



## **2015 RUSI QLD BLAMEY ORATION**

### **Lessons Learned by the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters**

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The 1st Division is a unit that was rebadged as the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters in 1998. This Headquarters comprises 151 full time and 71 part time personnel, including 19 Navy and eight Airforce staff. A headquarters tasked by the Chief of Defence Force to prepare and command assigned forces in order to meet Chief of Army and Chief of Defence Force specified and contingency requirements.

Since 1999 this headquarters has led several significant regional and international operations. Without doubt, our landmark operation, from a headquarters and Australian Defence Force (ADF) perspective was Operation Warden (OW) in East Timor in 1999. Our command and control experience has since extended to humanitarian disaster relief operations, such as Sumatra Assist (SA) in Indonesia in 2005 and Philippines Assist (PA) in 2013, as well as capacity building on Operation Okra (OO) in Iraq in 2015. But how much have we adapted as a headquarters since OW?

Today I would like to reflect on the lessons learned by the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters 1999-2015. I will do so by using the lessons learned during operation warden as a lens for examining our headquarters performance on subsequent operations. My overall assessment will offer that we have matured markedly since 1999, to the extent that we have become the preferred mission command node for leading short notice joint interagency operations for our Defence Force. On 15 September the United Nations (UN) authorized the establishment of a multinational peace enforcement mission.

It was named the International Force East Timor (INTERFET) and was led by Australia. Its role was to restore peace and security, support other UN forces, and facilitate humanitarian assistance, where possible. The nucleus of the Headquarters INTERFET was Australia's own Deployable Joint Force Headquarters, led by then Major General Peter Cosgrove. This headquarters commanded a coalition of 22 countries and a force of 11,000 troops.

In his book 'The Australian Army from Whitlam to Howard', author John Blaxland identified three key lessons from INTERFET. First that Operation

Warden demonstrated the merits of a joint approach to operations, particularly air and maritime assets in support of land forces. According to Blaxland: "To be sure, the major impediment to effective joint operations was the fact that Australian contingents had, for the preceding century, operated primarily as separate contingents alongside allies. The services tended to cling to their preferred mode of operating separately and resisting joint arrangements for their command, employment and provisioning. But this approach was unsustainable in circumstances where Australia was in charge and when Australian components had to support each other, without relying heavily on allies."

Second the value of sustained international engagement to prepare for the establishment of multinational forces and the conduct of regional crisis response operations. Blaxland argued that a 'Coalition of the Willing' was facilitated by the fact that Australia had engaged with many nations on key leadership visits, bilateral and multilateral command post and field training exercises prior to 1999. He provides the example that: "In early September 1999, when Australia was looking around for a regional partner to contribute forces and leadership to the International Stabilisation Force in East Timor, assistance came from an unexpected corner. Thailand was the first country in ASEAN to agree to contribute forces and also provided the Deputy Force Commander. The agreement came after decades of engagement with the Royal Thai armed forces and followed shortly after the bilateral exercise Chapel Gold between elements of the 2nd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (2 RAR) and the Royal Thai Army's Ready Deployment Force."

Third was the importance of rehearsals. Blaxland noted that the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters had conducted an Australia/Britain/Canada/America or ABCA Command Post exercise six weeks prior to deploying on Operation Warden, and that this had prepared all staff very well for their command, control, communications and coordination responsibilities on INTERFET. But how were these lessons for our headquarters regarding the importance of a joint approach, of international engagement, and rehearsals, reflected on subsequent operations? The answer came all too soon when on Boxing Day 2004 an earthquake and tsunami struck off the west coast of Sumatra, causing widespread devastation in coastal communities across India, Thailand and Indonesia. On 27 December 2004, our unit was ordered to form Headquarters Joint Task Force 629 and deploy to Sumatra to command and control defence support to the Australian government's national humanitarian relief effort to Indonesia.

The headquarters was assigned operational control of army aviation, engineer, health and logistic elements, and was supported by RAAF C130, Kingair as well as HMAS Kanimbla. The Joint Task Force focus area of operations was Banda Aceh and the main headquarters was established in Medan, during a three month deployment it coordinated: the distribution of 1,200 tonnes of humanitarian aid by air, the evacuation of 2,530 disaster affected people, the treatment of 3,700 casualties, the production of 4.7 million litres of clean water and the clearing of 9,000 cubic metres of debris.

From the outset, the headquarters adopted a joint approach. Maritime staff from the Amphibious Task Group, air staff from the Air Lift Group and logistic staff from the Force Support Battalion were integrated into Headquarters Joint Task Force 629. It meant that the deliveries of humanitarian supplies by Australian Air Force and Naval assets were centrally coordinated, and that engineer reconstruction tasks were centrally prioritised, but a new lesson emerged.

That was the importance of a civil military or interagency approach. This was most apparent during the response phase of the operation when over 160 different government and non-government aid agencies converged on the local airfield at Banda Aceh to distribute food, water and medical assistance to the most gravely affected disaster survivors.

To mitigate the risk that vital humanitarian assistance would fail to meet the relief priorities set by the Indonesian government, our headquarters created a civil military cooperation framework with the Indonesian authorities. It comprised a coordination cell at the district capital Medan and an operations centre, or CMOC, at Banda Aceh airfield. Led by Lieutenant Colonel David McGuire, the coordination cell ensured that Australian military capabilities complimented rather than contradicted other government and non-government capabilities. One example was the provision of emergency food, water and shelter to villagers isolated from Banda Aceh.

