



## Things I have heard

By Captain Pete Bartlett

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### OUR VALUES

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# Tac Talks

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## Introduction

As the Director Fleet Force Generation Directorate, I work in a space where, quite rightly, people have lots of opinion and comment and I thought I would discuss some of these views in an effort to develop an understanding of why we do what we do. Before I share some of the things I have heard, I would like to offer some snap shots of history to provide some context to my remarks.

## Vietnam War

During the Vietnam War, which lasted for around ten years, the US military lost almost 10,000 aircraft (3700 planes). If you focus on Fast Air, F4 Phantoms, F105 Thunderchiefs, A4 Skyhawk's and the like the number was around 1800 aircraft lost to combat operations (more were lost due to other reasons). These aircraft were lost to a combination of SA 2 Guideline, SA 7 Strella SAMs, and an enormous number of AAA Batteries, manned by a combination of North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Russian and Chinese Advisors. The upshot of these numbers is that on average a jet fighter or bomber was shot down every two days for a period of ten years. A Global Superpower lost a large number of relatively highly capable aircraft to a developing nation with a little help from their friends. Our next peer adversary is likely to be much better placed than the Vietnamese were 40 years ago.



Figure 1 – A F105 Thunderchief about to conduct a SEAD Mission. About half the entire USAF F105 Force was lost in Vietnam.

## Operation Reforger

In the late 1960's President Johnson moved two US Army Divisions from Europe to Vietnam. This movement predicated further planning on how a Third World War in Europe was going to be fought. As depicted in Figure 2 the Russians were going to charge over the border into West Germany and the NATO Armies would stand and fight until they could be reinforced by the Americans. This meant that up to five Heavy Divisions would be required to be lifted by Sea and Air from the East Coast of America to the Channel Ports and Airfields of France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Arrayed against such a mighty logistics effort was Russian Air and Naval Forces.

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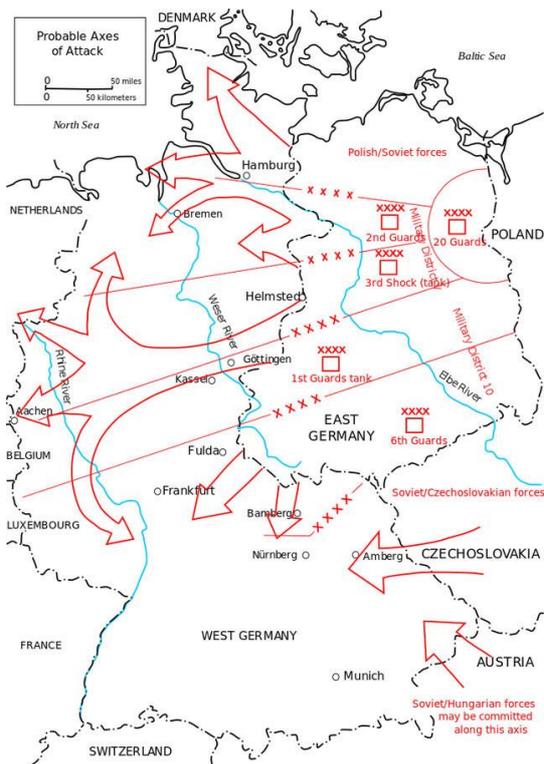
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One maritime mission was to escort the troop and logistics ships across the Atlantic, another was for NATO ASW Strike Groups to fight to deny Soviet submarines the ability to penetrate what was called the Greenland, Iceland, & United Kingdom (GIUK) Gap and break out into the Atlantic to reinforce those submarines already there. Carrier Strike Groups and Land Based Fighters were tasked with keeping the H6 Badger and TU 26 Backfire Regiments at bay as they attempted conduct strikes using long range missiles with Electronic Attack support.

The massive movement of men, machines and logistics would have to be completed in weeks not months; there was no time for significant manoeuvre or sanitization.

The Soviet Navy and Naval Air Forces opposing NATO were not dissimilar in size to that of today's PLA-N. All this would have been quite messy had it come to pass, but it was necessary at the time because of what people held dear was at stake (Freedom, Democracy etc).

Figure 2 – Russian Army Plan to Invade Western Europe.

## Afghanistan

In 2012 to 2013 I spent about nine months embedded with the 3rd Infantry Division (3ID), United States Army as the Reintegration Chief based in Kandahar. 3ID were responsible for Regional Command South (RC South), encompassing Kandahar, Zabal, Uruzgan, and Daykundi Provinces. During my time in country the Division killed a lot of Taliban, whilst the Taliban killed about of 40 of us, including 1 Australian, additionally a significant number of our men and women, including civilians, were also wounded. It is a most solemn experience participating in a Ramp Ceremony where the bodies of seven young soldiers, killed by IEDs were loaded onto a plane for their final flight home.

What struck me during my time as I moved around the RC South that despite the Coalition having complete Air Superiority, and a massive array of Intelligence, Surveillance, & Reconnaissance (ISR) capability, the Taliban were still able to conduct operations to good effect. If you flew around at that time you would have noticed small "Barrage Like" balloons floating above virtually all Forward Operating Bases (FOB) and Combat Outposts (COP). These balloons, fitted with Optical Devices, tethered to the FOB & COPS provided persistent surveillance detecting for Taliban and their nefarious activities (planting IED). When I conducted "Shura's", an Afghan equivalent of a Community or Key Leadership Engagement (KLE), I would hear IED going off in the background. On a couple of occasions either small arm projectiles, from the fire fight happening nearby, or the odd mortar round would drop inside the Compound. In that war, and it was a war with a real enemy (it is actually very interesting having a real enemy who you refer to as "the enemy"), Coalition personnel put themselves at risk for IED, Mortar, Rocket and Small Arms fire to go about their daily business such as attending meetings! In war there is risk of dying or being wounded.

