

Address by the Chief of Army to the RAN's Sea Power Conference ¹

Lieutenant General Angus Campbell, DSC, AM, Chief of Army

All three Service Chiefs appreciate the importance of maritime issues to the future security of Australia and the Indo-Pacific region. In 2011, in a paper titled 'On Military Grammar: the Australian Army beyond Afghanistan', the eminent Australian military strategist Professor Michael Evans posited that the Australian Army had to master three enduring, recurring roles, namely conventional combat, stabilisation operations and amphibious warfare.²

He was and is right. Conventional combat, in any domain, remains the benchmark from which a professional force can adjust to the requirements of a specific campaign. Stabilisation operations were as much a feature of the wider Palestine campaign in the First World War as of Afghanistan today. And, in Australia's maritime approaches, when our vital interests were at stake during the Second World War, Australia either conducted effective amphibious operations or ceded the initiative to our enemy.

In concluding his paper, Professor Evans offered the following advice to future Chiefs:

Every future Chief of Army needs to hang on his office wall two quotations as a historical reminder of the land force's strategic constancy as an overseas expeditionary force. The first is Major General Sydney Rowell's laconic January 1942 remark to the Americans that, if the Japanese were foolish enough to land troops in Northern Australia, he would respond by sending for the Australian Army's Salvage Corps 'to pick up the bones [because] there is no water between Broome and Alice Springs'. The second is Prime Minister Robert Menzies' September 1950 speech to the effect that any Australian land force optimised to fight on Australian soil will always be 'the equivalent of a wooden gun'. In these two statements from yesterday lies the essence of strategic wisdom for the land force of today and tomorrow.³

For a nation dependent on global trade, freedom of navigation and an international rules-based order, it should come as no surprise that Australia has long sought to realise its security through a maritime strategy. Looking beyond our shores is not a choice, it is a necessity; not as a justification for military adventurism and the careless squandering of blood and treasure but as a considered geostrategic response to preserving and promoting our interests *in extremis*. And yet, a Parliamentary Library Research Brief of 2004, titled 'Australia's Maritime Strategy in the 21st Century', noted that:

If our nature is characterised by our myths and legends, then Australia is not a maritime nation. As a people, we are happy to lie at the beach and toss pebbles at the waves, or turn our back upon it and fix our gaze on the dusty enormity of our island continent.⁴

Quite poetic for a library report really—and still true to a regrettable extent. But in the ten years since that was written, I think there has been significant change within the ADF, Australia and the Indo-Pacific, compelling Australia to embrace a maritime culture. And, I suggest, with the introduction into service of Her Majesty's Australian Ships *Choules*, *Canberra* and *Adelaide*, the first tangible expression of that modern change is apparent.

Compared to many other armed forces, the ADF is a joint force, which is essential given our size and the scale of its defence responsibilities. But it has only become the force it is today because of the consistent, driven leadership of its commanders over at least 30 years. And everyone would agree there is more to do. These ships form the centrepiece of a next 'forcing function', to continue toward realising a truly joint force—expert within distinct environments and seamlessly integrated in the planning and execution of operations.

Amphibious operations are often described as the most difficult and complex of all military activities. I am not sure about that. In the land environment, urban warfare and counter-insurgency operations are also pretty tough, and I am sure my colleagues could cite other challenges within their environments. But to succeed in amphibious operations definitely requires uniquely high levels of joint conception, planning,

execution and support. And the margins of tolerance in amphibious operations, to avoid catastrophic error, are slim.

As our trials unit, the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment is learning, one equipment pouch too wide and you don't get out of a downed helicopter—and nor does anyone behind you. This is an obvious point for those that have long since mastered the basics. We did too, on a number of occasions and were very good at it, but Australian 'amphibiousity' suffered from a great forgetting, and so we are learning it anew.

It is the professional rigour necessary to master amphibious operations, at every level and across all Services, which presents such a challenge and such an opportunity for the ADF. In order to realise excellence, the ADF will need to take small steps, learn from others, appreciate advice and build a 'team of teams' approach, both domestically and internationally.

My greatest concern isn't our ability to generate a constructive, broad-spectrum amphibious capability, beneficial to Australia and our region. I am certain this will be achieved. Rather, my concern is for mastering the ability to successfully undertake a range of amphibious activities consistently but not exclusively of those other tasks the ADF must maintain, such as conventional combat and stabilisation in the case of land forces, without periodically relearning very hard lessons.

To paraphrase Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, speaking of the British, when he was a Colonel in the inter-war period, but adjusted to be a Service Chief's precautionary advice to his officers, Rommel sagely noted that 'the [Australians] write some of the best doctrine in the world, it [would be] [un]fortunate [if] their officers do not read it'.⁵

Lessons 're-learned' is an intolerable trade in the lives of soldiers for the ahistorical indolence of their leaders. We are better than that and the sea is famously unforgiving. I have visited HMAS *Canberra* twice now, once with Admiral Barrett. The current 'Sea Series' of exercises is proving to be an outstanding opportunity to validate concepts and build our initial capability step-by-step.

