and these personnel would have to be exempted from the compulsory call-out, reducing the pool of reservists available;
- there were probably some reservists already on full-time service at home and/or deployed on operations abroad, reducing further the pool of reservists immediately available for voluntary call out; and
- there would be a need to have employers release their reservist employees for full-time service urgently.

This crisis also may have been seen as a good opportunity to evaluate the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of the relatively-new call-out powers under the Defence Reserve Service (Protection) Act 2001. Indeed, a combination of the above reasons may well have informed the decision. Let us consider the matter in more detail.

Most of the Army Reserve is split between the 2nd Division, which, inter alia, contains five light infantry brigades (4th Brigade, Victoria; 5th Brigade, New South Wales; 9th Brigade, South Australia and Tasmania; 11th Brigade, Queensland; and 13th Brigade, Western Australia) and Special Forces Command which contains the 1st Commando Regiment. The five light-infantry brigades, between them, provide three ad hoc light-infantry battalion groups, known as battle groups, each year to reinforce the Regular Army's three combat brigades under a reset (individual training), readying (collective training), and ready (immediately deployable) three-year cycle, such that one of the three battle groups is available for operational deployment at short notice at any time.

These ‘reinforcing battle groups’ have a strength of around 800 – 1000 personnel so, if the ‘ready’ battle group alone had been called out, it would have provided, at best, a third of the troops estimated to be needed for this operation. Further, it would come without a formation headquarters which would be needed as the basis for a joint task force headquarters.

Secondly, while reserve brigade headquarters have not been employed on warfighting operations since World War II, there is established precedent for employing them successfully to command and control disaster relief operations at home. An example is Operation Victoria Bushfire Assist in February 2009 when Headquarters 4th Brigade, which is Victoria-based, managed the disaster response. In the 2020 bushfire response, it was assessed, quite reasonably, that three of the five reserve brigade headquarters would be needed to manage state-based responses in their respective jurisdictions. The responses needed to be state-based because, within the Australian federation, the respective state emergency services have the powers and responsibility to combat bushfires and provide disaster relief. The ADF's role is to assist, within its capabilities and capacity, as requested by the states.

Further, as with all ADF joint operations, the three brigade commanders, in their capacity as joint task force commanders, would work to, and be co-ordinated by, Headquarters Joint Operations Command at Bungendore, where a two-star officer, Major General Justin Ellwood, had been appointed in December to co-ordinate Operation Bushfire Assist. General Ellwood would draw on resources from across the ADF as needed to enable the three state-based joint task forces to perform their missions.

It is too early to draw up a comprehensive list of lessons learned from the compulsory call-out of reservists for Operation Bushfire Assist, but the call-out appears to have proceeded satisfactorily overall, and was warmly welcomed by the supported agencies and affected communities at the time. Several lessons, though, have already emerged and no doubt many more will follow as various post-operation inquiries report their findings.

Perhaps the most important lesson to emerge to date relates to the manner of the announcement of the compulsory call-out by the Commonwealth Government. The announcement caught the New South Wales Government – and especially its Rural Fire Commissioner, the official responsible for fighting the fires – by surprise, and it did so...
on the most difficult day of the emergency. Notwithstanding that the ADF had been working with state officials for more than a month, the states had not been consulted on, nor warned in advance of, the compulsory call-out or of how the troops would be employed. This was particularly unhelpful when the states held the relevant constitutional powers, not the Commonwealth – some initially saw it as an attempted Commonwealth Government takeover. It is a measure of the leaders involved on both sides that the issue was quickly rectified and no lasting damage was done. Such a mis-communication and co-ordination lapse, however, must not be repeated in any future emergency.

This high-level lapse notwithstanding, the impression gained by people I have spoken to who had firsthand experience of the delivery of Operation Bushfire Assist on the ground in New South Wales, was that Defence delivered in excess of community expectations.

David Leece¹

LETTER

The 2019-20 bushfires and COVID-19 crises

What lessons have we learned so far from the bushfire and COVID-19 crises? I am sure there are many, but three immediately come to mind.

Firstly, the National Cabinet concept seems to be a useful and sound way to gain a national, bipartisan consensus in a crisis, given the limited powers of the federal government, the sovereignty of states and their primacy in bushfire and health management under the Australian constitution.

Secondly, where reservists concurrently hold senior executive positions in both the ADF and in the public or private sectors, the compulsory call-out powers can produce some interesting challenges for their civil employers. I know of one senior state government official who has been away for weeks deployed first on Operation Bushfire Assist and now on Operation COVID-19 Assist. This has caused considerable disruption in his department. Perhaps, though, many businesses now are happy to ‘lend’ their staff to the ADF.

Thirdly, inter-agency communication failures are to be expected, especially at the outset of a crisis. The key question is how to deal with them quickly without lasting damage to working relationships. Exchanges of liaison officers can help avoid/resolve such issues. People who are members of both the ADF and the other agency concerned would be potentially suitable for liaison duty, but their possible conflicts of interest would need to be thought through carefully.

Lieutenant Colonel Ken Broadhead RFD (Ret’d)
Wahroonga NSW, 11 April 2020

INSTITUTE NEWS

Upcoming Events

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, currently it is not possible to hold lunchtime-lectures at the Anzac Memorial, Hyde Park South, Sydney. Lectures, instead, are being pre-recorded on video and may be accessed via our website at [www.rusinsw.org.au/site/Videos.php] and via our YouTube channel [www.rusinsw.org.au/YouTube]. Papers based on the lectures will continue to be published in United Service in the usual way. The monthly lunchtime-lectures in the The Auditorium, Anzac Memorial, Hyde Park South, Sydney, will re-commence once government authorities advise it is safe to resume them. Planned forthcoming lectures are:

June Video/Lunchtime-Lecture
Tuesday, 23 June 2020
Speaker: Professor Tanya Monro
Chief Defence Scientist
Subject: “The relevance to Australia’s security of big Moon shots”

July Video/Lunchtime-Lecture
Tuesday, 28 July 2020
Speaker: Admiral Chris Barrie AC (Ret’d)
Chief of the Defence Force, 1998 - 2002
Subject: “Why climate change is an important component of national security”

August Video/Lunchtime-Lecture
Tuesday, 25 August 2020
Speaker: Dr Gorana Grgic
United States Studies Centre
University of Sydney
Subject: “The state of trans-Atlantic relations: The United States and Europe”

BEQUESTS

Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies
New South Wales, Incorporated

The Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, New South Wales, Incorporated, was established in 1888. It seeks to promote understanding of defence and national security. Membership is available to anyone interested.

The Institute undertakes research and provides policy advice arising therefrom to government; schedules regular lectures, seminars and conferences; maintains a specialist library and a website which gives it a global reach; publishes a quarterly professional journal, a monthly defence and security e-newsletter, and fortnightly events notices; and arranges visits to sites of interest.

To allow us to continue to provide services to members and the community into the future, you could assist greatly by remembering the Institute in your will. The Institute should be referred to as the “Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, New South Wales, Incorporated [ABN 80 724 654 162]”. Should you desire assistance with adding an appropriate codicil to your will, please contact the Institute’s office manager on (02) 8262 2922. If you have added a bequest to your will, please let us know in case we need to communicate with you or your executors.

¹Dr David Leece is editor of United Service. These are his personal views.
BACKGROUND BRIEFING

Recent provision of military assistance to civil authorities in Australia

David Leece

The Australian Defence Force assisted the Australian community during the major bushfires and then the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2019-20. This briefing explains the difference between ‘aid to the civil power’ and ‘assistance to the civil community’, and the constitutional basis for providing such assistance. It then summarises the assistance provided up to mid-May 2020.

Key words: Australia; Australian Defence Force; aid to the civil power; assistance to the civil community; Operation Bushfire Assist 2019-2020; Operation COVID-19 Assist.

Types of Assistance Military Forces May Render to Civil Authorities

In a democracy, the primary role of the defence forces of a nation-state is external security – to deter or, if necessary, to defend the state and its interests from aggression by other nation-states; or to assist neighbours and other allies to protect their territory and interests. As deterrence requires a contemporary high-end warfighting capability, high-end warfighting becomes the primary mission for which the defence forces train.

In contrast, the primary responsibility for internal security, including maintenance of law and order, normally rests with the civil authorities and their civilian agencies, such as police and emergency services. At times, though, the civil authorities become overwhelmed by their security responsibilities and seek military assistance to meet the challenges the civil authorities face. Such military assistance to civil authorities can be categorised either as:

- **aid to the civil power** – where it is for law enforcement purposes, *i.e.* paramilitary missions beyond the capacity or capability of the civilian police forces – it can include riot control, counter-terrorism, border protection, peacekeeping and peace enforcement tasks; or as

- **assistance to the civil community** – where it is for provision of humanitarian assistance and/or disaster relief during or following earthquakes, hurricanes, droughts, floods, bushfires, medical emergencies and the like.

The warfighting skills maintained by the Australian Defence Force (ADF) usually are directly transferable to paramilitary missions, although additional training in relevant law and the rules of engagement applicable to the mission may be needed pre-deployment. As an example, the Front Cover of this issue shows Royal Australian Navy (RAN) clearance divers, who in this instance are posted to the 2nd Commando Regiment, training for counter-terrorism operations – namely, to board a hijacked ship while it is underway.

While the ADF usually does not train for fighting bushfires or emergency management, many of their skills, capabilities and equipment can be very useful to civil authorities dealing with emergencies, such as provision of: command and control; communications; intelligence; reconnaissance and surveillance; light infantry manpower; engineering; medical; movement and transport (maritime, land and air); and other logistics support (including food, water and emergency accommodation). The RAN’s three amphibious ships, for example, are designed to deliver such assistance both around Australia’s coastline and to the island states in our neighbourhood; and, in particular, have excellent on-board medical facilities.

In the first two decades of this century, the ADF has been called on numerous times to provide both aid to the civil power and assistance to the civil community, both at home and abroad – the frequency of disaster relief requests, in particular, having increased as the impact of climate change on severe weather events has become more pronounced.

Most of these missions have been joint ones (*i.e.* have utilised all three Services in a joint task force specifically designed, staffed and equipped for the mission) and have involved both permanent (full-time) service-people and part-time reservists on full-time service for the duration of the emergency. Indeed, the civilian skills of reservists – doctors, nurses, engineers, tradesmen, lawyers, administrators and the like – often prove invaluable on such missions.

So far this year, the ADF has been formally asked to provide ‘assistance to the civil community’ in Australia twice: for Operation Bushfire Assist 2019-2020; and for Operation COVID-19 Assist.