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Figure 3 – Peace Shura



Figure 4 – Armoured Vehicles, the one on the left having a Mine Roller to sweep for IED.

This leads me to why I have written this article: “Things I have heard.”

## **“That’s an Air Force problem.”**

Air Power will be the effect of choice to dismantle or degrade any Anti Access Area Denial (A2AD) system or provide long-range protection of Task Groups be they a Sea Control or Force Projection. Air Power will also be the weapon of choice for Maritime Strike Missions against high-end capabilities such as the Luyang III DDG. If one was to look at a modern and comprehensive A2AD System you will see an array of AEW&C, Communications Intercept, Electronic Warfare, Defensive Counter Air (DCA) Aircraft, Long, Medium, and Short Range SAMS, AAA, GPS, HF, SATCOM, Link, and VHF Communications Jammers. This will take time, and effort to dismantle and aircraft will be lost. Squadrons of FA18F and EA18G will not last long, even in a coalition environment. The idea that we will always have enough aircraft to do the tough stuff will not survive the first few months in the modern combat environment. We should also consider that those aircraft we will so passionately believe should be apportioned to the Fleet for DCA missions, will simply be apportioned elsewhere because there will be more work than workers.

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## **“We are never going to do this.”**

I hear this a lot, particularly in relation to ASW. In a perfect world we would have absolute superiority in the five warfighting domains of Land, Air, Maritime, Space and Information, and of course we could choose when we manoeuvre to meet the enemy. We don't live in that world anymore; and you may note that “the enemy gets a vote”. We will not know where all Submarines are at all times, we must prepare for the fact we may encounter one or many through good planning by the enemy or through sheer bad luck.

## **“We can't do this, we don't have eyes on the target.”**

In the modern Combat Environment the early parts of the dismantlement of the A2AD mission will be conducted at long range and there will be many targets, literally thousands, which will require servicing. We will not have the luxury of Gun Camera Video, Ordnance Data Link, or Special Forces being able to see what gets struck and when. I always consider that the average Australian has “no skin in the game” for Iraq or Afghanistan, and by that I mean our daily lives are not really affected by events in those countries. Any conflict in the South China Sea will see the nation being affected in ways that we cannot even imagine. If someone else breaks our stuff, takes our internet, or even worse tells us what to do then we Australian, and indeed the American, people will have skin in the game. The view of what we can and cannot do will change.

## **“I am a TASO and therefore a realist.”**

The RAN does not have the best sonar in the world, but we do have defence in depth of which hull mounted sonar is but one element. We would not seek to be in a bad situation where surface ships are engaging submarines; however, we must be able to defend ourselves and fight our way out if it happens. I have seen a number of reconstructions where Submarines go underneath or within a few thousand yards of Frigates without being detected; I suspect this is not just because of the actual sonar performance, especially when the water conditions are favourable. Knowing how to operate these systems proficiently remains a critical requirement.

## **“We can't do that until we have Air Superiority.”**

“Air Superiority” doesn't mean the enemy can't take a shot, it just means that degree of dominance in the air battle of one force over another which permits the conduct of operations by the former and its related land, sea and air forces at a given time and place without prohibitive interference by the opposing force”. “Setting of Conditions” such as “Air Superiority” is the minimising or understanding of risk, not its complete removal.

## **“We should sanitise any Choke Point for weeks with MPRA before we go through it, that's ASW.”**

The MPRA favourite sensor for sanitising an area against SSK in particular is radar. I suggest that drilling holes in the sky in the same place repeatedly may draw attention to your intent. Additionally if you break the patrol for any reason you almost negate the impact of previous efforts. The enemy may even send something to shoot down your MPRA. In a mobile, agile, and modern combat environment time will not be on our side.

## **“I don't know why we do damage control the way we do.”**

The thing about Combat Damage Control is it is about saving the rest of the crew and the ship to fight to achieve your mission or not be a liability to the rest of the force getting about their mission. In the Falklands War HMS Glamorgan took an Exocet missile in her hanger and 14 sailors were killed. The survivors wanted to remain that way and get back into the fight, they fought really hard to do so and they did a lot of Combat Damage Control to save their ship, after

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which they looked after their dead and resumed operations. The battle did not stop just because *Glamorgan* had taken a hit. It's that sort of resilience that we need to have in our people. People need to know how to conduct Combat Damage Control under the most trying of circumstances, and they must be inculcated as part of our normal training cycle to bring capabilities back on line and get back into the fight. Peacetime Damage Control is different to Combat Damage Control.

The Fleet Certification Period, Viking, Pacific Vanguard, and Joint Warfighting Series of exercises are about training us to fight a war. We aim to provide staffs, and operators with real skills and experience in using their Task Groups, and systems to kill the other guy before he or she kills you.

## About the author

Captain Pete Bartlett joined the Navy in 1983. He has served in Operational, Development and Training roles since that time.

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