Chapter 10

The Higher Command Structure for Joint ADF Operations

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An effective command structure for ADF operations is one of the most important requirements for the defence of Australia and its interests. Civilian strategic analysts sometimes dismiss their military colleagues' apparent obsession with command. In their view, issues of international relations, strategic and defence policy, force development and budgets are the heart of strategic analysis. But command is fundamental to a military organisation. Put simply, it is the means by which the government's wishes are translated into military outcomes. As the Vice Chief of the Defence Force (VCDF), Vice-Admiral Russ Shalders, put it in 2005, the number one outcome for the ADF, as endorsed by the government, is the conduct of operations.¹

Command is not just about giving orders and ensuring that they are carried out. It is also about ensuring that the right orders are given—that the plans both reflect government policy and are achievable. There are, of course, two elements to command. The first is the ability of individual commanders to complete their tasks, and this depends on personal qualities, such as technical knowledge, courage, robustness and character. The second element is the command structure. Commanders can only operate within the bounds of their legal authority and within the structures available to them. The command structure includes headquarters, from the strategic to the tactical levels, the communications links between them, and the intelligence systems to inform them. This chapter focuses on the second element—the higher command structure for joint operations—as the most relevant to an enquiry into the broader aspects of defence policy.

The general principles of command are well-known, and most military commanders would agree that unity of command is paramount. Napoleon Bonaparte declared: 'Nothing is so important in war as an undivided command', and Britain's First World War Prime Minister, Lloyd George, said: 'It is not a question of one general being better than another, but of one general being better than two.'² Yet, for all these fine sentiments, it has not always been easy to achieve unity of command for joint operations.

The word 'joint' refers to activities, operations and organisations in which elements of more than one Service of the same nation participate. According to the ADF's 'capstone' doctrinal publication, *The Australian Approach to Warfare*, the 'integration of the capabilities of the three Services (Navy, Army and Air Force) in joint operations' is a 'key warfare' concept. The publication continues:

For Australia, the conduct of joint operations, rather than single-Service operations, is a matter of practical necessity. It is the effective integration of thought and action at all levels of command to achieve the common goal that produces a synergy in the conduct of operations, which is the strength of our joint warfare approach.³

The importance of joint operations is a relatively new phenomenon. In earlier times, navies and armies generally conducted their operations separately. When they needed to cooperate, this was normally achieved by a coordinating conference. It was extremely rare for an army officer to command ships or for a naval officer to command army units. It was the advent of aircraft—or more specifically the formation of separate air forces—that provided the impetus for the development of concepts for the command of joint operations. Nowadays, it is difficult to think of major land or maritime operations in which aircraft are not involved. Yet, ironically, it is possible to think of purely air operations, such as strategic bombing campaigns.

While military men have espoused the idea of unity of command, they have been less inclined to accept the idea of an officer of one Service exercising command over the combat forces of another Service. Yet this is what needs to happen if joint command is to be exercised effectively. The modern-day understanding of joint warfare and joint command stems from the Second World War. An early example was when Admiral Louis Mountbatten was appointed Chief of (so-called) Combined Operations in 1941. A more enduring example was when the allies set up joint theatre commands such as the Pacific Oceans Command, the Southwest Pacific Area, and Southeast Asia Command. General Douglas MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief of the Southwest Pacific Area, commanded all naval, land and air forces in his area. But what is the record of the development of joint command in Australia?

Forty years ago, two events occurred that were to have a fundamental effect on the development of the joint command structure for Australian military operations. The first of these was the appointment, on 17 April 1966, of Major General Ken Mackay as Commander Australian Force Vietnam (COMAFV), and the second was the appointment a month later, on 19 May 1966, of Lieutenant General Sir John Wilton as Chairman CSOC. We will return to the importance of these two appointments and how they changed Australian joint command arrangements a little later, but first we need to consider the extent to which Australia had developed joint command arrangements before then.

Before Vietnam

Until 1966, Australian forces had little experience of joint operations. Yet, ironically, if we leave aside Australia's limited contribution to the Boer War after Federation in 1901, Australia's first military operation was actually a joint undertaking. Soon after the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, the Australian Commonwealth Naval Board directed Rear Admiral Sir George Patey RN, commander of the Australian Fleet, to mount an expedition to seize German New Guinea. A Department of Defence publication has described this expedition as 'the first Australian joint military operation conceived, planned, organised, and executed by Australia with overall political direction leading back to the Government of Australia'.⁴ This is not quite correct. In fact, the expedition was undertaken at the urging of the British Government and against the advice of the Australian Chief of Naval Staff, Vice-Admiral Sir William Creswell. In his view the British and Australian naval forces in the Pacific would have been better used to seek out and destroy the powerful German units operating in the western Pacific.⁵

Patey's land force commander, Colonel William Holmes, led the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force, which consisted of two battalions—one a militia battalion and the other composed of naval troops—with little in the way of supporting arms. From the arrival of the fleet near Rabaul to the German surrender, the operation lasted less than six days. It was so swift and uncomplicated, the planning so unsophisticated and the enemy so weak, that it was a campaign in name only. It hardly provides any basis for developing an Australian tradition for joint command and planning at the operational level.