Relations between the Commonwealth and State Governments in Australia

The term “Australian Government” is very useful when describing relations between Australia and foreign countries. It is less helpful when used within Australia which, while constituting a single nation-state, is internally a federation containing seven sovereign governments – the governments of the six states and the “Government of the Commonwealth of Australia”. Internally, when intergovernmental arrangements are being discussed, the “Government of the Commonwealth of Australia” is usually best described in short-hand as the “Commonwealth Government” or the “federal government” or simply as the “Commonwealth” (the term used in the Australian

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1 Dr David Leece is editor of *United Service*. These are his personal views.

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The primary responsibility for fighting the fires and managing the crisis rested with the relevant state/territory authorities. Reinforcements from all over Australia were called in to assist in fighting the fires and to relieve exhausted local volunteer firefighters. Firefighters, supplies and equipment also from Canada, New Zealand, Singapore and the United States, among others, helped fight the fires, especially in New South Wales.

**ADF assistance**

Up to December 2019, the Commonwealth Government played no active role but its emergency management agencies, including ADF, responded to requests to the Commonwealth from the states for assistance. Indeed, the ADF began assisting the Queensland authorities in September.

On 5 December, Defence appointed Major General Justin Ellwood as Emergency ADF National Support Coordinator to work in support of state and territory authorities. Concurrently, the ADF commenced **Operation Bushfire Assist** to support state fire services in logistics, planning and operational support. Activities the ADF undertook included:

- Air Force aircraft transporting firefighters and their equipment interstate;
- Army and Navy helicopters transporting firefighters, conducting night fire mapping, impact assessments and search and rescue flights;
- use of various defence facilities as co-ordination and information centres and for catering and accommodation for firefighters;
- liaison between state and federal government agencies;
- reloading and refuelling of waterbombing aircraft;
- deployment of personnel to assess fire damage and severity; and
- provision of humanitarian supplies.

Additionally, 23 reservists were compulsorily called-out in Queensland and placed on continuous full-time service from 28 November to 7 December as reinforcements for Operation Bushfire Assist in that state. This was done as a validation exercise in the event that a much larger call-out of reservists would be needed later in the bushfire season – as eventuated on 3 January 2020.

On 31 December, the Defence Minister announced the ADF would support the isolated high-fire-risk town of Mallacoota in East Gippsland, Victoria, with aircraft (helicopters (including a CH-47 Chinook) and C-27J Spartan military transport aircraft from their base at RAAF

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3The information which follows on Operation Bushfire Assist is a synopsis of Department of Defence media releases.
On 1 January 2020, the ADF established Joint Task Force 646 in Victoria, based on the Army Reserve’s 4th Brigade. The following day, it established Joint Task Force 1111 in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, based on the Army Reserve’s 5th Brigade. Two days later, it established Joint Task Force 1111 in South Australia and Tasmania, based on the Army Reserve’s 9th Brigade. These three Army Reserve brigades were to command and control all ADF assets in the jurisdictions that they were supporting by providing civil aid (humanitarian, medical, civil emergency) and disaster assistance as needed. The three brigades had four key priorities:

- to provide isolated communities with supplies for immediate relief;
- to provide evacuation for vulnerable people in isolated communities;
- to assist with assessments and re-opening of vital roads; and
- to assist fire services with preparation of fire breaks away from the fire fronts.

On 3 January (with effect from 4 January), the government also announced the compulsory call-out of all Army Reservists in the 4th, 5th and 9th Brigades, as well as reserve logistic elements from 17th Sustainment Brigade, while exempting those members of those brigades who were already contributing to the bushfire response in their civilian capacities as firefighters, police, emergency service staff, Red Cross workers and the like. It was anticipated that the compulsory call-out would involve up to 3000 reserve personnel full-time to man the 4th, 5th and 9th Brigades and otherwise enable the ADF response to be sustained for the duration of the crisis.

Additionally, on 4 January, Defence announced that it would deploy the amphibious ship, HMAS _Adelaide_, to support other Navy ships in evacuations and relief, as well as additional Chinook helicopters and military transport aircraft to RAAF Base East Sale. The same day, Chinook helicopters evacuated civilians from Omeo; and Spartan aircraft evacuated civilians from Mallacoota on 5 January.

By 11 January, the bushfire crisis had become the ADF’s main effort, with several thousand full-time and reserve personnel providing direct support in the field, at sea, in the air and from Defence bases across fire-affected regions. The three joint task forces were now in full operation. They were utilising about 2000 reservists, drawing support elements from across the ADF as needed and were supporting emergency management agencies in the following jurisdictions:

- **Victoria** – JTF 646, based on the 4th Brigade located at RAAF Base East Sale;
- **New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory** – JTF 1110, based on the 5th Brigade located at Holsworthy Barracks, Sydney; and
- **South Australia and Tasmania** – JTF 1111, based on the 9th Brigade located at Keswick Barracks, Adelaide.

On 27 January, the Prime Minister announced that the compulsory call-out of reservists would revert to a voluntary call-out on 7 February.

By mid-March, the emergency response phase of the operation had ended. Now, the ADF was contributing to the recovery operations, although it remained postured to mobilise its forces quickly in response to emerging threats and emergencies. About 200 ADF personnel, including about 100 reservists, were still supporting Operation Bushfire Assist.

Major General Ellwood remained the Emergency ADF National Support Co-ordinator, working with local, state and territory authorities to determine where support was most needed, which he continued to provide through three enhanced Emergency Support Forces:

- **Victoria** – 4th Brigade, now located at Simpson Barracks, Melbourne;
- **New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory** – 5th Brigade at Holsworthy Barracks, Sydney; and
- **South Australia and Tasmania** – 9th Brigade at Keswick Barracks, Adelaide.

Further, Air Force continued to provide air transport support, moving personnel and cargo across all states using the C-17 Globemaster, C-130J Hercules and C-27J Spartan transport aircraft. The amphibious ship, HMAS _Canberra_, was now the designated humanitarian assistance vessel and was available to provide support if required. ADF bases across the nation had resumed normal operations, but continued to provide food, accommodation and general logistics support to forces involved in Operation Bushfire Assist.

International support to Operation Bushfire Assist had, by now, concluded. It had been provided by the New Zealand Defence Force, the Republic of Singapore Air Force, the Japanese Self-Defence Force, the Papua New Guinea Defence Force, the United States Air Force, the Indonesian National Armed Forces, and the Royal Canadian Air Force.

The following statistics provide a snapshot of ADF contributions to Operation Bushfire Assist (up to 12 March 2020):

- length of roads cleared: 4848km;
- length of fences cleared/repaired: 1286.5km;
- length of firebreaks cleared: 240km;
customised support to the state/territory authorities, re-
delivering the support via seven state-and territory-based
through Emergency Management Australia and is
writing (mid-May), is ongoing.

involved, pandemic and the whole-of-government effort. This
Frewen to co-ordinate Defence’s internal response to the
COVID-19 task force led by Lieutenant General John

Plan'; and providing logistics and specialist staff to the
Communicable Disease Incidence of National Significance
Management Australia-led planning for the 'National

rapidly among humans since January 2020. By April, it had
reached pandemic level in the global human population.
By 11 May, some 4.64 million people had contracted the
disease globally, of whom 312,000 had died.

ADF Operation COVID-19 Assist is the ADF’s
contribution to Australia’s whole-of-government effort to
address the COVID-19 pandemic. It commenced in March
2020 led by Major General Paul Kenny, and, at the time of
writing (mid-May), is ongoing.

The ADF is co-ordinating its provision of support
through Emergency Management Australia and is
delivering the support via seven state-and territory-based
ADF task groups. These task groups are providing
customised support to the state/territory authorities, re-
inforning and expanding their capacity to respond to the
pandemic.

By 21 April, some 2000 ADF members were providing
support, including:

- providing contact tracing and planning support
teams to all state and territory governments;
- supporting police and other law enforcement
agencies with mandatory quarantine arrangements
for international air arrivals; and
- embedding more than 100 ADF and Defence
civilian personnel in various federal agencies,
including the Department of Home Affairs and
Services Australia.

Additionally, the ADF had established an internal
COVID-19 task force led by Lieutenant General John
Frewen to co-ordinate Defence’s internal response to the
pandemic and the whole-of-government effort. This
involved, inter alia, the ADF supporting the Emergency
Management Australia-led planning for the ‘National
Communicable Disease Incidence of National Significance
Plan’; and providing logistics and specialist staff to the
Department of Health, including clinical and epidemi-
ological staff to the National Incident Room.

1 A zoonotic disease is one that is normally resident in animals but can be
transmitted to humans. A coronavirus is one of a group of ribonucleic acid
viruses that cause diseases in mammals and birds.

2 The information which follows on Operation COVID-19 Assist is a synop-
sis of Department of Defence media releases.

3 It was formally announced by the Defence Minister on 1 April 2020.

4 The information which follows on Operation COVID-19 Assist is a synop-
sis of Department of Defence media releases.

As of 8 May 2020, approximately 2000 personnel
remained deployed on Operation COVID-19 Assist nation-
wide. As an example of the customised support provided
to the states and territories, in Queensland:

- 156 ADF personnel were supporting Queensland
Police with Queensland border controls;
- 70 personnel were assisting Queensland Police to
protect Indigenous communities;
- 60 personnel were conducting self-isolation
compliance checks;
- 27 personnel were assisting Queensland Police
with the reception of international arrivals at air-
ports; and
- 16 personnel were involved in planning support
and contact tracing teams.

Defence remained well-positioned to scale-up support
to federal, state and territory agencies, as needed, for the
duration of this effort. The ADF, however, will not be
authorised as law enforcement officers as this remains the
responsibility of the states and territories.

Conclusion

Of the types of assistance that the ADF is called on
to give to civil authorities from time to time, aid to the civil
power is a part of its pre-1901 colonial heritage and
assistance to the civil community has become increasingly
important in the last 75 years.

While the constitutional and legal distinctions between
them are quite clear at the theoretical level, in practice they
can become blurred at the interface. An example is when
ADF personnel are asked to assist police with a policing
function when operating under an ‘assistance to the civil
community’ legal framework as occurred at times during
Operation COVID-19 Assist. If this is to become a more
regular occurrence, then more attention to the relevant
powers may be warranted.
Today, I will share with you the findings of a just completed, year-long study undertaken to assess the reforms of China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) initiated in 2015-16 and the implications of those reforms for Australia. The study’s particular focus was the development of the PLA’s capabilities in conducting joint operations, and deterrent and coercive operations, across multiple domains (land, sea, air, missile, outer space and cyber space).

