



# Army



## Leading a Resilient Force

### Insights of an Australian General

Major General P.W. 'Gus' Gilmore

*Serving our Nation*



# Leading a Resilient Force

## Insights of an Australian General

Major General P.W. 'Gus' Gilmore

*Serving our Nation*

**© Commonwealth of Australia 2016**

This work is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of study, research, criticism or review (as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968) and with standard source credit included, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Inquiries should be directed to Director, Army Research Centre, Department of Defence, Russell Offices, Russell ACT 2600.

Email: [dfw.publications@defence.gov.au](mailto:dfw.publications@defence.gov.au)

Web: [www.army.gov.au/Our-future/Publications](http://www.army.gov.au/Our-future/Publications)

**National Library of Australia**

**Cataloguing-In-Publication Entry**

Author, Gilmore, Peter

Title: Leading a resilient force: Insights of an Australian General / Major General Peter W. 'Gus' Gilmore

ISBN: 978-0-9944608-7-5

Series: Army Research Paper, No. 11

Subjects: Military Art and Science, Biography

**Army Research Papers**

ISSN: 2203-5893

Army Insight Papers, produced by the Army Research Centre as part of the Army Research Papers series, comprise topics of special to immediate interest to the Australian Army and international military community. These are vehicles for offering lessons learned, and providing insights on military strategy, future land operating environments and complex military modernisation. Insight Papers are intended to provide an opportunity for debate, further research and organisational change.

---

## LEADING A RESILIENT FORCE — INSIGHTS OF AN AUSTRALIAN GENERAL

### Major General P.W. ‘Gus’ Gilmore

Many of history's great armies have distinguished themselves by demonstrating superb individual and organisational resilience. From Field Marshal Sir William Slim's Fourteenth Army in Burma, which snatched victory from the jaws of defeat during the Second World War, to the 39th Battalion which prevailed over a tenacious Japanese Army on the Kokoda Track, or the actions of I Anzac Corps at Pozieres on the Western Front during the First World War, resilience has played a decisive role in achieving victory.

While many factors will ultimately contribute to victory or defeat, the ability to adapt, recover and thrive in the face of adversity and challenge has been remarkably evident in many of the successful outcomes I have observed throughout my career. Conversely, I have seen a lack of resilience contribute to poor military results on more than one occasion.

Military organisations fill a unique and exceptional role that is quite unlike the other elements of government or society.<sup>1</sup> This role requires a capable and resilient defence force with the ability to achieve the strategic defence objectives assigned to it by the government.<sup>2</sup> The unique nature of military service, however, means that resilience is just as important during training as it is on operations.

---

1 See Cathy Downes, 'To Be or Not To Be a Profession: The Military Case', *Defense Analysis*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1985, p. 159.

2 Department of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2016*, Canberra, 2016, pp. 68–76.

While resilience involves behaviour, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed, the reality is that resilience is not equally inherent in every person or organisation, nor is it institutionalised as a foundation of service in the Army.<sup>3</sup> For these reasons alone, it is incumbent on the Army's leaders to work every day to build resilience in its individuals, teams and organisations.

This paper will position resilience in this leadership framework by describing the importance of individual, team and organisational resilience within my own command experiences through almost 40 years of military service. It will contend that resilience can be developed through improved understanding and training design, and it will review the progress of resilience enhancement in Forces Command in recent times. In so doing, this paper will explain why resilience features so prominently in my own command philosophy.

### **The resilience mythology within Australian strategic culture**

Resilience is defined within Forces Command as 'the capacity of individuals, teams and organisations to adapt, recover and thrive in situations of risk, challenge, danger, complexity and adversity.'<sup>4</sup> Chaos and shock have been common features of military service throughout history, and the ability to adapt and recover when setbacks occur can often represent the difference between an expended 'one shot' capability and an organisation that thrives and prevails where others cannot. At a superficial level, therefore, this is simply a matter of capability; at a more fundamental level, this is a matter of wellbeing and survival, and it can mean the difference between defeat and victory.

---

3 American Psychological Association, Resilience homepage at: <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx> (accessed 23 March 2016).

4 Commander Forces Command, *Forces Command Resilience Plan*, Commander Forces Command Directive 210/15, Sydney, 2015.

When discussing leadership, eminent and operationally experienced Australian generals have emphasised that resilience is an essential requirement for the individuals and the teams they command, and for the organisations to which they belong. That the need for resilience is so widely accepted as a requirement for military service is important; it is the fact that Australia's strategic culture has fostered the belief that resilience is an intrinsic characteristic of its individuals, teams and organisations that is worth challenging.