There were no other instances of Australian joint command in the First World War. Rather, Australia's army and navy units fought separately, under British command. After the war, no effort was made to develop joint command arrangements in Australia. In time of war it was expected that the major fleet units would be deployed under Admiralty control. If an enemy tried to attack Australia, the forces defending a major port, such as Sydney, Melbourne or Newcastle, would be commanded separately, although the local commanders would form a committee to coordinate their activities. This idea of a command by committee was taken up in the early years of the Second World War. Nationally, command was exercised by the COSC, assisted by a Central War Room and a Combined Operational Intelligence Centre located at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne. In 1941 area combined headquarters were established at various locations such as Townsville, Melbourne, Fremantle and Darwin to coordinate the defence of those locations.⁶

As in the First World War, Australian forces deployed overseas operated separately under British command. Once Australia faced the threat of invasion in 1942 some joint command arrangements were introduced. For example, the

Commander of Northern Territory Force, a major general, was given authority to command all army, navy and air force units in his area once a land attack had started or was 'clearly imminent'.⁷ General Douglas MacArthur, the American general appointed Commander-in-Chief Southwest Pacific Area in April 1942, commanded all the allied forces in his command. But he did not form joint subordinate commands. Thus, when General Sir Thomas Blamey commanded New Guinea Force during the New Guinea offensives in 1943, he needed to coordinate his land operations with those of the commanders of the Allied Naval and Air Forces. Ultimate authority rested with MacArthur. On one notable occasion, the Commander Allied Naval Forces (Vice Admiral Arthur Carpender) refused to allow the Commander New Guinea Force (at that time Lieutenant General Sir Iven Mackay) to reinforce Finschhafen. After a plea from Blamey (who had returned to Australia from New Guinea), MacArthur intervened and ordered the reinforcement.⁸ A significant feature of the command structure was that the Australian Chiefs of Staff did not have operational command of their own forces.⁹

The Australian Commander-in-Chief British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) in Japan between 1946 and 1950 was both a joint and combined commander, but he did not conduct war-like operations. During the Korean War the Commander-in-Chief BCOF became the Commander-in-Chief British Commonwealth Force Korea. He was the Australian national commander as well as being responsible for the administration of the British Commonwealth forces, but he had no operational responsibility whatsoever. The commanders of the RAN ships, the Australian infantry battalions (and later the 28th Commonwealth Brigade) and the RAAF fighter squadron operating in Korea were all responsible to either British or American single-Service superiors.

Back in Australia, during the 1950 and 1960s, there was no joint command structure. The Services had their own command structures leading upwards to their Chiefs of Staff, who in fact were merely the first members of their Service boards. Australian forces in Malaya served under British single-Service commanders. When the Australian Army sent advisers to Vietnam in 1962 and an infantry battalion in 1965, the commander of the Australian Army Force Vietnam reported back to Army Headquarters in Canberra.

Commander Australian Force Vietnam

In March 1966 the Prime Minister, Harold Holt, announced that the battalion group deployed to Vietnam would be expanded to a two-battalion task force. The RAAF commitment to support the task Force was to be increased, and hence the headquarters of the Australian Army Force Vietnam was to become the joint Services headquarters of Australian Force Vietnam. Since the COMAFV was a joint Service commander, he became responsible not to the CGS but to the COSC through its Chairman, Lieutenant General Wilton.

The COMAFV was the Australian national commander with responsibility for the administration of the Australian forces in Vietnam. He had no responsibility for the operational employment of the Australian forces, primarily the Task Force in Phuoc Tuy Province, which came under the command of a US corps commander, but he was consulted on major operational matters, such as the decision in early 1968 to deploy the Task Force into Bien Hoa Province. The COMAFVs were given little political or strategic direction from Canberra and often had to make decisions according to what they thought would have been acceptable in Canberra.¹⁰

The appointment of COMAFV set a precedent for later ADF operations. The government realised that, for overseas operations, there was great value in appointing a national commander who could ensure that Australian policy was followed. Further, if more than one Service was deployed, there was advantage in having one national joint Service commander deal with allied commanders-in-chief and host governments.

Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee

The appointment of Lieutenant General Sir John Wilton as Chairman COSC was the most important development at this time.¹¹ A full-time chairman had first been appointed in 1958, but the incumbent did not gain much influence until Air Marshal Sir Frederick Scherger was appointed in 1961. He was promoted to Air Chief Marshal in 1965, a year before he was succeeded by Wilton. Scherger believed that a single ADF should be formed but, as he said later, 'Vietnam was no time for changing horses in midstream, or even changing the colour of the horses'.¹²

Wilton had no such hesitation. His problem was that he had no command authority over COMAFV. Thus if the COMAFV sought urgent direction from Wilton, he could not give it until he had called the COSC together. In practice, Wilton sometimes gave the necessary direction and sought COSC and ministerial approval later. Writing at about this time, Tom Millar, the first head of the newly-formed SDSC at the ANU, observed:

Control of actual military operations is effected by the Chiefs of Staff Committee direct to the theatre or operational commander, on the American pattern using the Joint Staff. A joint Service command has been established in Viet Nam and New Guinea, and will clearly be needed in Malaysia while Australian forces remain there. Allocation of resources is made by the Chiefs of Staff, within directives issued by the cabinet or the Minister of Defence and with advice from the relevant intelligence, planning and administrative committees. This means that the Chiefs of Staff have become in effect a joint Commander-in-Chief although in Viet Nam the Australian Task force is operationally under control of the

American Second Field Force, within guidelines laid down by the Australian Chiefs of Staff Committee.¹³

In September 1967, Wilton circulated his proposals for change.¹⁴ His key proposal was the formation of a unified Department of Defence, involving the abolition of the Service departments and ministers. The fighting Services would retain their separate identities to preserve morale and operational efficiency. Wilton's own position should be redesignated Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). Higher direction of the department would be in the hands of a Defence Board of Administration, which would operate in a similar manner to the Service boards. It would be headed by the Minister, and would include the CDS, the Secretary and the Service chiefs. The CDS and the Secretary would exercise joint executive authority. The COSC would be responsible to the Minister for the direction, planning and control of operations, with a joint Service staff to assist it. There should be a joint intelligence organisation, a joint cadet college, a joint staff college, a joint warfare establishment, a joint communications centre and joint medical services. The Service chiefs would remain the professional heads of their Services and would exercise their functions through their own headquarters.