Background to the PLA Reforms

In late 2015, the PLA launched the most sweeping and potentially transformative reorganisation in its history as part of a multi-decade reform process commenced in the mid-1990s. According to Beijing’s own schedule, this military modernisation process will “comprehensively enhance the modernisation of military theory, organisation, personnel, and weapons and equipment” by 2035 and build the PLA into a “world-class military” by 2049, 30 years from now, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China.

The reforms were undertaken for two key reasons. The first reason centres on the role of the PLA. The PLA is meant to be, first and foremost, the army of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It should provide the power of the gun to ensure the CCP’s legitimacy and survival. However, when Xi Jinping came to power as China’s paramount leader in 2012, he considered the PLA had become too independent and corrupt under the former national leadership, so the reform programme was introduced to reassert and strengthen the CCP’s control over the Chinese armed forces.

The second, more operational, reason for reform was to transform the PLA from a bloated and corrupt force with little wartime experience into a force increasingly capable of deterring attack on the mainland, protecting Chinese claims of sovereignty (say in the South China Sea or towards Taiwan) and, if necessary, fighting intensive, technologically-sophisticated conflicts against advanced adversaries, such as the United States or Japan, and doing so farther from Chinese shores.

The Study’s Topline Findings

China is a continental power trying to become a maritime power. A large portion of the PLA, however, remains focused on deterrence, continental defence and defence of Chinese claims within the ‘first island chain’. We expect that, over the next 5 – 15 years, with a strengthened PLA Navy, Chinese military activity will expand beyond the first island chain up to the second island chain and beyond, increasing its footprint in the Southwest Pacific and the Indian Oceans. This longer-term strategic requirement for the PLA to project power beyond its own shores requires the PLA to modernise and expand its military capacity and capability.

Background to the PLA Reforms

In late 2015, the PLA launched the most sweeping and potentially transformative reorganisation in its history as part of a multi-decade reform process commenced in the mid-1990s. According to Beijing’s own schedule, this military modernisation process will “comprehensively enhance the modernisation of military theory, organisation, personnel, and weapons and equipment” by 2035 and build the PLA into a “world-class military” by 2049, 30 years from now, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China.

The reforms were undertaken for two key reasons.

The first reason centres on the role of the PLA. The PLA is meant to be, first and foremost, the army of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It should provide the power of the gun to ensure the CCP’s legitimacy and survival. However, when Xi Jinping came to power as China’s paramount leader in 2012, he considered the PLA had become too independent and corrupt under the former national leadership, so the reform programme was introduced to reassert and strengthen the CCP’s control over the Chinese armed forces.

The second, more operational, reason for reform was to transform the PLA from a bloated and corrupt force with little wartime experience into a force increasingly capable of deterring attack on the mainland, protecting Chinese claims of sovereignty (say in the South China Sea or towards Taiwan) and, if necessary, fighting intensive, technologically-sophisticated conflicts against advanced adversaries, such as the United States or Japan, and doing so farther from Chinese shores.

The Study’s Topline Findings

China is a continental power trying to become a maritime power. A large portion of the PLA, however, remains focused on deterrence, continental defence and defence of Chinese claims within the ‘first island chain’. We expect that, over the next 5 – 15 years, with a strengthened PLA Navy, Chinese military activity will expand beyond the first island chain up to the second island chain and beyond, increasing its footprint in the Southwest Pacific and the Indian Oceans. This longer-term strategic requirement for the PLA to project power beyond its own shores requires the PLA to modernise and expand its military capacity and capability.

Key words: Asia-Pacific; China; People’s Liberation Army (PLA); PLA reforms; PLA Army; PLA Navy; PLA Air Force; PLA Rocket Force; PLA Strategic Support Force; United States; Australia.

Endnotes

1Email: bates.gill@mq.edu.au
2Bates Gill, Dennis Blasko, Adam Ni and Ben Schreer (2020). Assessing the ambitious reform plans of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army: progress, problems, and prospects. Report submitted to the Australian Department of Defence, 31 March 2020. The research was conducted with the financial support of the Australian Department of Defence Strategic Policy Grants Programme. The views expressed in the report are those of the authors.

3The ‘first island chain’ refers to the first chain of major archipelagos to the east of the East Asian mainland (Map 1). It encloses the Sea of Okhotsk, the Sea of Japan, the East China Sea, and the South China Sea. The chain runs south from Sakhalin Island though the Kuril Islands, the Japanese Archipelago, the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, and the north-western Philippines, across northern Borneo to the Malay Peninsula. The ‘second island chain’ encloses the Philippines Sea and runs south from Yokohama (Japan), through Guam and Palau, to the north-west tip of New Guinea.
power beyond the first and second island chains and into the Pacific and Indian Oceans raises serious questions and concerns about China’s defence posture and strategic objectives. It will certainly have implications for the Australian Defence Force (ADF) by 2035 and beyond.

The above notwithstanding, China’s military leaders recognise and speak openly about significant obstacles in the quest to build a “world-class military”, particularly in combat leadership, warfighting capability and Party loyalty. But we expect the reforms to proceed and more adjustments to be made to structure and doctrine as new technology transforms the PLA to a far more capable force between 2035 and 2049.

By 2035, we expect that the PLA will have:
- extended its anti-access/area-denial envelope further beyond the first island chain;
- enhanced its long-range strike capabilities, including having acquired hypersonic weapons capable of reaching Australia;
- advanced undersea and amphibious warfighting capacities, because both will be needed in warfighting within and beyond the first island chain; and
- significantly improved its capabilities in military operations in cyber-space – whether used for cyber espionage, cyber attack, cyber disruptive activities, even political and information warfare – and outer space operations.

So, given this 15-year timeframe to 2035, ADF planning for United States-led or other ally-led coalition operations or operations conducted independently by the ADF, must anticipate a much higher threat environment in contingencies involving the PLA, especially within the first island chain and ramping up the closer one gets to China’s close-in maritime areas and the Chinese mainland.

**PLA Reform – Specific Findings**

**Obstacles:** The PLA’s ambitions are high, but so are the obstacles to their attainment. Indeed, China’s top leadership repeatedly calls on the PLA to overcome problems, often phrased in pithy slogans (like ‘bumper stickers’) directed to commanders and units to show them where they need to improve – slogans such as: “two incompatibles”; “two inabilities”; “two big gaps”; “three whethers”; “five/incapables [cannots]”; and “peace disease”, “peace habits” or “peacetime practices [or problems]”.

**Warfighting expertise and leadership:** The pithy slogans criticise PLA warfighting capabilities and operational leadership and at times cast some doubt on whether the armed forces have sufficient ideological zeal and fealty toward the CCP. They suggest that, in the near term, the Chinese political and military leadership may lack confidence as to PLA capabilities against advanced militaries such as the United States, remembering that the PLA has not fought in combat since the mid-1980s when it was involved in border skirmishes with Vietnam (following its disastrous, short-lived invasion of Vietnam in 1979). This lack of warfighting experience is one the PLA leadership surely recognises. They realise they have to overcome it with more realistic training as they prepare the PLA for the conflicts that they anticipate will occur in the decades ahead.

**Manpower proficiency:** The study also found that the PLA has much “hardware” coming on line, but new “software” is lagging. PLA modernisation increasingly is more dependent on human factors than equipment and technology. Accordingly, there has been a recent focus on recruitment and training to develop initial crew and small unit proficiency; and, separately, on refining operational concepts, doctrine and procedures so as to establish the ability for the new systems to function effectively with others within task forces, strike groups and other joint formations.

**Headquarters and staffs:** To this end, since 2015, the PLA also has established new joint theatre and operational headquarters. Joint operations are an entirely new concept for the PLA, so, obviously, the PLA will experience growing pains and missteps in bringing them into effect. The new headquarters are now focused on training staffs to plan and control complex operations using new equipment and procedures that have never been tested in combat.

**High-level joint exercises:** So, the PLA has been working from both the bottom up to develop proficient small units which can use the new equipment, and from
the top down to develop headquarters and staffs able to plan and control the application of this combat power in a joint setting. In integrating these two approaches, some larger-scale combined-arms joint exercises have been conducted since 2016 with a view to evaluating how well the headquarters and units function together, but the number of large exercises has decreased significantly from pre-reform levels. We were expecting, that, from 2020 forward, an increasing number of major exercises would be conducted to further refine structure and doctrine. The impact, however, of the current COVID-19 disease pandemic on PLA recruitment and training, may put these plans back a year or more.

**Redistribution of personnel within the Chinese armed forces:** The new strategic focus on operations up to and beyond the second island chain has necessitated a reduction in personnel across all the Chinese armed forces, not just the PLA, and a redistribution of the retained personnel among the various forces and, within the PLA, its services (Table 1). We estimate that the post-reform PLA currently comprises some 2 million Active Duty personnel (including uniformed civilian cadres), of which the Army comprises >50 per cent; the Navy (including 40,000 marines) 12.5 per cent; the Air Force (including airborne) 20 per cent; the Rocket Force 6 per cent; the Strategic Support Force 6 per cent; the Joint Logistics Support Force 8 per cent; the Reserves 16 per cent; and the People's Armed Police 9 per cent. In addition, there are some 500,000 Reserves; up to 40,000 Contract Civilians; and perhaps 500,000 People's Armed Police (including the Coast Guard). The total of these armed forces (PLA, Reserves, People's Armed Police, and contract civilians) is believed to exceed 3 million. As well as the PLA, China also has a Militia of some 8 million personnel.

**Specific Findings Related to Individual Services**

**PLA Army** (PLAA): The Army is the service facing the biggest challenges. It is the least modern component of the PLA and felt the most “pain” in the recent reforms. It was significantly downsized during the reforms, but it remains the largest service (>50 per cent of the PLA – one reason why the PLA structure remains focused on continental defence). It has undergone manpower cuts and cuts to its traditionally dominant political role, while seeking to develop new capabilities to contribute to joint maritime and air operations. Many units still consist of large percentages of conscripts and legacy equipment. Border and coastal defence units comprise some 10-20 per cent of the Army.

**PLA Navy** (PLAN): Organisationaly, the Navy is gaining in strength and resources and is speeding up its transition from near seas defence to “far seas protection missions” in line with China’s longer-term strategic objectives. To this end also, the Marine Corps, which is part of the Navy, has been significantly expanded. Nevertheless, about 30 per cent of Navy personnel remain shore-based e.g. coastal defence units. Operationally, the Navy is improving its deterrence and warfighting posture within the first island chain, but its far seas and expeditionary capability is not yet at “world-class military” standard. The Navy operates China’s only overseas base – in Djibouti, which became operational in 2017 to support the PLAN’s anti-piracy and escort missions in the Gulf of Aden.