In his essay on 'generalship', Major General Stephen Day describes the 'dehumanising experience [of war] for all concerned', in which personal safety is disregarded, and where soldiers 'are involved in unspeakable events'.<sup>5</sup> General Peter Cosgrove writes of his leadership experience in Vietnam, where his soldiers faced 'moment-to-moment dangers' in an environment that was 'enormously wearing and stressful'.<sup>6</sup>

The increase in non-traditional military tasks regularly performed by the Army's soldiers and units has further underlined the risky, challenging, dangerous, complex and adverse environments in which the Australian Army often operates. The 2011 Queensland floods and the devastation following Cyclone Yasi saw thousands of soldiers perform difficult tasks in confronting environments. The Commander of Joint Task Force 637 during Operation Queensland Flood Assist 2011, (now) Major General Paul McLachlan, observed that the floods had left 'the worst carnage I have seen'.<sup>7</sup> These situations are not unprecedented, nor is there any reason to believe that they will decrease in future years.

---

5 Major General Stephen Day, 'Thoughts on Generalship: Lessons from Two Wars', at: [http://www.army.gov.au/~media/Army/Our%20future/Publications/Papers/Insights%20Papers/AIP2015\\_001\\_Thoughts\\_on\\_generalship.pdf](http://www.army.gov.au/~media/Army/Our%20future/Publications/Papers/Insights%20Papers/AIP2015_001_Thoughts_on_generalship.pdf), 16 (accessed 3 February 2016).

6 General Peter Cosgrove, *My Story*, HarperCollins, Sydney, 2006, pp. 76–77.

7 Australian Army, 'Operation Queensland Flood Assist 2011', at: <http://www.army.gov.au/Our-work/Community-engagement/Disaster-relief-at-home/Operation-QUEENSLAND-FLOOD-ASSIST-2011> (accessed 2 February 2016).

Historians have also described the challenges confronted by Australian soldiers in twentieth-century conflicts who left 'families, homes and jobs, often for years'. Providing an insight into the demands on Australian soldiers in war, in training and at home, Martin Crotty and Mark Edele describe the 'very real challenges [Australian soldiers faced] on demobilisation' which were only partially mitigated by the leadership of governments and veterans' associations.<sup>8</sup>

In a broader military context, resilience and leadership have been regularly linked, although often not explicitly. For example, General George Patton's 'extraordinary generalship' in the military campaign through the Ardennes was built at least in part on the individual resilience of his soldiers.<sup>9</sup> Patton observed that generals 'have to push people beyond endurance' in military operations.<sup>10</sup> His deep concern for organisational resilience was evident in his strenuous efforts to ensure the continual supply of the immense quantities of fuel necessary to support his advance.

Field Marshal Slim was another highly regarded commander who demonstrated a keen awareness of the importance of organisational resilience while commanding the Burma Corps and the Fourteenth Army during the Second World War. Slim understood the organisational challenge posed by malaria and the huge risk that this presented to his campaign objectives. History records his consistent efforts to adapt procedures to reduce the incidence of malaria in his fighting force, ensuring that the Fourteenth Army thrived in the face of this significant challenge.<sup>11</sup>

---

8 Martin Crotty and Mark Edele, 'Total War and Entitlement: Towards a Global History of Veteran Privilege' in *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 59, No. 1, March 2013, p. 17.

9 Carlo D'Este, *A Genius for War: A Life of General George S. Patton*, HarperCollins, London, 1996.

10 Ibid.

11 Field Marshal Sir William Slim, *Defeat Into Victory: Battling Japan in Burma and India, 1942-1945*, McKay, New York, 1956, p. 178.