AUSAID had the capacity to provide portable food and shelter packages, but lacked the capability to deliver these packages. Accordingly, the Civil Military Coordination Cell scheduled RAAF C130 aircraft to transport these packages from Medan to Banda Aceh, where they were cross loaded to army helicopters and delivered to remote locations identified by Indonesian Armed Forces liaison officers at our CMOC. Having seen the value of civil military cooperation in this context, on return to Australia we established a permanent Civil Military Cooperation Branch within DJFHQ. We tasked this branch to refine CIMIC doctrine and training, and develop habitual relationships with those government and non-government agencies we were likely to operate with during future crisis response operations. Operation Sumatra Assist demonstrated a clear learning from Operation Warden and a leap forward in our joint interagency approach as a headquarters.

The next major activity in which our headquarters was tested was operation Philippines Assist in 2013. And the imagery from that operation reflected scenes similar to Operation Sumatra Assist. On 8 November 2013, typhoon Haiyan, known locally as Yolanda, made landfall in the eastern Philippines region. The United Nations reported that Haiyan had affected around 14 million people and displaced an estimated four million. On 12 November, we were directed to form Headquarters Joint Task Force 630 to command and control defence support to the Australian government's national humanitarian relief effort to the Philippines. The headquarters was assigned operational control of army engineer, health and logistic elements, and was supported by RAAF air transport assets, as well as HMAS Tobruk. Focussing its operations in the central region of ORMOC, during a one month deployment the headquarters coordinated: the

repair of 16 schools and 180 classrooms, the removal of 1,302 cubic metres of debris, the evacuation of 3,300 internally displaced persons and the distribution of two tonnes of humanitarian aid.

The key observation for our headquarters from this operation was the manner in which our program of international engagement had exponentially improved our mission effectiveness. Through our cycle of command post and field training exercises we had developed a generation of staff officers who now enjoyed a habitual working relationship with counterparts officers in our Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Border Protection and Customs, as well as the Philippines Armed Forces, Marine Forces Pacific and Japanese Ground Self Defence Forces. And these were in the very same officers our headquarters worked beside as part of the international relief efforts in the Philippines. As the commander of the Joint Task Force, Lieutenant Colonel Rod Lang reflected: "The United States military response to the disaster was led by the commander of the 3rd U.S. Marine Expeditionary Brigade. I had worked with him that year on exercise Talisman Sabre. So, I was able to liaise with him directly and confirm the concept for our Australian military support quickly." But each of these regional contingency operations took place at the same time as our defence force was committed to an era of specified global operations.

I speak here of our deployments to Iraq on Operation Catalyst and Afghanistan on Operation Slipper. During this period, the DJFHQ found itself responsible for mounting and certifying land forces for these operations. Having realised the value of rehearsals during Operation Warden, we introduced a program of mission rehearsal activities and exercises as part of the mounting and certification process. The 39th Operational Support Battalion and the Combat Training Centre were placed under command of the DJFHQ to enact this individual and collective training program.

In addition, the headquarters established the Adaptive Warfare Branch to conduct analysis of current operations, and identify lessons for immediate implementation within our force preparation program. One output from the Adaptive Warfare Branch was the drafting and issue of pre-deployment handbooks. Prior to deploying on Operation Warden, some troops received a 40 minute country brief as part of their battle procedure.

Today, pre-deployment handbooks are used in conjunction with mission rehearsal activities. They provide each individual undergoing force preparation with a ready reckoner on the mission, history, geography, culture, and language aspects pertinent to their area of operation. Another output has been, in cooperation with the Combat Training Centre, the design of specific mission training events so that they are as contemporary as the current operational environment as possible. The Adaptive Warfare Branch was further tasked to establish a working relationship with the Defence Science and Technology Organisation to ensure that a scientific method was applied to all aspects of operational analysis. Through the Adaptive Warfare Branch, we have seen a gradual improvement in the standard of force preparation of individuals and

force elements. Our most recent headquarters deployment provides a very good example.

On 14 October 2014, we were directed to plan, force prepare, command and control a 400 person Australian and New Zealand Build Partner Capacity Task Group as part of the Australian Defence Force's contribution to the international effort to combat the Daesh (also known as ISIL) terrorist threat in Iraq. The task group headquarters was assigned operational control of army training, force protection, communications and logistic force elements before deploying to the TAJI military complex on 6 May this year, and is currently training an Iraqi Security Force Brigade.

Building on lessons learned from Operation Warden and reinforced by operational analysis from the Adaptive Warfare Branch, the Task Group Headquarters underwent a comprehensive program of command post and field training mission rehearsals. Again, the utility of frequent engagement between the New Zealand Joint Force Headquarters and our DJFHQ was proven in the seamless manner in which the Task Group Headquarters integrated as part of the command post rehearsal. However, the greatest adaptation introduced during these rehearsals was the application of cultural compatibility training. This training was developed in cooperation with DSTO cultural compatibility analysts. This training was directed at key headquarters staff and advisors in order to improve their interaction with foreign soldiers deliver more effective capacity training and mitigate against the threat of green on blue attacks. It was designed to make them more culturally intelligent. Specific mission events, such as meetings with senior Iraqi commanders, range practices with Iraqi soldiers and green on blue incidents were realistically rehearsed in order to confirm levels of cultural compatibility.

As the current commander of Task Group TAJI, Colonel Matt Galton reflected from his command post in Iraq: "The rigours of our mission rehearsal exercise are now paying dividends because our headquarters is well attuned to the complexities of this Build Partner Capacity Mission." In conclusion, the deployment of Headquarters Task Group TAJI on Operation Okra epitomises the evolution of the DJFHQ since 1999. It is now a headquarters with a culture characterised by a joint approach, committed to building counterpart staff relations through international engagement and fiercely attentive to the detail of mission rehearsals. The headquarters is a product of learning and stands ready to prepare and command assigned forces, to meet Chief of Army and Chief of Joint Operations specified and contingency requirements.