**PLA Air Force** (PLAAF): The Air Force is improving, but is lagging in key areas. It has a large number of platforms, but 30-40 per cent of fighters, fighter-bombers and bombers are legacy aircraft, in some cases dating back to the 1960s and 1970s. It has been tasked to accelerate the transition from homeland air defence to offshore offensive and defensive missions, but this will take some time as, for such tasks, it has pronounced weaknesses in aerial refuelling and strategic airlift. The majority of the PLA airborne and long-range surface-to-air missile forces are assigned to the Air Force.

**PLA Rocket Force** (PLARF): Previously called the Second Artillery, the Rocket Force has gained status, resources and a new mandate under the reforms. It has been promoted to the status of a fully-fledged service arm co-equal to the PLAA, PLAN, and PLAAF, with increased manpower and, with its conventional and nuclear missile forces, an increasingly critical role for PLA deterrence and warfighting strategies.

- It is equipped with one of the world’s largest and most diverse arrays of conventional and cruise missiles. It also has a relatively small (by United States and Russian standards), but increasingly reliable, nuclear capability.

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*The Chinese People’s Armed Police Force (PAP) is a paramilitary police force primarily responsible for internal security, riot control, anti-terrorism, law enforcement, and maritime rights protection in China, as well as providing support to the PLA Army during wartime.

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Table 1: Chinese armed forces personnel numbers and distribution by service post the 2018 reforms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Estimated number of personnel</th>
<th>% of Active Force</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Duty PLA</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Includes uniformed civilian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>915,000</td>
<td>&gt;50</td>
<td>Includes Airborne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>250,000</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>Includes 40,000 Marines (3% of Active Force)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Force</td>
<td>395,000</td>
<td>19.75</td>
<td>Includes 1,000 marines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocket Force</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Includes 6,000 marines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Support Force</td>
<td>155,000</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>Includes 1,500 marines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Logistics Support Force</td>
<td>85,000</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>Includes 2,500 marines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserves</td>
<td>310,000 (7)</td>
<td>Old number; no recent reporting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract Civilian Personnel</td>
<td>49,000 (7)</td>
<td>Not Active Duty, previously 20,000, but undergoing expansion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People's Armed Police (PAP)</td>
<td>3,650,000 (7)</td>
<td>Approximately 2,500 without the PAP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total PLA: Active, Reserves, Civilians and PAP</td>
<td>8,000,000 (7)</td>
<td>2018 number - no recent reporting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note

1. The post-reduction PLA-wide estimated distribution of officers and enlisted personnel is:
   - Officers and uniformed Civilian Cadre = 450,000 (23% of PLA),
   - Non-commissioned Officers = 830,000 (42% of PLA), and
   - Conscripts = 700,000 (35% of PLA).
2. The actual distribution varies by type of unit.
- Its nuclear and conventional forces have improved over the last 10-15 years as to firepower, mobility, survivability and accuracy; but, while their C4ISR\(^*\) for targeting and communications is improving, it remains unproven in warfare.
- The U.S. Department of Defense recently noted that China now has a second-strike nuclear capability (i.e. it would be able to survive a massive nuclear strike and deliver a nuclear response) which ensures its nuclear deterrent standing vis-à-vis the United States.

It is now the intention of the PLA to develop two other legs of a “nuclear triad” which would include the Navy and the Air Force and it is anticipated that the Rocket Force may have a role in developing nuclear capabilities for the PLAN and PLAAF.

**PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF):** The Strategic Support Force is newly-established and one of the most important elements of the PLA going forward. It consolidates the PLA’s cyber, electronic, space and information warfare capabilities which formerly resided in the Army (mainly), Navy and Air Force. It has two roles:

- The first role is to provide operational and tactical support in its areas of expertise to the Army, Navy, Air Force and Rocket Force; and to enable joint operations by providing strategic information support through space and network-based capabilities – communications, navigation, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and the protection of military information infrastructure.
- The second role is an independent mission of its own, viz. to conduct strategic information operations in the cyber and outer space domains – space and counter-space missions; cyber attack, cyber espionage, cyber disruption; electromagnetic warfare; psychological warfare; disinformation, and the like.

So, this is a very modern, arguably the most advanced, part of the PLA and is at the forefront of the development of joint operations – through the integration of deterrence and warfighting capabilities across multiple domains. It will be ‘the pointy end of the spear’ in any future operations that the PLA undertakes.

**People’s Armed Police (PAP):** The PAP is a domestic security force and frees up the PLA to focus on external rather than internal security. The PAP is now solely under the command of the Central Military Commission and has taken over control of the Coast Guard. It has 32 internal defence units throughout the country. It now has two, centrally-controlled, national mobile units, plus mobile units in every province. The PAP’s former border defence, firefighting, gold mining, forestry, hydropower, and security guard units have been transferred to civilian government agencies.

\(^*\)C4ISR is a military acronym for command, control, communications and computers (C); information, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR).

**Study Methods**

The study made extensive use of publicly available, authoritative, Chinese-language sources. This was important because it enabled us to see what the Chinese leadership was saying to the PLA and what the PLA was saying internally, including its priorities, where progress is being made to date and what the continuing problems will be going forward.

The material examined included up-to-date details on the current state of the PLA reorganisation, including border and coastal defence forces and the People’s Armed Police units. Numerous charts provide details of PLA structures, capabilities and activities; and extensive details on the PLA Navy’s Gulf of Aden escort missions since December 2008 are also provided. Finally, a survey was conducted of outside experts – mostly former United States defence intelligence officials/analysts – comparing the United States and Chinese militaries across a range of land and maritime operational capabilities. At 117 pages, the report presents one of the most comprehensive and up-to-date open-source studies on this subject, and, if there is interest, I would be happy to make it available to you.

**Conclusion**

The study findings outlined herein assess the most up-to-date information available on the current reorganisation of the PLA which is scheduled for completion by 2035 as the basis for transforming the PLA into a “world-class” military by 2049. The PLA is working to transform from a bloated, corrupt and outdated force with a continental, defensive mindset to a world-class, 21\(^{st}\) century, expeditionary force able to project power up to and beyond the second island chain into the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The Army is being slimmed down, the Navy (including the Marines) is being expanded, new Rocket and Strategic Support Forces are being formed, and internal security and border protection responsibilities are being transferred to the People’s Armed Police backed up by the Militia. It is a very ambitious undertaking with many obstacles to overcome, but, if achieved, will pose a complex set of challenges to the United States and its allies, especially within the Asia-Pacific region.

**The Speaker:** Dr Bates Gill is Professor of Asia-Pacific Security Studies in the Department of Security Studies and Criminology, Macquarie University, Sydney. A China specialist and a Senior Associate Fellow of the Royal United Services Institute (London), he has been an educator, scholar, and policy advisor for 30 years, having held academic and research positions at world-leading universities and public policy research institutions in the United States, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific. His research interests include Chinese foreign, strategic, defence, and security policy; United States-China relations; and the role of the United States in the Asia-Pacific. He has produced more than 200 publications. [Photo of Dr Gill: Macquarie University]

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\(^*\)C4ISR is a military acronym for command, control, communications and computers (C); information, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR).
Australia’s Pacific policy: COVID-19, China and community

A paper based on what was to have been a presentation to the Institute on 28 April 2020 by

Graeme R. Dobell
Journalist Fellow, Australian Strategic Policy Institute

The South Pacific and Timor Leste are vital to Australia’s geostrategic interests. These island nation-states face five strategic challenges (in descending priority): human security and state security (including weak governments); climate change; natural disasters; natural resource management; and China. These challenges cannot be solved without Australia and New Zealand. As co-equals, Australia and its neighbours must build on their already strong bonds to develop a stronger, more capable Pacific community.

Key words: Australia; South Pacific island states; China; Pacific Community; foreign policy; Australia’s ‘Pacific step-up’; foreign aid.

Australia faces core questions about its interests, influence and values in the South Pacific. The COVID-19 pandemic and the aftermath of the April 2020 cyclone that hit Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands constitute the immediate crisis. China is a long-term test of power and governance in the islands. The issues of human and state security run through all dimensions.

Australia’s ambitious policy response is its ‘Pacific step-up’. The ultimate aim of the step-up, economic and security ‘integration’ with the islands, is so visionary it is almost out of sight, and it is seldom mentioned. Six reviews and inquiries are afoot as Australia seeks to take ‘our partnerships with the Pacific to a new level’. As ever, the islands know they need us, but it does not mean they have to like it, or us – or like their dependence.

Geostrategy in the South Pacific

Australia wants the power and the central place in the South Pacific. The need goes in both directions. We matter and what we do matters greatly. Australia’s security guarantee to the region does not buy much love, because it is a commitment to our interests as well as theirs.

Our deepest, oldest instinct in the South Pacific is strategic denial, striving to exclude other major powers. This instinct, now about 150 years old, was one driver for the six states to federate (with a specific mention in the Commonwealth constitution of Australia’s special role in the South Pacific).

Australia can never achieve dominance in the South Pacific, so the denial instinct is always beset by a faint, constant ache. The stage is too big; other powers always come to play. Australia is ever the frustrated, edgy hegemon. We face the familiar problem of Australian leadership – generating enough island followership. Australia’s influence in the islands is at times limited, and may even be declining (Wallis 2017a, 2017b; Hayward-Jones 2019).

The step-up is a positive policy responding to negative trends. Defence doctrine and foreign policy channel the old instinct with two primary propositions:

• Australia has vital interests in the South Pacific. As the 2017 foreign policy white paper puts it: “The stability and economic progress of Papua New Guinea, other Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste is of fundamental importance to Australia” (Foreign Affairs 2017: 99).

• Australia wants to be the principal security and economic partner of the South Pacific. It is an enduring statement of strategy, a geographic commandment, that no external power should have significant political influence or establish a military base in Papua New Guinea and the islands.

The Australia-New Zealand-South Pacific family relationship

Making the policy personal, Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s embrace of the ‘Pacific family’ is inspired imagery – I have called it diplomatic genius – to view the

*This paper draws on two previous papers (Dobell 2019a, 2020). Email: graemedobell@aspi.org.au

*The six Canberra inquiries are:

- a Defence Department review of defence strategy and capabilities;
- a Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade inquiry on a ‘new international development policy’ to support ‘security, stability, prosperity and resilience in the Indo-Pacific’; and
- four ‘Pacific step-up’ inquiries by the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade –
  - Australia’s defence relationships with Pacific island nations,
  - activating greater trade and investment with Pacific islands,
  - human rights of women and girls in the Pacific, and
  - strengthening Australia’s relationships with countries in the Pacific.

