



Thoughts on joint professional military education ¹

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Introduction

Just what is ‘professional military education’ (PME) and, more specifically, what is ‘joint professional military education’ (JPME)?

Elsewhere in Issue No. 181 of the *Australian Defence Force Journal* are offered draft definitions of PME and JPME. These drafts have been developed in the wake of work over 2009-10 by Joint Education, Training and Warfare Command (JETWC), in concert with the Services, to achieve a better understanding of our PME and JPME requirements and what these mean for the career development continuum of ADF personnel.

What I would assert is that the product of successful PME and JPME comes not only in formal skills and knowledge but in possession of the right outlook and that these parallel requirements exist at every stage of the continuum and must be provided for. PME and JPME in their full sense encompass a host of activities—the achievement of all the skill sets for their people that modern defence organisations require.

Even confined to specifically military issues, the subject is a very broad one. In this article, I want to provide my own perspective as Commander JETWC and Commander of the Australian Defence

College (ADC) and to highlight a few key principles which need to underpin any PME programs, as well as some associated challenges for the ADF. My thoughts on PME and the language which I use are not those of a professional educator but of a practitioner.

My focus relates principally to personal development in areas specifically related to the military profession, rather than those which are applicable elsewhere. The difference is that many of the latter skill sets can most effectively be acquired either from outside authorities or in close cooperation with them. My key effort as Commander JETWC must lie in understanding where we need to go in those areas in which the military profession is unique or where it has very particular requirements.

My emphasis, in an attempt to achieve simplicity in a complicated subject, is on the classical aspects of ‘jointery’, that is, between and amongst the Services, rather than on international or inter-agency factors. The truth is, however, that the right approach to resolving inter-Service issues readily extends to the wider stage and this wider stage will occupy more and more of our time in the years ahead.

The reality behind joint success

The first principle of PME that I will declare is derived from the basic reality of successful joint operations—they are successful because of what each Service and each specialisation within that Service brings to the joint environment. Jointery depends upon professional mastery within each Service—and international and inter-agency successes depend in their turn upon professional mastery within the ADF as a whole.

In creating a continuum of education and training, it is axiomatic **that joint things cannot come at the expense of the single Service foundation but instead must build upon that base**. This is reflected in the organisation of the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA)



military training programs where every midshipmen and officer cadet at the Academy not only undertakes the full ADFA military education and training (AMET) program but also completes the full general service officer initial training of their own Service that those who have not entered through the Academy undertake.

The real aim of ADFA in this aspect does not in fact relate to the additional skills and knowledge that the AMET program provides for the Academy's graduates, however desirable they may be, but to the goal—nicely defined by a former Commander ADC—of creating 'joint mates'. In other words, it is the lifelong friendships and bonds of trust that the graduates will have with each other across the Services that will really benefit the ADF. From the time of the East Timor operation, some ten years after the first graduates left the Academy, the dividends of those friendships and that trust have been obvious in the contribution that they have made to more effective co-operation between the Services.

We cannot realistically give the three year-long ADFA experience to all our junior officers in the ADF and the creation of artificial mechanisms to do so would not be a practical solution. Academy graduates represent approximately one-third of the officer corps and what we need is for these officers, through the joint outlook that they have developed, to act as a catalyst to encourage trust and cooperation amongst others. In fact, there are now officers undertaking the Defence and Strategic Studies Course (DSSC) who are graduates both of ADFA and the Australian Command and Staff Course (ACSC). And, yes, time flies!

I am confident that they have been agents for greater cooperation between the Services from the time they graduated but it is also probably true that the relationships which have been developed between other individuals of different Services on operations during the high tempo of the last decade have also been of critical importance—they are certainly apparent amongst the course members of both the ACSC (at O4 and O5 ranks) and the DSSC (at O6). If, for

any reason, the level of operational inter-action were to be reduced, then the ADF would need to consider very carefully the form and scale of its joint exercise and training programs to ensure that the impetus is maintained.

What we do need to get right is the provision of the skills and knowledge that junior officers must have when they are moved from their Service into a joint environment, particularly a joint headquarters in which they will be involved in preparing and executing joint plans. This was the responsibility of the Australian Defence Force Warfare Centre (ADFWC), which has now passed on its disestablishment to the Joint Warfare Doctrine and Training Centre (JWTDC). The courses which are offered tend to be short and relatively compressed but they do appear, in general, to provide not only the basic skills but in their own right help with the development of the personal relationships which are so important.