Wilton argued that, as most operations in which Australian forces were likely to be committed would be joint, there should be a 'single clear chain of operational control'. Joint forces, such as Australian Force Vietnam, should report to the COSC, which should have 'statutory authority and some of the powers now vested in the existing statutory Service boards'. Other proposed joint commands, such as Air Defence and Maritime Commands, could report to the COSC through the Chief of the Air Staff and the Chief of Naval Staff respectively. As Wilton put it, the CDS, in 'respect of operations', would be the 'executive agent' of the COSC, issuing instructions to designated joint commands and military establishments and as appropriate to individual Chiefs of Staff. The joint staff and the staffs of the Service chiefs were to be collocated in the same building. It would be another 30 years before this idea was realised.

Wilton was unable to persuade either the Defence Minister, Allen Fairhall, or the Defence Secretary, Sir Edwin Hicks, but he bided his time, and when Sir Henry Bland became Secretary in January 1968 he began implementing changes. By the time Wilton retired in November 1970, with Bland's assistance he had formed a Joint Staff headed by a two-star Director Joint Staff (Rear Admiral Bill Dovers). Wilton chaired a committee that recommended and pushed through the formation of the Joint Intelligence Organisation. He established the Joint Services Staff College; took the first step in forming the Australian Joint Warfare Establishment; and was a prime mover in working towards a tri-Service officer cadet academy (the latter not being approved until after he had retired). He even

persuaded the COSC to accept a joint Service badge—the same one that is used today for the ADF, an organisation that at that time had not yet been formed.

Wilton was not the only one agitating for change. Writing in 1969, Millar argued that if Australia were to become involved in ‘substantial operations of war’, it would require ‘a direct command structure’. He wondered whether ‘the head of the whole defence organisation should be a professional military man rather than a professional civil servant?’ Recognising that this was probably ‘not feasible’, he thought that ‘the senior Service officer at least needs to be given prime operational responsibility, by making him the Chief of the Defence Staff and not simply chairman of a committee’. Defence needed ‘a chief and not a chairman. He should be of four-star rank, i.e., general or equivalent. At present the Chairman of the COSC, usually a three-star officer, is at a disadvantage in international military meetings and in dealing with the Chiefs of Staff’.¹⁵ (Wilton had been promoted to general in September 1968; but there was no guarantee that his successor would be promoted.)

In his last year as Chairman, with a new Defence Minister, Malcolm Fraser, and a new Defence Secretary, Sir Arthur Tange, Wilton revived his earlier proposals, but he made no headway. Two years later, after he had retired, he submitted another paper to the Shadow Minister for Defence, Lance Barnard, in which he argued that the COSC should be established as a statutory authority and that its Chairman should be redesignated CDS as a statutory appointment. He would perform his duties ‘by virtue of his statutory office rather than as Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff. He should have co-equal status and authority with the Secretary Department of Defence.’¹⁶ Interestingly, the ANU played a minor role in Wilton’s approach to Barnard: in mid-1972 Wilton attended a lecture given by Barnard at the university and afterwards explained his concerns to Barnard, who subsequently agreed to meet with Wilton.¹⁷

Defence Reorganisation

When the Labor Party was elected in December 1972, Barnard became Minister for Defence and immediately directed Tange to undertake a review and to make recommendations leading to the reorganisation of the Defence group of departments. The ‘Tange reorganisation’, as it was sometimes called, introduced many of the proposals for which Wilton had been agitating for the previous nine years.

The reorganisation of the Defence group of departments was to have a profound effect on Australian command arrangements. The single-Service departments and the Service boards were abolished and one Defence Department was formed with a single Defence Minister. On 9 February 1976, General Sir Francis Hassett, Chairman, COSC, assumed the new appointment of Chief of the Defence Force Staff (CDFS). The CDFS was given command of the Defence Force

and the chiefs of each Service were given command (under the CDFS) of their Service. The CDFS could appoint an officer to command a part of the Defence Force consisting of members of more than one Service. The CDFS was the principal military adviser to the Defence Minister and was responsible to him for:

- the conduct of military operations by the Defence Force;
- ensuring the effectiveness of military plans, training and organisation, the effectiveness of the Defence Force in the conduct of joint operations, and the standard of discipline, morale and health of the Forces;
- tendering military advice on the size of the Defence Force and the balance within it in relation to the strategic requirements; and
- ensuring the exercise of command within the Defence Force was within approved policies.

In other words, the CDFS became the top joint Service commander.

The Service chiefs were responsible to the Defence Minister, through the CDFS, for command of their Services, and had the right of direct access to the Minister. They were to plan and conduct single-Service operations and provide forces from their respective Services for assignment to joint operations. The COSC was to provide collective professional advice on military operations, endorse military plans, recommend the allocation of resources and endorse the military aspects of policies concerning joint Service units and installations.