*The enduring strategic interest in preventing external powers from establishing a political or military role in the South Pacific runs through all seven of Australia’s Defence white papers since 1976 (https://www.defence.gov.au/WhitePaper/Links.asp). Previously, that commandment ran through all Australia’s strategic guidance papers from 1946 (Fruhling 2009).
Pacific family as an Australian promise, a pledge to do much more for Pacific people. A sceptical rendering of ‘family’ paints it as rebadged Australian paternalism/colonialism, based on the denial habit of thinking and China’s arrival. It was not coincidental that Scott Morrison’s ‘family’ speech, proclaiming a new chapter for Australia in the Pacific, was delivered at a military barracks in Queensland.

Geopolitics, however, isn’t the only element in the equation. Morrison’s vision is notable for its warmth and what it says about Australia as well as the islands:

“We are more than partners by choice. We are connected as members of a Pacific family. It’s why the first leaders I hosted in Australia as prime minister have been from Solomon Islands, Fiji and Papua New Guinea. It’s time to open, I believe, a new chapter in relations with our Pacific family. One based on respect, equality and openness. A relationship for its own sake, because it’s right. Because it’s who we are.”

Island perceptions of Australia and how it uses its power will do much to determine the success and reach of the step-up, and of Australia’s ambitious offer of economic and security integration. A striking element of the 2017 foreign policy white paper (Foreign Affairs 2017) was its embrace of ‘integration’ as a key objective:

“The Government is delivering a step-change in our engagement with Pacific island countries. This new approach recognises that more ambitious engagement by Australia, including helping to integrate Pacific countries into the Australian and New Zealand economies and our security institutions, is essential to the long-term stability and economic prospects of the Pacific. Our partnership with New Zealand will be central to advancing this agenda.”

If step-up is the process and policy integration is the aim, we are happy to talk about all the steps, just not the aim. Step-up is policy in action. Yet we cannot name where the steps are leading. Island sensitivities explain much of the integration silence. Equally, Australia is unsure about how far integration should go and how close the ultimate embrace should be – the policy grows as it goes along. The islands must decide what they need; Australia must see how much it can give. The South Pacific embrace is hesitant. Integration will be soft and slow, evolving over decades. Several factors combine to make integration a tough topic:

- climate change – as Hayward-Jones (2019) argues, “Australia is the principal aid donor and security partner in the region of the world most vulnerable to climate change, but has not exercised leadership on climate change in its diplomatic, aid or security planning”;
- the islands’ pride in their own sovereignty and identity;
- the old ‘neo’ fears—colonialist/imperialist – about Australian dominance; and
- lack of confidence in Australia, including a view that Canberra is just panicking about China.

As the chief of the Australian Defence Force has noted, different South Pacific perceptions “could impact our ability to influence their choices for support in the region” (Clark 2019). Ultimately, though, big problems demand big responses. And integrating Pacific countries into the Australian and New Zealand economies and our security institutions is essential to the long-term stability and economic prospects of the Pacific:

- hold the islands close to help hold them upright;
- rank the threats, risks and challenges the South Pacific faces; and then
- to balance the gloom, see the many qualities and strengths of islanders.

The Challenges Ahead

Ranking the challenges facing the Pacific islands must look beyond headlines to define what really matters. Using headlines, Canberra puts the China challenge near the top. Certainly, the South Pacific is passionate about climate change. Both are in the top five, but neither is on top, in my ordering of the South Pacific challenges:

1. human security and state security;
2. climate change;
3. natural disasters;
4. natural resources; and
5. China

Let us examine them in reverse order.

5. China

Canberra judges that China wants to become the dominant strategic power in the islands, with military reach and bases to match. This went from a matter of debate to the Canberra consensus about three years ago. As I put it in 2018: “Australia today sees its strategic interests in the South Pacific directly challenged by China” (Dobell 2018).

Not since World War II and the Cold War have the islands been so strategically relevant – and that is a view from the Pacific Islands Forum (Dobell 2019b). The region is waking to the China challenge. It is manageable. It has to be, because China offers plenty of upside, as the Australian economy attests.

Canberra worries about China’s ability to buy island elites. As the switch of diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China by Solomon Islands shows, Beijing can buy a government, but it is harder to buy a people and a country (Cavanough 2019). China has economic reach but little soft power (Herr 2019). Indeed, Australia needs to have confidence in our shared history with the South Pacific – the breadth, the depth and the intricate, strong linkages. The islands know how to bargain; they have been dealing with the arrival of big powers for 250 years. China is being judged on its performance and it is not winning everything.

Kevin Rudd (2020) is right to note, “If we want to be the partner of choice, we need to also acknowledge we are not the only choice of partner”. China will have a big

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*Scott Morrison, Australia and the Pacific: a new chapter. Address by the Prime Minister, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville, 8 November 2018.
role. Our aim must be to work with the islands and key institutions to shape that role.

Canberra has dealt itself into China’s island game by the creation of the A$2 billion Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific, to be managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The high priority list includes telecommunications, energy, transport, water and other essential infrastructure. There is lots of room for China to play, though, with the region needing US$3.1 billion in investment per year to 2030.

Playing to our strengths and the values of Pacific people can write the script for playing with, not against, China. Important institutions can do much to shape that script: the Pacific Islands Forum, the Pacific Community, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. As the natural regional partner always here to help, Australia’s tactic must be more, “Yes, but...” than, ‘No way!’

A winning equation reads: China does lots of infrastructure, plus Australia does lots of infrastructure, plus Australia serves Pacific people and the values Australia shares with islanders. Take heart from Professor Richard Herr’s conclusion that China’s influence is more about economic clout than soft power: “The admiration that Pacific Island states feel for China is genuine. However, on balance, China’s current regional soft power lacks breadth and depth, although it’s still evolving (Herr 2019).

In responding to China in the region, Australia needs to know the dragon’s limits as well as its capabilities. The way China talks to the islands is clearly different to Australia’s language. Canberra’s emphasis on good governance, economic reform and anti-corruption policies has no counterpart when Beijing comes calling. Pacific politicians contrast the Chinese approach with the demands imposed by Australia – but the values Australia argues for resonate on the streets and in the villages. The values dimension is an important part of putting Pacific people at the centre of our policy. The South Pacific positives lean towards Australia, not China.

4. Natural resources

The islands’ natural resources are a set of assets with risks attached. The islands strive to protect and use their fishery resources – tuna rates as a relative success story; while the tropical forests are a tragedy. The dwindling, ravaged forests of Melanesia show what happens when extraction becomes exploitation, flavoured by corruption. Logging has been unsustainable and often illegal. Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands are the biggest sources of tropical logs for China. Global Witness says log exports from the Solomons are more than 19 times a conservative estimate of the annual sustainable harvest (Anon. 2018).

Individual nations have done poorly on logging, compared to the collective action of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, which works to manage, monitor and control the distant-water fleets from China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

Logging and fisheries offer lessons and cautions as the islands consider future prospects for exploiting seabed resources (Filer et al. 2020).
The third point in the Boe document is where the leaders step forward to claim ‘stewardship’ of the Blue Pacific. Not until point 7 of the declaration does an expanded concept of security arrive. Even then, human security is discussed in terms of outside ‘humanitarian assistance, to protect the rights, health and prosperity of Pacific people’. It is an indirect way to discuss the biggest threat, which is also the major responsibility.

1. Human security and state security

The challenges the islands face – social, health, economic and political – merge new concepts of human security with traditional ideas of state security.

South Pacific governments confront their ceaseless capability conundrum: the limited ability of the state and national economy to deliver for their people. The islands are strong societies with weak governments. The societies stretch and strain while the governments get no stronger. The traditional stabilisers of village, clan and religion are shaken. The challenges of modernisation come from outside and inside.

South Pacific cities are as challenged by sewage as they are by sea level. The ocean tide coming in matches the tide of those leaving the villages for Pacific towns and cities. The islands grapple with urbanisation.

Health problems abound. Colin Tukuitonga, a doctor from Nuie who was head of the Pacific Community from 2014 until recently, talks of ‘dual crises’ – the climate crisis is matched by the health crisis:

“Noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes and heart disease cause three out of four deaths in the Pacific. These conditions are fuelled by a pipeline of risk factors such as high levels of smoking, unhealthy diets and reduced levels of physical activity. These conditions cause considerable personal costs such as blindness and kidney and heart failure.” (Tukuitonga 2019)

In the South Pacific country most important to Australia, Papua New Guinea (PNG), the threat of COVID-19 adds to the sense of PNG’s ‘economic, fiscal and social crisis’ (Wall 2020).

The islands, especially Melanesia, have the youth bulge that brings revolutions. Strong population growth and weak income growth is a dangerous formula for human security, social harmony and state stability.

The Pacific catch-22 is the ‘paradox of relatively high per capita levels of aid and low rates of economic growth’ – the Pacific limits to growth (Pollard 2018). In the Pacific, real average income per capita has increased by less than 10 per cent since 1990 compared with about 150 per cent in Asia’s emerging market economies (Foreign Affairs 2018: 2).

Australia worries quietly about a breakdown of state legitimacy and capacity among its neighbours.

Thinking about likely flashpoints in the manner of the Australian military, Blaxland (2020) offers a crisis scorecard for the coming decade, with 10 being the highest probability. Bougainville’s quest for independence from PNG is an 8. The prospect of a breakdown in law and order in the island arc, as happened in Timor-Leste and Tonga in 2006, and repeatedly in the Solomon Islands in the last two decades, is also an 8.

The COVID-19 pandemic shapes as a diabolical stress-test for health systems and the stability of island states. The Vanuatu-based journalist Dan McGarry says the ‘chronically fragile economies’ of the islands face massive disruption:

“The nations of the Pacific not only have to fight an unprecedented public health threat; the majority have to retool their entire economies. It will be a difficult transition, fraught with risks. If the Pacific island countries are starved of the resources they need, they may collapse.” (McGarry 2020).

To shut out the pandemic, the islands had to shut out the world. Their initial success gives time to plan, but it is not a long-term solution. The traditional capability challenges now come with a COVID coda.

A fact that lives in plain view, as far out as anyone can see, South Pacific states will be dependent on aid. Aid policy is economic policy for the South Pacific: relationships with Australia, New Zealand, Japan, China, the United States and the European Union pay for government and run services.