In all these historical examples, the presence of individual, team and organisational resilience is consistently inferred, to the extent that it is now perceived as a universal quality inherent in the Australian Army and its soldiers. Les Carlyon highlights the emergence of the belief in the 'lean and laconic' Anzac soldier who regarded war as 'just another hindrance'.<sup>12</sup> The notion of the resilient Australian soldiers who possessed little 'but their own courage' during the siege of Tobruk in North Africa during the Second World War is deeply embedded in the Australian psyche.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, resilience is aligned with Australian strategic culture and the 'parameters and mental boundaries' that this entails, rather than something that is regularly and explicitly discussed.<sup>14</sup>

This does not mean, however, that all Australian soldiers possess resilience in equal measure. While it is widely accepted as being a vital contributor to military capability, less is written about how leaders can ensure that the Army is as resilient as it can be. Although the American Psychological Association contends that 'resilience is ordinary, not extraordinary' in that 'people commonly demonstrate resilience', it would be folly to assume that the resilience of Australia's soldiers and officers is optimised just because this belief is so deeply ingrained in their culture.<sup>15</sup>

Compounding this risk is the fact that resilience is often not well defined or widely understood. Too often resilience is misconceived as a factor of strength or weakness, or as an innate quality that one either possesses or does not. Worse still is the overly simplistic view that 'hard training' will build resilient soldiers.

---

12 Les Carlyon, *Gallipoli*, Macmillan, Sydney, 2001, p. 9.

13 Peter Fitzsimons, *Tobruk*, HarperCollins Australia, 2006, p. 219.

14 David Kilcullen, 'Australian Statecraft: The Challenge of Aligning Policy with Strategic Culture', *Security Challenges*, Vol. 3, Issue 4, November 2007, p. 47.

15 American Psychological Association, Resilience homepage.



Resilience is the ability to adapt, recover and thrive in complexity, and leaders must understand how resilience can be trained and developed within the Army.

Major General John Cantwell writes of the ‘destructive wake’ of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and has strongly advocated for the provision of mental health and PTSD support for military professionals.<sup>16</sup> This has contributed significantly to reducing the stigma associated with psychological illness while also better contextualising the environment in which soldiers operate. It should also provide cause to consider whether the Army is doing enough to prepare its soldiers and officers to adapt, recover and thrive when first confronted with this potentially ‘destructive’ force.

Part of the challenge of training and developing resilience within the Army involves normalising resilience as part of its cultural behaviour. David Kilcullen once warned that ‘a policy which lies outside the boundaries of culturally normative strategic behaviour will simply not be followed.’<sup>17</sup> What this means is that merely signing a directive to implement resilience training across Forces Command or the Army will not work. Until resilience is institutionalised as ‘normative behaviour’, little progress will be made. Institutionalising resilience will require leaders to reject the Australian strategic cultural notion that resilience occurs naturally in equal parts in Australian soldiers, teams and organisations. Resilience must be trained and developed as a foundation of service.

The priority that I have afforded to resilience development and learning in Forces Command is based, in part, on my experiences throughout my career. It is also based on a series of conversations as

---

<sup>16</sup> Major General John Cantwell and Greg Bearup, *Exit Wounds*, Melbourne University Press, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Kilcullen, ‘Australian Statecraft: The Challenge of Aligning Policy with Strategic Culture’, p. 47.

I prepared my '100 day assessment' in 2015<sup>18</sup> and my Commander's Assessment in 2016.<sup>19</sup> My focus has perhaps been most sharpened, however, through engagements with wounded, injured and ill soldiers and officers, and with Defence and other health professionals over a number of years. This next section includes some individual, team and organisational examples which influenced the evolution of my philosophy of resilience.

### **Individual, team and organisational resilience**

Over the period of my military career I have had the good fortune to be employed in many different areas of Defence and alongside and within other government departments. Through all these diverse roles, I have seen soldiers, sailors, airmen and airwomen, senior officials and politicians from Australia and abroad operating in situations of chaos and uncertainty. In each of these situations, resilience has been evident in varying degrees, but it has not always been an institutionalised feature of training or preparation.

If I were to ask a group of experienced officers, I have no doubt that all would be able to recount several examples of individual resilience witnessed during their service. Some of these may have been on the battlefield, while others may have occurred in barracks or during training. Regardless of the environment, discussion would eventually turn to the cognitive, social, psychological, physical or character traits that were most evident in underpinning this evolved individual resilience. From my own experience, I would intuitively turn to some of the generals with whom I have served on operations.