The Secretary to the Defence Department retained his traditional statutory responsibilities as permanent head, and advised the Minister on policy, resources, organisation and finance. With the CDFS, he exercised joint responsibility for the administration of the Defence Force. This was the so-called 'diarchy' of responsibility that has continued through to the present day.

The main weakness flowing from the Defence reorganisation was that the CDFS had completely inadequate staff by which to exercise his command responsibilities. As Sir Arthur Tange often pointed out in later years, under the Defence Act 1903, the CDFS had the authority to exercise command and for some reason failed to put in place the structures to allow him to do so. Some commentators, however, have noted that Tange took no action to encourage the military to develop the necessary joint command structures.

Towards a Joint Command Structure

The new Defence organisation that came into existence between 1974 and 1976 coincided with the development of a new Defence policy, formalised by the release of the Defence White Paper, *Australian Defence*, in November 1976. This policy, often described as 'self reliance within an alliance framework', gave

greater attention to preparing forces for the defence of Australia and its near region. As the paper put it:

In our contemporary circumstances we no longer base our policy on the expectation that Australia's Navy or Army or Air Force will be sent abroad to fight as part of some other nation's force, supported by it. We do not rule out an Australian contribution to operations elsewhere if the requirement arose and we felt that our presence would be effective, and if our forces could be spared from their national tasks. But we believe that any operations are much more likely to be in our own neighbourhood than in some distant or forward theatre, and that our Armed Services would be conducting joint operations together as the Australian Defence Force.¹⁸

Clearly, the new Defence reorganisation and this new policy required new joint command arrangements, but the CDFS was slow to act. Instead, one initiative came from Robert O'Neill, who had succeeded Millar as Head of the SDSC. In January 1976 he suggested the establishment of three joint operational commands: Continental Defence, Coastal Defence, and perhaps Retaliatory Strike Commands.¹⁹ Apparently, Defence did not even consider this suggestion.

In the *Kangaroo* series of military exercises in the 1970s, various commanders were appointed, but no formal structure was established. During the following decade, Australian forces had no major overseas deployments and the command structures evolved relatively slowly. Indeed, although the ADF had formally come into existence in 1976, it took several years before it was recognised as a new entity.

The Australian Labor Party came to power in March 1983 with a Defence platform stating that it would 'develop an Australian Defence Force functional command structure with a decentralised organisation'. It seemed likely that the new government would be receptive to proposals to improve the joint command structure and, anticipating this, in his 1982 and 1983 exercises, CGS Lieutenant General Phillip Bennett, examined the higher command problems in the Army.²⁰

Bennett was appointed CDFS in April 1984, and in September that year he redesignated his staff to form Headquarters Australian Defence Force (HQADF), in order to emphasise his command and administrative functions in relation to the ADF and to underscore his role as the principal military adviser to the government. In October 1984 the government changed the title of CDFS to CDF to reflect more accurately the fact that the CDF commanded the ADF. In 1985 Maritime Headquarters (formerly the Navy's Fleet headquarters) was made responsible to the CDF for joint exercises and operations, but to the Chief of Naval Staff for command of the Fleet. The following year, the Army's Field Force Headquarters and the RAAF's Operational Command Headquarters became joint

headquarters with the titles of Land Force and Air Headquarters respectively. Initially these were joint headquarters in name only, but they formally became joint headquarters in 1987. These were fairly conservative changes, reflecting the military's belief that each step needed to be tested before the next one was proposed.

There was considerable opposition to the new command structure. Several retired and serving senior officers feared that the Service chiefs would be eliminated from the chain of command and that the CDF would be able to command operations through his joint commanders without reference to them.²¹ Bennett thought that this was a simplistic view of how the chiefs operated. He wrote later that it was 'inconceivable that a CDF would ignore the collective wisdom of his Service Chiefs—or his senior logistics advisers. Every effort would be made by the CDF to present agreed advice to Government, or at the very least, well supported advice, from the Chiefs most involved, and only reached after full consideration of the professional views of all the Service Chiefs.'²²

General Peter Gration, who succeeded Bennett in 1987, took the changes further when he commissioned Brigadier John Baker to review and recommend changes to the ADF command arrangements. Baker argued that there were three levels of command—strategic, operational and tactical—and these needed to be reflected in the ADF.²³ Following the submission of Baker's report, in March 1988 the government approved the establishment of another joint command, Northern Command, in Darwin. Gration directed the establishment of the position of Commander Joint Forces Australia (CJFA). It was explicitly assigned to the operational level of war. Gration, assisted by HQADF was to concentrate on command at the strategic level. The arrangements were to 'provide, in higher level operations, for an operational level commander, the Commander Joint Forces Australia, to be responsible directly to me, located away from Canberra, and commanding the three Joint Force Commanders'.²⁴ In September 1988, Gration issued a directive confirming the arrangements with the joint force commanders. The joint commands were now known as Maritime, Land and Air Commands, but in the first instance no-one was appointed CJFA. The Chiefs of Staff were thus removed from the chain of command for operations, much as they had been during the Second World War, although they remained as advisers to the CDF.

1990–91 Persian Gulf War

This was the command structure in place during the Persian Gulf crisis in 1990 and the subsequent war to eject Iraq from Kuwait in the early months of 1991. Gration exercised command at the strategic level with the advice of the augmented COSC. This consisted of the Service chiefs, the VCDF (a position that had been established a few years earlier), the Secretary, and other key civilian

and military staff. He was assisted by the HQADF operations staff, headed by the Assistant CDF (Operations) (ACOPS), Rear Admiral Rod Taylor. The Maritime Commander, Rear Admiral Ken Doolan, was responsible for deploying the two RAN task groups to the Persian Gulf. The task groups were commanded at sea by the Commodore Flotillas (COMFLOT), while Doolan remained in overall command of Operation *Damask*.