Canberra is a great ship and it can generate a great capability. The quality of the people assigned from each Service, especially the leaders, is immediately apparent. And, most importantly, their work together is embedding a deep culture of professional excellence and joint cooperation—a culture that will enable our best. In time, the ADF looks forward to opportunities to broaden the team, and to see multilateral exercising and support operations as a routine component of our training cycle.

Right now, the question on the minds of Army's senior leadership is how to embed amphibious competence within the force. The analysis of options is being led by Major General Stuart Smith, Commander of the ADF's Deployable Joint Force Headquarters. Additionally, some worthy advice is on offer including Peter Dean's insightful 2012 paper, 'Amphibious Warfare: lessons from the past for the ADF's future', and Ken Gleiman and Peter Dean's, 'Beyond 2017: the Australian Defence Force and amphibious warfare'.⁶

Both papers remind that we were once very good at amphibious operations, in all its forms, from humanitarian assistance to assault. While change is in the wind, it is notable that students at the US Marine Corps Command and Staff College spend more time on the Southwest Pacific campaign of the Second World War (an Army not Marine land force operation) than their Australian counterparts.

The key messages from these papers, regarding dedicated command, specialist enablers, assignment of high quality personnel, and professional learning, have all been well received. To put it simply, in terms of building Army's contribution to an ADF amphibious effect, the two key questions are what must be maintained as dedicated specialist expertise, and what can be rotated within the general force?

The whole-of-force professional standards and brigade readiness achieved through Plan BEERSHEBA has greatly strengthened Army as a combat force. This will be sustained. Hence these essential, amphibious sustainment questions will be answered within rather than instead of the BEERSHEBA force generation framework. I look forward to discussing the options and risks arising from these questions with my senior leadership team over the next few months. My team and I are listening.

So, in closing, be assured that Army is committed to the ADF's future amphibious capability and, more generally, to contributing to our national maritime strategy and the joint force it requires. The future is challenging but who would want it any other way.

Lieutenant General Angus Campbell joined the Australian Army in 1981, graduating from the Royal Military College Duntroon in 1984. He served as a platoon commander in the 3rd Battalion (Parachute), The Royal Australian Regiment, followed by troop and squadron command appointments within the Special Air Service Regiment.

In 2001, he was appointed Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment. While in command, the battalion group deployed to East Timor. Lieutenant General Campbell has also served in a range of staff appointments, including Aide-de-Camp to the Chief of Army, strategic policy officer in Army Headquarters, instructor at the Australian Command and Staff College, and Chief of Staff to the Chief of the Defence Force.

In late 2005, he joined the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet as a First Assistant Secretary to head the Office of National Security and was subsequently promoted to Deputy Secretary and appointed Deputy National Security Adviser. On his return to the ADF in early 2010, he led the Military Strategic Commitments staff in Defence headquarters until January 2011, when he assumed command of Australian forces deployed in the Middle East Area of Operations. He subsequently served as Deputy Chief of Army from February 2012 to September 2013, when he was promoted to command the Joint Agency Task Force responsible for the implementation of Operation SOVEREIGN BORDERS. Lieutenant General Campbell was appointed Chief of Army in May 2015.

Lieutenant General Campbell holds a Bachelor of Science (Honours) from the University of New South Wales, a Master of Philosophy in International Relations from Cambridge University, and is a graduate of the Australian Army Command and Staff College.

Notes

- ¹ This is an edited version of an address to the RAN's 'Sea Power Conference', held in Sydney from 6-8 October 2015. The original version is available at <<http://army.gov.au/Our-work/Speeches-and-transcripts/Chief-of-Army-address-to-Seapower-conference>>
- ² Michael Evans, 'On Military Grammar: the Australian Army beyond Afghanistan', *Security Challenges*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Winter 2011, pp. 33-40, available at <<http://www.regionalsecurity.org.au/Resources/Documents/vol7no2Evans.pdf>> accessed 26 February 2016.
- ³ Evans, 'On Military Grammar', pp. 39-40.
- ⁴ Alex Tewes, Laura Rayner and Kelly Kavanaugh, 'Australia's Maritime Strategy in the 21st Century', Parliamentary Research Brief No. 4, November 2004, pp. 1-65, available at <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/3L7F6/upload_binary/3l7f66.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22library/prspub/3L7F6%22> accessed 26 February 2016.
- ⁵ Rommel's original quote is generally regarded as saying 'the British write the best doctrine in the world and then fail to read it': cited, for example, by Chris Tripodi, 'The Doctrine of "Understanding" and the Illusion of Control', *Defence-in-Depth* [website], 8 June 2015, available at <<http://defenceindepth.co/2015/06/08/the-doctrine-of-understanding-and-the-illusion-of-control/>> accessed 26 February 2016.
- ⁶ Peter Dean, 'Amphibious Warfare: lessons from the past for the ADF's future', *Security Challenges*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Autumn 2012, pp. 57-76, available at <<http://www.regionalsecurity.org.au/Resources/Files/vol8no1Dean.pdf>> accessed 26 February 2016, and Ken Gleiman and Peter Dean, 'Beyond 2017: the Australian Defence Force and amphibious warfare', *Australian Strategic Policy Institute* [website], 29 July 2015, available at <<https://www.aspi.org.au/publications/beyond-2017-the-australian-defence-force-and-amphibious-warfare>> accessed 26 February 2016.