Conclusion

What is to be done? The answer is to build on the strong community within the islands and the strong bonds of regional community.

The Australian talk of family is a folksy way of understanding the needs for a stronger, more capable Pacific community. The non-folksy expression is Australia’s integration policy. And integration is the effort to build from community to a big ‘C’ Pacific Community (Prasad 2020).

Today’s community has been made by the islands, with Australia and New Zealand. And the future Community will be created by the islands, again with us. The regional future is not in the gift of Canberra and Wellington, however much they must help shape it. The Pacific positives point the way.

The peoples of the South Pacific, inhabiting an environment which can be as harsh as it is beautiful, constitute true nations. The island nations have clear identities of culture, language, ethnicity and history offering much to admire and learn from. These strong societies and their weak states made the smoothest transition from colony to independence of any region. South Pacific states have been able to transplant and grow Western democratic forms – a better collective record than anywhere else in the developing world. Fiji proves the power of the Pacific’s democratic norm by clawing its way back to elections from its military coups.

Pacific democracy is beset by ‘big man’ politics and corruption, but democracy reigns across the region, often rough, yet admirably robust. The next challenge is for Pacific women to get their share of political power. The positives are central to Pacific life (and must hearten policy-makers in Canberra and Wellington).

The islands are Christian with relatively conservative societies that are English-speaking, pro-Western and
pro-capitalist. Apart from English as the lingua franca, the French territories of Polynesia, New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands also tick those boxes.

Australia embraces the place the rest of the world wants to visit on holiday. We get to create community in paradise, in vibrant societies with wonderful cultures. South Pacific nations, so different from Australia, actually speak our language: not just English, but in their understandings of religion and politics. We share a lot of history, and most of it is good. Just like a family, really. We differ, yet agree on the fundamentals.

For Australia, geography meets community in the South Pacific, so our interests align with our values. Canberra must accentuate those Pacific positives, to work with what is natural in the islands. The South Pacific asks us to help build on our own values. Australia must put Pacific people at the centre of our policy, embracing our role in realising to the full the future of Pacific community.

The Author: Graeme Dobell is Journalist Fellow at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) and writes for ASPI's blog, The Strategist. A journalist since 1971, he has focused on Australian and international politics, international affairs and defence, and the Asia-Pacific since 1975. For 33 years, he served as a correspondent for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's international service, Radio Australia, in Canberra, Europe, America, Singapore, and throughout Asia and the Pacific. Notable assignments as a correspondent have included the Falklands War; coups in Fiji, Thailand and the Philippines; Beijing after the crushing of the pro-democracy movement in Tiananmen Square; and the return of Hong Kong to China. He was a member of ASPI's independent task force on relations with the South Pacific which reported in 2008. In 2011, he was made a Fellow of the Australian Institute of International Affairs. [Photo of Graeme Dobell: ASPI]

References


NAVAL HISTORY ESSAY

Royal Australian Navy beach commandos of World War II

Petar Djokovic
Senior Naval Historical Officer, Sea Power Centre – Australia

Starting in 1942, around 1000 Australian sailors were trained in amphibious warfare. In May-July 1945, they participated in the liberation of Borneo, primarily by providing landing craft crews, beach parties and signals teams for amphibious landings at Tarakan, Brunei Bay and Balikpapan.

Key words: World War II; Royal Australian Navy; beach commandos; Borneo; Operation OBOE; Tarakan; Brunei Bay; Balikpapan.

The World War II naval beach commandos hold a unique place in Australian naval history. From 1942 to 1945, around 1000 Royal Australian Navy (RAN) sailors trained in amphibious warfare alongside their compatriots from the army and air force, and large numbers of United States (U.S.) servicemen. These sailors played an instrumental role in the Operation OBOE landings in Borneo at Tarakan, Brunei Bay and Balikpapan in 1945.

Training
In March 1942, the Australian government recognised the importance of an amphibious capability in any effort to drive the Japanese out of the Pacific. It began exploring the requirements for combined operations training in Australia. Two training centres were established before the end of the year: the Combined Training Centre at Toorbul Point (now Sandstone Point), on Moreton Bay, Queensland; and the Joint Overseas Operational Training School at Port Stephens, north of Newcastle, New South Wales.

With construction work progressing ashore at Port Stephens, HMAS Assault was initially commissioned aboard the armed merchant cruiser HMAS Westralia and began providing instruction for landing craft crews, beach parties (naval commandos) and combined operations signals teams. Assault transferred ashore on 10 December 1942. An American Amphibious Training Group was established nearby and the two facilities were combined as the Amphibious Training Centre in February 1943 under the overall command of the commander of the U.S. 7th Amphibious Force, Rear Admiral Daniel E. Barbey USN.

HMA Ships Kanimbla, Westralia and Manoora also were converted into infantry landing ships (LSIs) during 1943.

Training at HMAS Assault was intense, covering every aspect of landing operations on hostile shores. Sailors had to partake in assault courses, instruction in various weapons and explosives as well as hand-to-hand combat. Former naval commando, Able Seaman Ted Jones, recalled training with his unarmed combat instructor, Lieutenant Donald Davidson: “Over and over again he would impress upon us that we were being trained to fill a commando role and in such a role we could quite easily find ourselves in a position where we had to depend on our hands, eyes and senses to prevent an enemy in hand-to-hand combat from killing us … it was – kill or be killed – and this was reality, not supposition” (Jones 1998).

The commandos also had to learn how to conduct in-water beach surveys which would often leave them immersed fully clothed for hours on end, as well as constructing makeshift metal ‘roadways’ on the beach enabling the landing of vehicles as large as a tank. Following training some 20,000 U.S. soldiers and marines, 2000 Australian soldiers and 1000 sailors, the Amphibious Training Centre closed in October 1943, although HMAS Assault continued operating on a reduced basis. Thereafter, all amphibious training facilities were based at

1 Email: petar.djokovic@defence.gov.au
2 Editor’s note: This is an edited version of an article first published by the Sea Power Centre – Australia on the Royal Australian Navy website at https://www.navy.gov.au/history/feature-histories/ran-beach-commandos (accessed 25 March 2020). It is republished here with permission so as to provide further historical perspective to the paper on amphibious warfare by Colonel Kim Gillilan that we published in the December 2019 issue (Gillilan 2019). A more detailed account of activities at HMAS Assault by Institute naval historian Dennis Weatherall was published recently (Weatherall 2020).
3 Editor’s note: An aerial inspection in June 1942 showed Port Stephens, containing only a small isolated fishing village, would be a safe haven from Japanese submarines operating off Australia’s east coast and its beaches had the attributes needed for amphibious training, including ocean-fronting surf beaches with formidable defensive positions and bay beaches with little surf, mangrove swamps and low hinterland.
Toorbul, which became the centre for amphibious activities in the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA). Most of the RAN’s 120 naval commandos as well as Kanimbla, Westralia and Manoora, were transferred to Toorbul. In addition, shortly after training at Port Stephens ceased, a detachment of naval commandos proceeded to Cairns for training with the army’s Australian Beach Group.

In December 1943, the RAN decided to raise a dedicated naval commando unit. The Naval Beach Commando was formed on 6 January 1944 under the command of Principal Beachmaster, Commander Robert S. Pearson RAN. By the end of 1944, three additional beach units had been raised along with boat crews and signal units. The title RAN Beach Unit was adopted for each and Commander Pearson became Senior Naval Officer, Beach Unit. Although these highly trained, elite units were desperate to prove their skills in action, they had to endure a long wait while U.S. formations took priority during subsequent amphibious assaults across northern New Guinea and the Philippines.

Operations

Tarakan – May 1945

The RAN naval commandos first saw action on 1 May 1945 during Operation OBOE I, the assault on Tarakan Island off Borneo. Tarakan has an area of only 135km², and largely consists of mangrove swamps with a hilly, forested centre. The port of Lingkas was selected for the landing as it had the Island’s best beach, though hardly ideal being 2km long by 90m wide and composed mainly of soft mud up to three metres deep. Westralia and Manoora formed part of the RAN contingent at Tarakan.

The LSIs carried Naval Beach Commando B, comprising 14 officers and 107 ratings under the command of Lieutenant Commander Bernard Morris RANVR, five observers from Beach Commando D, as well as units of the 9th Australian Division. Six telegraphists from Naval Beach Signal Section D were also loaned to USS Rocky Mount and later landed on Tarakan to replace casualties.

The main invasion force entered Lingkas before dawn on 1 May. A shore bombardment swept the area before the landing craft thrust up onto the beach giving the commandos a dry landing. Throughout the course of the day and into the night, hundreds of tonnes of equipment and personnel were disembarked from Westralia and Manoora and the LSIs departed at around noon the following day.

The beach commandos landed with the first wave of each forward battalion. They carried out reconnaissance, marked beaches, established and maintained signal communications, organised and furthered the unloading of landing craft, salvaged craft that became stranded, and generally organised and conducted all the work on the beaches (Gill 1968). This was no easy task as the jetties were damaged and the tide had receded. All of the RAN’s casualties during this operation were beach commandos – telegraphists John Brady and William Ryan were killed and a signalman wounded when a Beach Control Point came under shellfire on 2 May. Lieutenant Commander Morris continued to act as Port Director until relieved on 17 May.

Brunei Bay – June 1945

All three Australian LSIs took part in the amphibious phase of Operation OBOE VI, the assault on Brunei Bay on 10 June 1945. Beach Commando A, under the command of Lieutenant Commander Ron McKauge DSC RANVR, was embarked on this occasion, once again in company with units of the 9th Australian Division. This time the naval commandos, numbering 20 officers and 157 ratings, were divided into three beach parties. The main body of the assault group landed on Labuan Island, dubbed Brown Beach, while a smaller force, from Kanimbla, landed at Muara Island and Brunei Bluff – White and Green Beaches respectively – which were some 32km from the main assault. The selected beaches in Brunei were wide and sandy, much better suited to amphibious landings than those at Tarakan. The assault group entered Brunei Bay before dawn and, in spite of the shore bombardment, landing craft came under sporadic sniper fire as they approached the shore. The snipers, however, only succeeded in revealing their positions and were soon stopped by Allied guns. The beach commandos were first ashore at 0915 hours and little more than an hour later all three beaches were secured without casualties. The commandos again played a leading role during the assault as well as in organising the follow-on Allied forces. General Douglas MacArthur expressed his satisfaction to the commandos, remarking: “The execution of the Brunei Bay operations has been flawless ... convey to your officers and men the pride and gratification I feel in such a splendid performance” (Jones 1998).