The Gulf commitment appeared to justify the broad ADF command arrangements that had been introduced during the previous five years. HQADF developed the strategic mission and passed it directly to Maritime Headquarters for its implementation. In view of the speed with which events moved, and their possible sensitivity, this was a much more efficient arrangement than the old system, which would have interposed Navy Office in the chain of command. Navy Office was kept informed throughout. The ability of Maritime Headquarters to command the task group in the Gulf was enhanced by its occupation of its new headquarters building just prior to the deployment, and by the development of the Maritime Intelligence Centre.

The Persian Gulf commitment caused no major change to the command structure, but it signalled an increase in ADF deployments abroad, most of which were mounted and commanded by one of the joint commands. Both the commitments of a signals regiment to Cambodia in 1992–93 and of an infantry battalion group to Somalia in December 1992–May 1993 were mounted and commanded by Land Headquarters. Joint exercises in Australia pointed to the necessity for a commander who could coordinate the operations of the joint environmental commanders. In 1993, Lieutenant General John Sanderson, who had commanded the United Nations force in Cambodia, was appointed CJFA and he did considerable work on the responsibilities and scope of an operational level commander in an Australian setting. But, as CJFA, Sanderson had no command responsibilities.

Commander Australian Theatre

In January 1996, the CDF, General John Baker, announced significant changes to the ADF's command and control arrangements.²⁵ Baker believed Bennett's initiatives had strengthened the position of CDF, but that he still had insufficient staff to command the ADF adequately. Baker announced that, at the strategic level, the single-Service staffs in Russell Offices would be absorbed as components of HQADF, while the Chiefs of Staff would be redesignated as component commanders to the CDF. The chiefs would change their titles to Chief of Navy, Chief of Army and Chief of Air Force, and their staffs would become Navy, Army and Air Force Headquarters respectively.

At the operational level, there was to be a single joint commander to be known as Commander Australian Theatre (COMAST), who would have a single

headquarters (Headquarters Australian Theatre—HQAST) incorporating the existing Maritime, Land and Air Commands as components. The joint staff was to be kept to a minimum size by drawing on the expertise of the components, but would include joint logistics and joint movements staff. A common joint intelligence centre, the Australian Theatre Joint Intelligence Centre, would meet the needs of COMAST and the component commanders.

To enable him to develop operational level doctrine, COMAST was given control of the ADF Warfare Centre at Williamstown. To organise joint exercises he was given the Joint Exercise Planning Staff, previously under the CDF's control in Canberra. Headquarters Special Forces was to move from Canberra and be placed under COMAST for operations. Headquarters Northern Command was to come under COMAST and be developed into a joint headquarters capable of conducting all defensive operations across northern Australia. Two deployable joint force headquarters, one based on the 1st Division headquarters in Brisbane and the other on COMFLOT's staff, would command other joint operations as required. A new headquarters building with the latest information and communications facilities was to be built at a new site, its location to be decided later. This plan, the most sweeping for the ADF since its inception 20 years earlier, was designed to make it into a truly joint force.

In January 1997, Major General James Connolly took up the appointment as COMAST. His headquarters was in a Defence-owned multi-storey building next door to Maritime Headquarters in Potts Point, Sydney. The component commanders—Maritime, Land, Air and Special Operations—continued to work from their own headquarters buildings. Fortunately, Maritime Headquarters was next door to the COMAST building, Special Operations Command was almost next door, Land Headquarters was a couple of kilometres away and only Air Headquarters, at Glenbrook, was more than an hour away.

In some ways the establishment of HQAST facilitated the fundamental changes in Russell Offices that flowed from the report of the *Defence Efficiency Review*, released in April 1997. The formation of a proper operational headquarters made it possible to configure HQADF as a true joint strategic headquarters. The new structure came into existence on 1 July 1997. HQADF was dissolved and replaced by Australian Defence Headquarters headed jointly by the VCDF and the Deputy Secretary (Strategy and Intelligence). It consisted of the three Service headquarters and six staff divisions.

Another key change was the formation of a new joint headquarters and command—Support Command Australia—that was analogous to Australian Theatre Command in that both were at the operational level. The Navy, Army and Air Force Support Commanders became component commanders under the Commander Support Australia. Three years later, the Defence Acquisition Organisation and Support Command were amalgamated to form the Defence

Materiel Organisation. The latter organisation included Joint Logistic Command, responsible for supporting all three Services.

In May 1997 Baker claimed that, with the new command arrangements, 'we are probably at the forefront of military thinking in the world. I would like to claim a lot of responsibility for that.' He admitted that there was 'still a degree of rivalry between the Services and there always will be', but he thought that it had been harnessed for the good of the total organisation.²⁶

East Timor—INTERFET

These evolving command arrangements were tested during the deployment of the Australian-led international force to East Timor in 1999. This was not the first time that Australia had led and mounted a joint and combined operation away from Australian shores. In 1994, in Operation *Lagoon*, Australia had led a multinational force to support the Bougainville peace process. But the East Timor operation was on a much larger scale and was more challenging. The headquarters of the International Force East Timor (INTERFET) was based on the Deployable Joint Force Headquarters, and the Commander of INTERFET, Major General Peter Cosgrove, was truly a joint commander.