They are also probably offered at the right time—just before officers move into the joint environment. For timeliness is a critical factor in ensuring credibility and readiness to accept new concepts and skills. It is quite possible for officers to spend a decade or more wholly within a single Service environment, even when on operations. The challenge in getting the balance right for junior officers is best reflected in the issue of the joint military appreciation process (JMAP). Understanding of the JMAP and the ability to conduct it are central to the utility of a staff officer in a joint headquarters.

The truth is, however, that both the Navy and the Air Force have at the tactical level other planning processes developed for and more suited to the problems that have to be solved there than the JMAP. The latter can appear somewhat arcane if it is presented in the wrong way and both its theory and practice of doubtful utility to the warfare officer in the operations room or to the pilot or air combat officer aloft. JMAP training for junior ranks therefore works best as 'pre-joining training' before a joint appointment.

There is an additional tension in the ADF situation, one that relates to our relatively small

size and the consequent need for our people to possess generalist skills earlier than is the case for our larger partners, particularly the US. The latter can much more easily maintain career structures to high rank for many deep specialists in a way that the ADF simply cannot. This means that all the Australian services have to place a high premium on the development of professional ‘operator/specialist’ skills and standards from the outset and as quickly as possible. It also means that our junior officers have to squeeze every ounce out of the professional experience that they gain on exercises and operations and seek every opportunity to extend their understanding and their expertise—and any additional joint education and training have to be aligned with that requirement.

I am not convinced, however, that we provide our junior personnel with enough grounding in the basic structures, equipment and capabilities of the ADF as a whole. If we make the effort to provide this too early, it runs the risk of not only interfering with the needs of the single Service but also of going right over the heads of the intended recipients. If it is provided too late, then there will be key deficiencies in the understanding of our people.

We need to look at new ways of providing such grounding to more than a selected few and this is one of the areas that the new JWDC will be examining as it maps out its path for the future. Some of the work being done within the ADF on e-learning packages for the new amphibious capability suggests that there is real promise in these areas. I should add, however, as I have already implied, that the most important thing is to encourage curiosity and a burning desire to extend their own professional horizons amongst our junior personnel. A generation brought up on surfing the web does possess the skills to seek out and understand without too much external guidance—once they have the right grounding.

Meeting all needs within a JPME construct

Another principle is that *one size does not fit all*. This is true within the Services and between the Services. This principle is associated with the fact that you cannot have everything in a continuum of training and education, although the subject is sometimes debated in such a way as to suggest that many believe that you can. Indeed, it is fair to say that everyone in the ADF has an opinion about how they were trained and educated and on how other people should be trained and educated. The satirist John Winton once had one of his characters remark that half the people in the Royal Navy spent their time training and the other half criticising training and this is probably just as true for the ADF.

PME and JPME include much more than preparing officers to command forces in conflict, however much this requirement is central—or even unique—to their purpose. And even with the equivalent of the ‘arms corps’ within each Service, the development requirements are not the same for each individual and it is not necessarily easy to align a cohort. For example, it has been estimated for the US Navy that it takes approximately two years longer to produce a major surface combatant captain than the Army does a battalion commander.

The fact that the Army Technical Officers Staff Course (ATSOC), a long standing and very successful program of the Army, has now been renamed the Capability and Technology Management College (CTMC) as a joint organisation and placed under the command of the ADC within the ACSC is a significant recognition of the fact that there must be significant diversity in our understanding of just what the PME and JPME needs really are for the ADF (and Defence) as a whole. We must factor in the requirements of our specialists, whether in logistics, technical services or in other areas such as medicine and law.

Focus on what is unique

The third principle is that ***a defence force or a service needs to focus on providing with its own resources what is unique within the PME requirement and use external capabilities for what is not unique, particularly when these achieve economies of scale.***

We have become much better at recognising the training and education activities which can be conducted on a joint basis with shared administration and facilities and it is likely that the ADF will move further down this path in future. Similarly, we should not hesitate to use academic institutions and other providers when what we want is the same as the civilian world.

My own view is that the potential for 'distance learning' that is being opened up by rapidly developing information and communications technology will accelerate this trend because it will become progressively easier to access the centres of excellence in any particular area of expertise, no matter where the students are located. I have been particularly encouraged by the success of video lectures for the Defence and Strategic Studies Course (our senior program), as a way in which the world's leading experts on particular topics can be tapped for their expertise without having to make the expensive and time consuming journey to Australia on every occasion that we need them.

One of the associated issues is how much we should attempt to achieve external accreditation for our training and education efforts. This is not a simple question because, if we apply the principle that the ADF should focus on what is unique to the military profession, it follows that what is being taught and learned does not have exact equivalents in the civilian sphere. In reality, there is a cross-over of significant elements, no matter how 'military' the course, but lines do need to be drawn.