When the amphibious fleet departed, the beach commandos stayed behind, employed in various duties including patrol and survey. They were withdrawn on 27 June through the Australian Beach Group Camp on Labuan Island.

Balikpapan – July 1945

The beach commandos’ final action in World War II was during Operation OBOE II, the 7th Australian Division’s

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*Editor’s Note: While not strictly a RAN Beach Unit operation, Lieutenant Commander M. J. Band RANR, a former officer-in-charge of the naval wing at the combined operations training centre at Toorbul Point, displayed extraordinary heroism as the officer-in-charge of the U.S.-Australian combined naval beach party which landed with the 9th Australian Division at Japanese-occupied Finschhafen, New Guinea, on 22 September 1943, for which he was posthumously awarded a U.S. Navy Cross.

*Operation OBOE II had been postponed and Operations OBOE III, IV and V had been cancelled. The objective of Operation OBOE VI had also been changed. The result was that the OBOE operations proceeded out of sequence.
amphibious assault at Balikpapan. In addition to the army contingent, the three LSIs embarked 17 officers and 150 ratings of Beach Commandos B and D, under the command of the experienced Lieutenant Commander Morris Klandasan. The southern end of Balikpapan Bay was identified as the best landing site despite the relative shallowness of the water and the strength of enemy defences. Some 25km of coast was protected by a log barricade and around 3500 Japanese and 6500 local conscripts covered the beaches with automatic weapons. Heavier installations farther inland provided defence-in-depth. The Australian landing force also had to contend with an extensive shallow-water minefield, laid originally by the Allies, which took 16 days to make safe. Three beaches, designated Red, Yellow and Green, were selected for the landing.

The Balikpapan assault group arrived before dawn on 1 July and the beach parties started transferring to the landing craft at 0710 hours. The shore bombardment began 10 minutes earlier and, apart from a well protected 3-inch gun which did little but force the troops to take cover, effectively destroyed the larger shore defences. The beach commandos, as always, were first ashore at 0855 hours and although they suffered no casualties during the landing, some of their mates in the 7th Division were not so lucky.

The commandos in the first wave directed naval gunfire and, by the time the third assault wave landed at 0903 hours, the Japanese mortars and pillboxes had been destroyed. During the day, the beach parties directed the landing of 10,500 troops, 700 vehicles and 1950 tons (1980 tonnes) of stores over difficult beaches with more than a metre of surf running (Gill 1968).

**Conclusion**

The assault at Balikpapan was the last amphibious landing of the war. The Naval Beach Commando Units were disbanded shortly afterwards. Their men were re-assigned throughout the RAN, many remaining in the SWPA and some returning to Australia.

**BIOGRAPHY: Maj-Gen Premangsu Chowdry (Continued from page 21)**

at Leh which he commanded until 1970. Prem earned the Param Vishisht Seva Medal (PVSM) during this command both for his overall meritorious service and specifically for his direction of a disaster relief programme following an earthquake in the Ladakh region.

In December 1970, Prem became GOC Bengal Area which included responsibility for dealing with a Naxalite uprising in Bengal. He had under his operational control the three Army divisions then based in Bengal, the Railway, the State Police, the Central Reserve Police Force, the Border Security Force and the Home Guards. During the 1971 India-Pakistan war, which led to the creation of Bangladesh, Prem's Bengal Area managed thousands of refugees pouring into India from East Pakistan. His headquarters had to co-ordinate the entire logistics and movement of people and goods by rail and road in the region as part of the war effort.

**Post-Army Life**

On 30 April 1974, after 33 years of meritorious service, Prem retired from the Army to pursue a career in business. Prem held senior executive positions in the corporate and public sectors, converting loss-making enterprises into profitable ones. In 1983 aged 63, Prem retired permanently. He and Sheila thereafter spent time with their three sons in Sydney and Dubai. Since Sheila's death, Prem has resided in Sydney with his eldest son, Rahoul.

Prem is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society (United Kingdom) and a Life Member of both the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, New South Wales, and the United Service Institution of India.

Joseph Matthews and David Leece

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1. The Param Vishisht Seva Medal is awarded in recognition of exceptional military service in peace-time.
2. This is an abstract, prepared by the editor, of a lengthier biography of General Chowdry written by Colonel Joseph Matthews, Indian Army (Retired), based on interviews he held with General Chowdry in Sydney in 2019.
Premangsu Chowdry (known to his friends as ‘Prem’) was born and raised in East Bengal (now Bangladesh). At the outbreak of World War II, he joined the British Indian Army and was commissioned into the Royal Garhwal Rifles in December 1941. He was posted as a 2nd Lieutenant to the 3rd Battalion.

World War II
In North Africa in 1942, as part of the 5th Indian Division, the battalion took part in the ‘Battle of Tobruk’, which cost the battalion 12 officers and over 500 soldiers. The battalion was then withdrawn to Cyprus for six-months of rest and reinforcement during which Prem participated in raids into the Greek islands. From early 1943 to May 1945 as part of the 10th Indian Division, the battalion took part in the Italian Campaign. Initially, it was deployed in the Taranto, Eastern and Central Sectors along the Apennine Mountains and undertook assault river crossings at Sangro, Garigliano and Senio. Subsequently, it took part in the battles of Monte Grande and Cassino. Prem served sequentially as the Battalion Signals Officer, a support platoon commander, Assistant Adjutant, a rifle company commander and Headquarters Company commander. He was mentioned-in-despatches (MiD) for his outstanding operational performance and, in 1944, he was promoted to major. The battalion earned the battle honours: Gallabat, Barentu, Massawa, Keren, Amba Alagi, and Città di Castello. It also earned the theatre honours: North Africa 1940-43 and Italy 1943-45.

In mid-1945, the battalion was sent to the Italian border on a 3-months’ assignment to prevent Yugoslavian partisans under Marshal Josef Tito entering the Italian-speaking province of Istria (currently in Croatia) to which Yugoslavia had laid claim at the end of World War I. Prem was instrumental in accomplishing this politically-sensitive assignment.

Post-War Indian Army
In October 1945, Prem returned to India with his battalion which deployed in the North West Frontier Province (in current Pakistan) to suppress an Hazara tribal uprising in Waziristan and the Swat Valley. During the 1948 India-Pakistan war, the battalion deployed in Kashmir. They cleared the Baramullah-Uri axis under heavy odds and Prem earned a second MiD for gallantry.

Following the 1948 war, Prem was given command of the 3rd Battalion, 5th Gorkha Rifles (Frontier Force). In September 1948, the battalion provided support to the police in Hyderabad, a Nizam-ruled princely state, to ensure that the state remained in the Indian Union. The battalion supported the civil administration with Prem acting as the civil administrator.

In December 1950, Prem became General Staff Officer Grade 1 (GSO1), Headquarters British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) in Japan then commanded Lieutenant-General Sir Horace Robertson, an Australian, who also appointed Prem as the BCOF Liaison Officer at Headquarters United Nations Forces in Japan under General Douglas MacArthur. In 1951, Prem was posted as GSO1 at Headquarters, British Commonwealth Division, in Korea.

In October 1952, Prem returned to India and took command of the 2nd Battalion, 5th Gorkha Rifles (Frontier Force). In 1953, he married Sheila Devichand in New Delhi.

In 1954, Prem attended the Joint Services Staff College in England and then served on exchange with the British Army of the Rhine and later with the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy.

Back in India from 1955 to 1960, several staff and training postings followed before, aged 40, he was promoted to brigadier and took command of the 114th Infantry Brigade in Ladakh.

At the end of 1960, Prem was appointed as commandant of the Ethiopian Military Academy and as an unofficial military advisor to Emperor Haile Selassie. In 1962, Prem’s advice to the Emperor contributed to the Emperor overcoming an internal coup.

In 1963, Prem took command of the 120th Infantry Brigade. In 1965, he became acting chief-of-staff of 1st Corps at Mathura which took part in the second India-Pakistan war. Prem earned another MiD for his exemplary contribution to the war effort.

In 1967 aged 47, Prem was posted as the General Officer Commanding (GOC) Madhya Pradesh Area. The following year, he took command of the 3rd Infantry Division
(Continued on opposite page)
When Adolf Hitler went to war in 1914, aged 25, he lived through what he would later call the “most stupendous experience of my life”. Twice decorated for bravery, the future dictator thrilled to battle, relished violence and was willing to give everything for his beloved Fatherland.

He heard of Germany’s defeat as he lay immobilised in a hospital bed, temporarily blinded from mustard gas. He opened his eyes on a terrible new world, of Germany’s loss and humiliation, the flight of the Kaiser, a Marxist uprising in Bavaria and the destruction of his beloved army.

Hitler would never accept Germany’s defeat or the terms of the peace settlement. Out of his fury arose an unquenchable thirst for revenge, against the ‘November criminals’ who had signed the armistice; against the socialists whom he blamed for stabbing the army in the back; and, most violently, against the Jews, on whom he would load the blame for all Germany’s woes and whom he considered a direct threat to the German master race of his imagination.

The seeds of that hatred lay in Hitler’s youthful experiences, growing up in Linz, Vienna and Munich, and as a young soldier in the Great War. What turned ‘a Viennese bum’, as Göring later damned him, into one of the most brutal dictators in human history? How had Hitler’s first war, the defining years of his life, affected his rise to power? In a broader sense, was Hitler a freak of history? Or rather an extreme example of a recurring ‘type’ of demagogue, who thrives in chaos, revolution and economic collapse?

Ham believes that other biographies have not given sufficient weight to the degree that the First World War shaped Hitler’s character. By peeling back the layers of Hitler’s childhood, war record and early political career, Ham examines the ordinary man beneath the myth and seeks to solve the riddle behind the enigma of the Nazi leader.

The striking features of Hitler’s experience of the First World War are that: he survived all 4½ years of it on the Western Front; he was a brave soldier and deserved his two Iron Crosses; he was exhilarated by the dangerous life of combat; he was disgusted by whingeing and poor morale on the home front; and he saw the heavy losses in the First Battle of Ypres as the malign doing of the German political and military establishment.

Naturally, all or much of this played into the man’s evolving personality. But certain central traits of the ‘mature’ Hitler do not seem to have had a Great War genesis or particular encouragement – his anti-Semitism, for example. At length, Ham refers to the anti-Semitic miasma in the air in Hitler’s youth days in Vienna and Munich, but keeps commenting that Hitler was not irrevocably infected then. And it was not the war that did it either: Hitler’s Iron Cross First Class was recommended by his Jewish officer, and Hitler does not seem to have noticed or minded, much less felt disgusted or ashamed.