In exercising strategic command, the CDF, Admiral Chris Barrie, relied on two organisations that were similar to those that had supported Gration in 1991. Instead of Gration's augmented COSC, Barrie had the Strategic Command Group. Within Australian Defence Headquarters, Barrie was supported by Strategic Command Division, headed by Major General Michael Keating. This position was analogous to that of ACOPS during Gration's time.

There was, however, one major difference between command arrangements in 1991 and 1999. In 1991 Rear Admiral Doolan had reported directly to Gration, with Taylor heading Gration's operations staff. In 1999, initially Cosgrove reported to COMAST, Air Vice-Marshal Bob Treloar, in Sydney, who in turn reported to Barrie, with Keating heading Barrie's operations staff. That is, there was one more link in the chain. After a short while, however, and because of the international nature of INTERFET, Barrie changed the chain of command so that Cosgrove reported directly to him.

The institution of this command arrangement raised questions as to whether it was necessary to retain Headquarters Australian Theatre. At least two arguments were presented for retaining it. First, HQAST conducted a huge amount of staff work to maintain the force in East Timor. Second, COMAST commanded several separate operations that were supporting the operation in East Timor, and also conducted or supervised other operations that had nothing to do with East Timor: for example, Australia's commitment to peacekeeping operations. For that reason, despite the INTERFET experience, Barrie decided to retain HQAST. But the experience underlined the fact that Baker had set up

HQAST to conduct operations in 'the Australian theatre' in the context of a defence policy that emphasised the defence of Australia. It was never intended to deploy it overseas. Once a large force was deployed overseas, it was likely that the CDF would require its commander to report to him.

The Bungendore Solution

When General Gration had announced the establishment of the position of Commander Joint Forces Australia in 1988, he had mentioned that the commander needed to be 'located away from Canberra' and, four years later, as he neared the end of his command, Gration went further. He declared that the joint commands needed to be collocated on one site: 'We have not yet fixed on a site, but I think it should be outside Canberra, but not too far—say no more than half an hour by helicopter.'²⁷ The rationale for locating the headquarters away from Canberra was so that politicians would not interfere at the operational level of command. Over the following years there was much discussion about the eventual site for the collocated headquarters, but eventually, in 2001 the government announced that it was to be near Bungendore, just outside the Australian Capital Territory.²⁸ There were various reasons for selecting a site near to Canberra, but one was the politicians' desire that it be near enough that they could visit it easily—the very reason why Gration had wanted it to be further away. The project was delayed and in the meantime the shape of the new headquarters was influenced by several more operations.

Operation *Slipper*

In October 2001, following the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, the ADF deployed an Australian national commander to Kuwait, several ships to support the Multinational Interception Force in the Persian Gulf, a special forces task group for operations in Afghanistan, and various types of aircraft to different locations in the region.

Operation *Slipper*, as it was known, was commanded by the COMAST, Rear Admiral Chris Ritchie. The Strategic Command Group met to consider the concept of operations, submitted by Ritchie, and thereafter he was allowed to get on with the operation, although he kept in very close contact with the CDF, Admiral Barrie. Unlike in the INTERFET operation, Australia did not deploy a joint task force headquarters. The Australian national commander for Operation *Slipper*, Brigadier Ken Gillespie, was based in Kuwait where he was collocated with the US Land Component Commander, and only a short flight from the US Maritime and Air Component Commanders. Gillespie did not report to the CDF, but directly to Rear Admiral Ritchie. Both Gillespie and his successor, Brigadier Gary Bornholm, exercised little control over the deployed forces. Rather, the commanders of the deployed maritime, special forces and air elements reported directly to the Australian Theatre component commanders (Maritime, Special

Operations and Air Commanders), while keeping Gillespie informed on operational matters, so that he could, if necessary, veto Australian participation; but otherwise they operated under the operational control of US component commanders.

2003 Iraq War

Command arrangements were slightly different for the 2003 Iraq War. As in the previous deployments, the CDF, General Peter Cosgrove, was assisted by the Strategic Command Group and the staff of Strategic Command Division (later called Strategic Operations Division) under Major General Ken Gillespie. However, because of the very high level of secrecy necessary during the early phase, the initial planning was conducted by Gillespie's staff. The COMAST, Rear Admiral Marc Bonser, was only brought into it somewhat later.

There were similarities with Operation *Slipper*. The Australian national commander, Brigadier Maurie McNarn, was located in Qatar, alongside the headquarters of the US Commander, General Tommy Franks. He reported to the COMAST, Rear Admiral Bonser. As in Operation *Slipper*, he had several task group commanders, in this case four—maritime, maritime patrol aircraft, special forces, and fighters/transport aircraft. These were placed under the operational control of coalition component commanders. They reported on operational matters to McNarn and on technical and administrative matters directly to COMAST.

The major difference between this operation and Operation *Slipper*, however, was that McNarn also reported directly to the Cosgrove, who believed that he needed up-to-date information so that he could report it to the government. Further, in a fast-moving operation, Cosgrove believed that he needed to be able to give orders directly to the commander in the field.

