

## Defense of Australia – The Army pulls itself together

After serving in my first battalion for four and one half years I was posted to the Reserve Command and staff college (RCSC) to be trained in the necessary skills to be promoted to Captain. I studied; tactics, training design, leadership, war and peace administration after which I was posted to Melbourne University Regiment as Second in Command of Administrative Company. It was while I was in this posting that I served in my civilian job on the Parliamentary Response team which I mentioned earlier. I struggled with the implications of my exposure to the Political process and decided to leave my employment with the Phone Company and after a period working as an accountant for a large supermarket chain volunteered and was accepted to serve on a full time basis with the Army filling a vacancy as an Operations Officer with the Headquarters of the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

It was whilst serving on full time service with the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade that I was trained in the new Defence Force Disciplinary Procedures which replaced the old World War II Australian Military Regulations and Orders. This training would normally have taken place during the promotion course at RCSC but this was not done as the army was transitioning to the new procedures at the time. The most important change from my view was that it removed the old powers of Summary Execution and made it much more like civilian court proceedings. During the early period of my service as Staff Officer Grade Three on the Headquarters 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade the Soviet Union Collapsed, I got married and we almost immediately afterwards become involved in the First Gulf War. It was only around this time that I first received any training in the Humanitarian Laws of War and we began to transition to “The Defence of Australia Doctrine”. I took advantage of serving full time to explore concepts like “What is a lawful command?” and to contrast it with the employment law I studied during my degree.

As a keen young officer I resolved to read widely to understand my craft. One of the books I read was Sun Tzu’s “The Art of War” one of the key quotes in this book was “The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.” My key takeaways from the Nuremberg Trials was that winning by Genocide was no longer considered a valid strategy. Also it is fair to say that I saw warfare in national conflict terms. Therefore I reasoned that as there were only some One hundred and Ninety Five Countries in the world and I thought that we should study the thinking and trends in other countries in order to detect threats and subdue them or at least protect or advance our critical national objectives without fighting. In my civilian capacity I worked for the Phone Company and saw with the ramped up inter-connectivity the evolving global village and there was a possibility for the cross border penetration of ideas.

It occurred to me that the other side might think a lot like me and be equally as frightened of me as I was of him. So I played with this concept a little putting out a memes like “If the Russians love their children too” and I was delighted when this was picked up in a song by Sting in 1985.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHylQRVN2Qs>

I also independently developed and explored the concept of the six degrees of separation circa 1991. I was able to determine I was no more than four degrees separated from Osama Bin Laden through my wife's' family. During my military service it is fair to say that I did not always find these concepts present in my military training. During the first half of my Military Service which was during the Cold War the tactical training I received was largely mechanical in nature. The tactics were on the best way to use the combat groups and weapon systems the “Mechanical Resources” I was likely to be entrusted with to the optimum fire power effect.

This reflected the Cold War Mass Army doctrine and the views of General Sir John Monash: “the true role of infantry was not to expend itself upon heroic physical effort, not to wither away under merciless machine-gun fire, not to impale itself on hostile bayonets, but on the contrary, to advance under the maximum possible protection of the maximum possible array of mechanical resources, in the form of guns, machine-guns, tanks, mortars and aeroplanes; to advance with as little impediment as possible; to be relieved as far as possible of the obligation to fight their way forward.” There was no simply no discussion of the psychological dimensions of warfare or combat.

As I was determined to be as knowledgeable about my craft as I could, I had supplemented my formal training with war gaming as I had been told by a fellow officer that this is what all Officers should do. I therefore bought and played a number of times the game of “Squad Leader”. In that game I quickly discovered the centrality of “Morale” as a concept. I realized that building and maintaining the motivation and resilience of the troops was a key to operational success and that an understanding how an opponent thought and how to break their morale could be important for success. Once again to quote Sen Tzu - “To fight and conquer in all our battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting.”

This understanding of tactics paid dividends when I incorporated deception methods into my tactics. I would undertake actions designed to cause my opponent to mis-employ their combat power. When Australia adopted the Defence of Australia defense doctrine one of the first differences was an increased focus on the careful use of force given that any civilians in the area were likely to be Australians. This meant that the use of some of the weapon systems under my command were subject to tight restrictions on their use. These restrictions in particular related to the use of so called “Area Weapons” such as mortars or artillery as it was very difficult at long range to ensure that there would be no civilians casualties (Civilians whom we were sworn to protect) in the impact area of these high explosive weapons. One of the key differences was a concept called “Rules of Engagement” and for the soldiers “Orders for Opening Fire”.

This was in an effort to address the political dimensions of war. To illustrate the new political dimension to war acts I will use an incident portrayed in the film “Thirteen Days” which is about the Cuban Missile Crisis, where the world teetered on the edge of a nuclear war. In the film the Navy Commander tells the President “We know how to conduct a blockade we have been doing it in the Navy since John Paul Jones!” To which the Secretary of War Robert McNamara replies “We are not conducting a blockade we are sending a carefully calibrated message to the Kremlin in a high stakes game!”

Which leads me to a final observation and that is that violence is often an imprecise form of communication.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yt8SB1x9P9I&list=PL5eqA9W2zNewoywQdXP1fITQhdlgn\\_KWx](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yt8SB1x9P9I&list=PL5eqA9W2zNewoywQdXP1fITQhdlgn_KWx)

Asking “how would I react if I was the other guy is a good start. But people do not always think like you. Expecting the Soviets to think like us worked because we had a lot in common. But this process is filtered by culture which is shaped by history. I have seen a great deal of evidence that people in the West can be baffled by the thinking of people in the East. This is because there is little understanding in the West of the centrality of the concept of Face in the East. Also although it is largely unaware of it the West thinks in terms of Nation States. Societies have been shaped the needs of survival, the needs of war. How our countries are organized in part is to meet the needs of war the so called “Nation in

Arms” Theory where a centralized political system supervises: educational, industrial and infrastructural systems are organized to meet the needs of war. We only have to look at the Australian Car Industry which was created in Australia using tariff walls to ensure we could build our own tanks in the event of a war.

Thinking that they will behave largely “Like us” in order to forecast behavior breaks down when we seek to use the tools that work in a centralized government situation to put pressure on a weak central government such as in Afghanistan. Expecting the central government to curb the behavior of its citizens who owe more loyalty to there local tribal leaders than to the central government which has little to no impact on there lives simply doesn’t work.

<https://kr.usembassy.gov/education-culture/infopedia-usa/living-documents-american-history-democracy/john-f-kennedy-american-university-address-1963/>