Ham’s earliest assessment of the child is as “sullen and resentful” and “by the age of 12 Hitler had grown into an emotionally indulged self-absorbed boy with a marked contempt for authority and the temper of a bully”. “Whence came this juvenile rage at the world? … The answer has eluded the powers of psychiatrists”, Ham humbly submits. And there is no trace of what might be called empathy for Hitler and his circumstances. Thus, despite the book’s avowed intention, there is no prising open the psyche of the as-yet-uniformed young man.

If anything – and this seems the strong counter-current of Ham’s book – it was Hitler’s experiences in the aftermath of the war that seems to have most influenced the final Führer mould. Hitler bitterly embraced the myth of the stab in the back as an explanation for Germany’s defeat, and he threw himself into the business of fingerling and nailing the assassin. In the end, this came down to being the entirely imaginary figure of Jewish Bolshevism.

The epilogue opens out into a critique on the present. Comparing and contrasting contemporary issues with the circumstances associated with Hitler’s rise detract from an otherwise well-presented historical work. Ham’s ‘solutions’ to prevent another Hitler are more suited to an editorial than this book. His motives in adding this sermonising commentary are unclear.

Ham is a former Sunday Times correspondent, with a Master’s degree in economic history from the London School of Economics. He now devotes most of his time to writing history and has authored six books.

The book includes several photographs, detailed notes, a selected bibliography and a comprehensive index. One appendix reproduces the German National Socialist ‘25 Point Programme’.

Young Hitler is a new direction for this acclaimed military historian. It is short and entertaining, but is far from an in-depth analysis of Hitler’s early life as the 20th century’s most well recognised demagogue.

Marcus Fielding
BOOK REVIEW:

**Turning Point: Battle for Milne Bay 1942 – Japan's first land defeat in World War II**

by Michael Veitch

Hachette Australia: Sydney; 2019; 334 pp; ISBN 978073340551 (paperback); RRP $32.99

At a remote airstrip in Milne Bay stands a simple monument with an inscription: “This marks the westernmost point of the Japanese advance, Aug - Sep 42. 85 unknown marines lie buried here.”

It is a modest monument to a great achievement, summed up by Brigadier John Field, who commanded the 7th Brigade, Citizen Military Forces, at Milne Bay with the comment: “Small in comparison to some of the sustained and desperate fighting which took place in the Pacific … yet it was the first Australian victory against the Japanese invader, and brought to a halt the long series of territorial gains which the enemy had seemed to achieve with relative ease. Henceforth the tide was destined to turn.”

In *Turning Point: Battle for Milne Bay 1942*, Michael Veitch has produced a superb historical account of Australia’s first victory against a determined, well-trained enemy seeking control of a vital airstrip on the eastern end of Papua. From there, the Japanese planned to control the northern approaches to Australia, use Milne Bay as a springboard to capture Port Moresby, and neutralise the Australian war effort.

It is an easy-to-read book recounting the severe trials of the Australian troops and United States Army Engineers who carved out an airstrip in a malaria-infested quagmire in which men floundered and vehicles struggled to stay afloat in a sea of mud. The airstrip was constructed by the U.S. Army Engineers who, along with their heavy equipment, accompanied by the initial force of Australian troops, were transported to Milne Bay on two Dutch ships, escorted by two Australian Navy warships.

In their quest to build an airstrip from where they hoped to repel the expected Japanese invasion, the Allied force had the assistance of the local population. Unlike the inhumane treatment suffered at the hands of the Japanese Special Landing Force (Marines), the local population was treated with respect and dignity by the Australians and were justly rewarded for their labour.

Following the completion of No. 1 Airstrip at Gill Gill, the focal point of Allied air and land forces began construction of another airstrip. It is important to note that, without the use of perforated steel planking known as Marston, the airstrip would not have been capable of supporting air operations. Marston planking was the product of research conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Marston, North Carolina, and was used for the first time at Milne Bay.

The soldiers of the Australian Imperial Force, the Militia, and the air and ground crews of the Royal Australian Air Force put aside their single-Service attitudes that had been formed following the fall of Singapore and melded into an effective fighting force, each fully supportive of the other.

Allied soldiers and airmen suffered terribly during the preparation for and conduct of the battle as a result of the horrendous weather. Noted for its rainfall, the Battle for Milne Bay was conducted during a period of unseasonably heavy downpours. With a cloud base of less than 1000 feet, and generally almost to the ground, flying in those conditions was dangerous in the extreme – and then of course, there was the enemy to contend with.

Added to the strain of flying in atrocious weather conditions, pilots flew in shorts and boots while suffering from the effects of dysentery, fouling their cockpits.

Michael Veitch blends the history of the battle with the personal insights of those who flew combat missions, prepared the airstrips and supporting infrastructure, and fought the Japanese in desperate and bitter combat at close quarters. As the ‘fog of war’ settled, there was significant uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the conflict and while the outcome of the battle is known, the author generates a sense of excitement throughout his description of these actions which readily engages the reader.

The Battle for Milne Bay was Australia’s first victory against the Japanese; indeed, it was the first land defeat suffered by the advancing Japanese forces, and yet several respected works on Australia’s wars have neglected to reference this battle. *Turning Point: Battle for Milne Bay 1942* helps to address these omissions.

The Australian commander, Major General Cyril Clowes, received scant recognition for brilliantly achieving this victory. He apparently ran foul of General MacArthur and General Blamey for failing to respond to their requests for information during the height of the battle. He is a much-forgotten Australian hero.

Michael Veitch is well known as an author, actor, comedian and former ABC television and radio presenter. His books include the critically acclaimed accounts of Australian airmen in World War II: *44 Days; Heroes of the Skies; Fly; Flak; and Barney Greatrex*. He lives in the Yarra Valley, outside Melbourne.

This book should appeal to any reader who has even a passing interest in Australia’s military history. It is informative and easy to read.

Bob Treloar
BOOK REVIEW:

**D-Day: ‘Neptune’, ‘Overlord’ and the Battle of Normandy: operations manual: insights into how science, technology and engineering made the Normandy invasion possible**

by Jonathan Falconer

*Haynes Publishing: Sparkford, Yeovil, Somerset; 2013; 179 pp.; ISBN 9780857332349 (hardback); RRP $48.90; Ursula Davidson Library call number: 583 FALC 2013*

The Allied invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944 was the largest amphibious operation in history. This D-Day ‘operations manual’ focuses primarily on the science, technology and engineering which underpinned key aspects of the invasion.

The author, Jonathan Falconer, has published more than 25 books on aspects of aviation and military history. He was commissioning editor of the 14-volume ‘Battle Zone Normandy’ series in 2004 for Sutton Publishing and is now a senior commissioning editor with Haynes Publishing.

The objective of Operation Overlord was to secure a lodgement on the European Continent from which further offensive operations could be developed. The lodgement was to be effected in the Bay of the Seine across the 50 miles of beaches which formed the southern shore of the Bay between Varreville and Ouistreham by five infantry divisions (two American, two British and one Canadian), supported by Commandos and United States Rangers, all of whom were to be delivered by ship and landing craft. Prior to the amphibious assault, three airborne divisions would be dropped/air-landed on both the western and eastern flanks of the invasion to provide flank protection. Follow-up forces would be landed by ship and landing craft at the rate of one-and-a-third divisions a day. Once a firm lodgement had been established, the objects were to capture the port of Cherbourg and then sweep south to occupy the Brittany ports. Initially, though, two harbours prefabricated in Britain and towed to and assembled in the Bay of the Seine, beginning on D-Day, would provide harbour and breakwater facilities.

This ‘manual’ is not so much about strategy and grand tactics as it is about technology and innovation — from radio and radar aids that ensured landing craft arrived on the right beaches; to tank-carrying gliders, swimming tanks, Mulberry prefabricated harbours and advanced landing grounds. The manual describes the development, construction and use of a wide range of innovative machines, structures and systems, explaining their uses on D-Day and after, and revealing how they contributed to the success of ‘Overlord’.

The book has a short introduction, including a brief outline of the D-Day plan, followed by seven chapters, a brief epilogue, a list of primary and secondary sources, useful contacts, and an index.

Chapter One describes how the planning was facilitated by aerial photography, geology and hydrography; how radio countermeasures and electronics played their part in the choice of suitable landing beaches, ensured that sea channels to the Normandy coast were cleansed of mines, and kept the Germans guessing from whence and when the invasion would come.

Chapter Two describes the wide variety of landing ships and landing craft used, some quite specialised. More prominent among them were: the Landing Ship Tank and Landing Ship Infantry; Landing Craft Tank, Landing Craft Infantry, and Landing Craft Vehicle and Personnel; and the ‘Duck’ Amphibious Truck (DUKW).

Chapter Three is devoted to the Mulberry harbours and associated breakwaters and to the imagination, resource, resolution and courage of those who planned and carried out their prefabrication in Britain, transport to Normandy, assembly in the Bay of the Seine and then operated them logistically support ‘Overlord’ until September 1944 by which time Dieppe, Ostend and later Antwerp had been captured allowing their continued use to be phased out by December.

Chapter Four looks at the deployment of a diverse collection of specialised armoured vehicles and equipment in the assault phase of the Normandy landings which enabled the British and Canadian commanders to get their forces off the beaches quickly, saving vital time and lives. Much of the equipment was conceived and developed by Major-General Sir Percy Hobart and his 79th Armoured Division — hence “Hobart’s funnies”; and were based on the Churchill infantry tank, especially the Armoured Vehicle Royal Engineers version developed for assault engine operations. They included: the Churchill Petard Spigot Mortar; Churchill Armoured Ramp Carrier; Churchill Bobbin, which laid a carpet over soft sand; Churchill Small Box Girder bridge; and the Churchill Crocodile — the feared flamethrower.

Chapters Five to Seven are devoted to the special equipment developed by Britain and the United States to support the airborne and air-landing operations on the west and east flanks of the invasion. Chapter Five covers the aircraft and equipment used by paratroopers; and the gliders and tugs used by air-landed brigades. Chapter Six is devoted to the Horsa assault glider; and Chapter Seven focuses on the building of advanced landing grounds.

This book is for a general reader, not the specialist scientist or engineer. Each chapter stands alone and the chapters can be read in any order. The book provides a fascinating insight into the science and engineering which underpinned key aspects of D-Day and frequently the courage required to utilise the technology. I recommend the book to anyone who wishes to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what it took to lodge the allied armies in Europe in 1944.

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