After the successful invasion of Iraq, and the end of Operation *Falconer*, the ADF began a new operation, Operation *Catalyst*. Considerable numbers of ADF units returned to Australia, but the remaining force still contained several different elements, including land and air force elements in Iraq, air force units outside Iraq, and naval units in the Persian Gulf. The command structure changed yet again. This time the ADF formed a joint task force in the Middle East, commanded by a one-star officer, initially Air Commodore Graham Bentley. While the details were extremely complex, in brief, Bentley had operational control of all the Australian components. In turn he reported directly to COMAST. As in Operation *Falconer*, Bentley could speak directly to Cosgrove on matters of strategic and national policy, but these occasions were fewer, and he reported more regularly to COMAST.

The conduct of the Iraq War raised further questions about the efficacy of the higher command arrangements for joint operations. In particular, there were

suggestions that, as the planning for the war had been conducted by Strategic Operations Division (at least in the first instance) and as McNarn had reported directly to Cosgrove, there was no need for HQUEST. Some of these criticisms were couched in terms of questioning the validity of the concept of the operational level of war, suggesting that it is no longer relevant in modern war, or at least there is no place for an operational level command structure.

This claim misunderstands the nature of the operational level. The operational level is the link between the strategic and the tactical levels, and should not merely be seen in terms of the functions of HQUEST. The operational level existed before HQUEST was established and does not exist in just one headquarters. The operational level planning for the commitment to the Iraq War was conducted by the Australian planning team at the Headquarters of US Central Command and also at HQUEST. The operational command of the Iraq War was conducted by General Franks' US Central Command headquarters level. Brigadier McNarn therefore worked at the operational level headquarters, even if he did not fully command at that level. The restrictions on his exercising his command were caused partly by the coalition nature of the war. When Australia provided the main deployed force, it was as in East Timor in 1999 where Headquarters INTERFET had been an operational level headquarters and the Commander INTERFET an operational level commander. Nonetheless, there were tensions between HQUEST and Strategic Operations Division and there was some overlap of work. Undoubtedly, in future operations, the CDF would want to communicate directly with a deployed joint force commander, and he would need timely access to information. Further, in a small defence force it seemed wasteful to maintain a large number of headquarters.

Headquarters Joint Operations Command

Noting these concerns, and aware that planning was underway for the collocated headquarters site near Bungendore, Cosgrove initiated a review of the command arrangements, and in March 2004 the Defence Minister, Senator Robert Hill, announced the establishment of a new Joint Operations Command. The command brought together the former HQUEST and the operational functions of Maritime, Land and Air Commands. It incorporated Special Operations and Joint Logistics Commands, and commanded Strategic Operations Division in Canberra, Northern Command in Darwin, the ADF Warfare Centre at Williamstown and the Joint Operational Intelligence Centre in Sydney. The VCDF took on the additional duties of Chief of Joint Operations. The former COMAST became the Deputy Chief of Joint Operations and the former two-star position of Head of Strategic Operations Division was abolished. Until the Bungendore headquarters was constructed, the new Headquarters Joint Operations Command continued to operate using the existing premises and those of its component commanders.

As with previous reorganisations, this was a conservative approach. The new structure recognised that there was overlap between the work of the strategic and operational level staffs, and that the CDF needed the capacity to command a deployed force. But as the time for deciding the shape of the Bungendore headquarters approached, the new CDF, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, directed another review of higher command and control arrangements. As a result, in October 2005 Senator Hill announced that the new headquarters was to be modified 'to make it more streamlined and effective in the light of lessons learned from recent successful deployments and swiftly evolving command, control and communications systems and methods'.²⁹ This low key announcement—which had implications for the tender process for the new buildings—disguised one of the most fundamental changes in joint command arrangements during the past 40 years.

HQAST had been formed with the idea of making a truly joint headquarters, but COMAST had relied heavily on the staffs of the component commanders. The original Headquarters Joint Operations Command had continued the idea of relying on the component commanders. The new Headquarters Joint Operations Command, however, is to be based on abolishing the component commanders. In future, it is to be completely joint. While certain cells within the headquarters will be concerned with specific air, submarine, maritime and special forces operations, in the main ADF operations will be controlled by a joint operations staff. The previous component commanders will revert to their single-Service roles of raise, train and sustain. It is intended that this new structure will begin operation in 2007, well before the Bungendore facility has been constructed. In the first instance, the headquarters staffs will be split between premises at Potts Point in Sydney and Russell Offices and Fairbairn in Canberra. Northern Command in Darwin will be disbanded, and some of its responsibilities will be taken over by the Joint Offshore Protection Command, operating out of Customs House in Canberra. Thus, with the exception of the Joint Offshore Protection Command, there will be only one operational headquarters in Australia, with one operations room—or control centre—namely, Headquarters Joint Operations Command. Current plans envisage the headquarters moving into its new premises near Bungendore in late 2008 and it will take several years for the new arrangements to reach a steady state.

Conclusion

Reflecting on how far the ADF has come since it was formed in 1976, it is noticeable that the changes to the command arrangements have been incremental. As each step was taken, it was possible to discern a further step that might have been taken along the road to a joint command, but which was resisted at that stage. With this latest development, it is hard to see the next step. As far as the

actual headquarters is concerned, it is difficult to imagine an even more joint headquarters.

Perhaps the next step is to look at the command structure below the actual headquarters. Already plans are envisaged for a small deployable joint force headquarters to be incorporated into Headquarters Joint Operations Command, ready to be deployed if necessary. Bob Breen has suggested that in future the forces on a short notice for deployment be allocated to a joint Rapid Response Command, answerable to the Chief of Joint Operations.³⁰ If past experience is a guide, this is unlikely to happen until the planned arrangements have been tested and found to work effectively.