There is some evidence from overseas, for example, that efforts to make staff courses fully accredited and complete postgraduate degree

programs in their own right have sometimes had the effect of skewing the priorities away from the military requirement. The ACSC currently has some accredited elements which go a significant way towards the achievement of a postgraduate degree but not completely. Officers can do something in their own time to gain formal academic and external professional qualifications if they want them. The numbers currently undertaking part-time or external studies are such that it is clear that they are willing to do so.

JPME in the future

Do I see difficulties ahead? The greatest danger is that the apparent capabilities of distance and part-time education and training and the increasing cost of the time of our best personnel could combine to reduce or even end the practice of removing our officers for up to a year to undertake staff or higher defence courses—or allowing them time for full-time civil schooling. Learning is not a linear process and people do not necessarily gain all that they can or should within a high-pressure environment in which they are forced to husband inadequate time to meet only the most pressing priorities. Space for reflection and debate is vital to intellectual growth.

Henry Kissinger once commented that a person does not actually become wiser while doing a highly responsible, demanding and complex job. Wisdom comes, he suggested, only during an inter-regnum, in which one can consider and build upon one's experiences to develop a more complete and better judged picture of the world and an understanding of what still needs to be done. And then go out again. It may indeed be that the nature of warfare has changed in ways that make this kind of personal 'operational pause' even more important in ensuring that people do not burn out permanently. There will be a place for both part-time and full-time endeavours but we need to get the balance right.

Nevertheless, we can utilise distance processes to offer PME opportunities to a wider range of people and this possibility is currently being examined by the ACSC, which already runs very

successful distance programs for the Naval and Army Reserves. It may be that a good part of the ACSC opportunity can be extended to a larger audience—a way not only of providing more staff trained officers to the ADF but of developing in more officers the skills and attributes that they will require in higher ranks.

Another danger would be either erosion of or a failure to further develop the ADF's capacity to educate and train in the unique elements of the military profession. This relates not only to the higher command and planning levels but also in the basics of our profession, what the British Admiral Richard Kempenfelt described more than 200 years ago as the primary and secondary elements. As I have already noted, the pressure on the Australian career continuum is such that we have to keep the maintenance of very high training standards in developing our junior personnel as an absolute priority.

In this context, I do believe that the ADF will need to further integrate warfare training between the Services. This has been a gradual process for many years but it will have to go further. Apart from the unprecedented amphibious capabilities that the new landing ships and their associated assets will bring to the ADF, the networked nature of our ships, aircraft and, increasingly, land based assets means that we are not speaking of the five environments of space, air, sea, land and cyberspace but, in some respects, of one. The skills which will be required of an air combat officer in an aerial early warning and control (AEW&C) aircraft are very largely the same as those of an air warfare officer in an air warfare destroyer (AWD). Indeed, the former may well end up giving the order to fire for the weapons carried in the AWD, albeit from 60 nautical miles away and from 30,000 feet above sea level! How we do this will be one of the key training challenges of the next decade.

We will certainly need to continue to develop our efforts in training and educating for higher command. There has been significant change within the DSSC program over the last few years and it now includes not only a comprehensive higher command module but also classified and

unclassified electives which allow potential operational commanders to examine campaigning and higher command issues in depth. The Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies will continue to evolve this aspect of the course.

We will also need to continue to extend our leadership programs and, as an integral part of them, our ethics education. The Centre for Defence Leadership and Ethics (CDLE) is not only working closely with the three Services but also conducting its own courses and research to support our personnel at all levels in the increasingly complex, even chaotic, environments in which they must operate.

Finally, we need to work on developing JPME for our non-commissioned personnel. I have not dwelt on this aspect of PME but it is clear that there is a hunger for such activities and not only at the warrant officer and senior NCO levels. The participation by warrant officers of all services in key elements of the ACSC program and the annual NCO Forum represent an excellent start in this direction and they will be something, subject to the availability of resources, which the ADC will seek to build upon.

Conclusion

This article is intended to provoke comment and debate on what is—and always will be—a 'work in progress'. I welcome any response, either in the pages of the *ADF Journal* or to me personally via the Australian Defence College.

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He was promoted Rear Admiral in May 2006 and appointed Commander Border Protection Command. In May 2008, he assumed duty as Commander Joint Education, Training and Warfare Command. He has a Bachelor of Arts from the University of NSW and a Master of Letters from the University of New England. He is a graduate of the Advanced Management Program of Harvard Business School. He was awarded the degree of Doctor of Letters honoris causa by the University of NSW in 2006 and is a Professorial Fellow of the Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security. Admiral Goldrick retired from full-time service in 2012.

Notes

- ¹ This article was published in Issue No. 181 of the *Australian Defence Force Journal* in 2010.