Of necessity, this chapter has been about the apparently esoteric topic of command structures and organisations. But it is a mistake to focus on the bricks and mortar. In reality, command structures are about power relationships. There is a centuries-long belief that only naval officers have the knowledge and understanding to command naval operations, that only army officers can command army operations and that only air force officers can command air operations. The dilemma has been to resolve the problem of who commands joint operations.

Those who have wished to implement new joint command arrangements have always run up against institutional single-Service resistance. There is no doubt that each Service draws its fighting strength from its own ethos and esprit de corps, and this single-Service strength must be maintained. The trick has been to maintain this strength while providing effective joint command.

In my view, the great story of the Australian armed forces during the past 30 years has been the formation and development of the new entity known as the ADF. We now accept it as though it was always there. But without adequate joint command arrangements, it would not exist at all.

ENDNOTES

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² Quoted in Robert Debs Heintz Jr, *Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations*, United States Naval Institute, Annapolis, MD, 1966, pp. 334.

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⁴ Quoted in D. J. Killen, 'The Government's View', in (eds) Robert O'Neill and D. M. Horner, *Australian Defence Policy for the 1980s*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1982, p. 1.

⁵ Stephen D. Webster, 'Vice Admiral Sir William Creswell', in (ed.) D. M. Horner, *The Commanders: Australian Military Leadership in the Twentieth Century*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1984, p. 51.

⁶ Dudley McCarthy, *South-West Pacific Area—First Year: Kokoda to Wau*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1959, p. 9.

⁷ McCarthy, *South-West Pacific Area—First Year: Kokoda to Wau*, p. 74.

- ⁸ D. M. Horner, *High Command; Australia and Allied Strategy 1939–1945*, Australian War Memorial and George Allen & Unwin, Canberra and Sydney, 1982, p. 300.
- ⁹ Blamey was Commander-in-Chief of the Army, not CGS. He commanded the Army's operational forces by virtue of his position as Commander Allied Land Forces. The Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Sir Guy Royle, was appointed Commander Southwest Sea Frontiers, under the Commander Allied Naval Forces, and so had operational command of some of his naval forces.
- ¹⁰ For a discussion of the COMAFVs, see D. M. Horner, *Australian Higher Command in the Vietnam War*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence, CP 40, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, The Australian National University, Canberra, 1986.
- ¹¹ For a biography of Wilton, see D. M. Horner, *Strategic Command: General Sir John Wilton and Australia's Asian Wars*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2005, p. 262.
- ¹² Harry Rayner, *Scherger: A biography of Air Chief Marshal Sir Frederick Scherger, KBE, CB, DSO, AFC*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1984, p. 312.
- ¹³ Tom Millar, *Australia's Defence*, 2nd ed., Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1969, p. 105.
- ¹⁴ Wilton to Fairhall, 5 September 1967, Wilton Papers, folder 20, Australia Defence Force Academy Library, Canberra.
- ¹⁵ Millar, *Australia's Defence*, p. 111.
- ¹⁶ 'Brief Notes on Australian Defence Organisation', Wilton Papers, folder 19, Australian Defence Force Academy Library, Canberra.
- ¹⁷ Horner, *Strategic Command*, pp. 363–64.
- ¹⁸ Department of Defence, *Australian Defence*, White Paper presented to Parliament by the Minister for Defence the Hon. D.J. Killen, MP, November 1976, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1976, p. 10.
- ¹⁹ Robert O'Neill, *Structural changes for a more self-reliant national defence*, Dyason House papers, Australian Institute for International Affairs, January/February 1976. Also published as SDSC Working Paper, no. 3, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, The Australian National University, Canberra, December 1975.
- ²⁰ In preparing for the 1983 *Kangaroo* exercise, General Bennett used D. M. Horner's book *High Command*, published the previous year and based on Horner's PhD thesis, undertaken at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre between 1978 and 1980.
- ²¹ Air Marshal David Evans, *A Fatal Rivalry: Australia's Defence at Risk*, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1990, pp. 137–39.
- ²² Letter, General Sir Phillip Bennett to author, 21 July 2000.
- ²³ 'Report of the Study into ADF Command Arrangements HQ ADF, March 1988', an abridged version of the report prepared by Brigadier J. S. Baker in November 1987.
- ²⁴ General Peter C. Gratton, 'The Australian Defence Force, Current Issues and Future Prospects', Strategic and Defence Studies Centre Bicentennial Conference, 6–9 December 1988.
- ²⁵ The government had approved the changes on 22 December 1985.
- ²⁶ Mark Dapin, 'Top Brass', *Australian Financial Review*, 30 May 1997, pp. 20–9.
- ²⁷ General Peter C. Gratton, 'The ADF—Today and Tomorrow', CDF Address to the United Services Institute of ACT, 2 December 1992.
- ²⁸ Peter Reith, MP, 'Announcement of the New Defence Joint Headquarters', Queanbeyan Council Chambers, 18 July 2001, available at <<http://www.minister.defence.gov.au/ReithSpeechtpl.cfm?CurrentId=818>>, accessed 8 November 2007.
- ²⁹ Robert Hill, 'ADF Headquarters to be Streamlined', media release 166/2005, 5 October 2005, available at <<http://www.defence.gov.au/minister/Hilltpl.cfm?CurrentId=5147>>, accessed 8 November 2007.
- ³⁰ Bob Breen, 'Australian Military Force Projection in the late 1980s and the 1990s: What happened and Why', PhD Thesis, The Australian National University, Canberra, 2006.