---

18 Major General Peter Gilmore, 'Commander Forces Command 100 day assessment', May 2015, p. 6.

19 Major General Peter Gilmore, 'Annual Assessment and Direction for 2016', January 2016, p. 8.

In 2006 I was working in partnership with the Commander of the Iraqi Armed Forces, General Babakir Zebari. Commanding a nascent air force, the Iraqi navy, and ten fledgling army divisions, General Zebari was playing a key role in the fight to bring security and stability to a country ravaged by war. To describe progress at that time as 'two steps forward and one step back' would be to overstate the headway that was being made. This was a period in the months before the 'coalition surge' when sectarian violence and civilian deaths were at their zenith. The physical and organisational risks encircling his world were palpable and persistent features.

Whether in the Iraqi headquarters building in Baghdad, or with his troops in the field, General Zebari demonstrated the cool head and steady hand of an experienced leader. Most likely forged by his experience leading the Peshmerga in the war against Saddam in the 1970s, he maintained a strong social network with colleagues and friends who trusted and supported him. He had a cognitive ability that allowed him to tolerate the extreme ambiguity of his operating environment and a character that appeared to draw on a positive sense of self. Despite assassination attempts and the frustrations of faltering progress, he had clearly learned to cope with the challenges of his role.

Similarly engaged in this process was my immediate coalition commander at the time, US Army Lieutenant General Martin Dempsey. As Commander of the Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq, his was the challenge of safeguarding the operations of his troops while also dealing with the frustrations of an ambiguous and often duplicitous array of interlocutors. While these challenges represent common experiences confronting most military commanders, at senior command level the complexity of this environment can be almost overwhelming.

Despite the daily ambiguity, complexity and frustration, General Dempsey was always clear and measured in his dealings with those under his command and determined yet diplomatic in his engagement

with senior officials. I clearly recall one particularly challenging meeting with a senior Iraqi official in early 2006 that would have sorely tested the resolve of most others. General Dempsey persevered throughout that meeting and returned to achieve his desired outcome in a subsequent engagement. While this is just one small example, General Dempsey demonstrated a persistent ability to adapt and thrive in the face of challenge and complexity and, in so doing, he exhibited resilience.

Like many senior coalition leaders with whom I have had the good fortune to work, I believe that physical wellbeing played its part in underpinning resilience. Staying fit and well, and managing fatigue within the constraints of the operating environment, were important. I sense that General Dempsey had developed an awareness of this through his professional military education. Likewise, high cognitive ability and a strong sense of character were equally evident in the resilient generals for whom I worked. Finally, these men were characterised by a positive and constructive approach to adversity. I was consistently impressed with their ability to assess a difficult situation, take stock, and move forward with a positive mindset. I will return to some of these characteristics at a later point when I examine organisational resilience.

While these examples have focussed on general officers, inspirational examples of individual resilience are also evident across the Army. One cannot help but admire the resilience of padres, many of whom have played a crucial part in consistently supporting those with friends or colleagues killed or wounded on operations. Their own beliefs and the importance of ethics, values, self-awareness and character are evident in the resilience underpinning their work.

The resilience of wounded, injured and ill soldiers, many of whom were injured through their service, is also worth considering. While Defence and supporting agencies must continue to help these soldiers, some inspiring examples of resilience have emerged from

these often incredibly difficult circumstances. I have known many soldiers and visited many others whose lives have been abruptly and irreversibly changed through their wounds, injuries or illness. Almost all were focussed on 'bouncing back', either through rehabilitation and reintegration into the Army, or through transition to employment and a productive future in civilian society. Their behaviour, thoughts and actions while recovering and adapting to their new circumstances and environment set an example for all.

I see it as an enduring and core responsibility of Defence, the Army and its leaders to prioritise the development of resilience in servicemen and servicewomen. Resilience is not simply a matter of preparing to adapt, recover and thrive when confronted with risk, challenge, danger, complexity or adversity; it is also about building the capacity to do so long after the moment has passed. This responsibility is similarly recognised by the Chief of Army who has prioritised support to those who are wounded, injured and ill as one of his four framework priorities.

When I consider team resilience, it is difficult for me not to recall the group of US Navy Seabee construction engineers who were responsible for sustaining night-only air operations at the dusty Forward Operating Base RHINO airstrip in Southern Afghanistan in late 2001.<sup>20</sup> Without a functioning airstrip, the vital flow of ammunition and fuel so necessary to progress coalition operations beyond the tiny toehold that had been established in the south would have ceased. This, in turn, would have compromised the subsequent seizure of Kandahar airfield and the campaign design for the months ahead.

---

20 Robert J. Schneller, *Anchor of Resolve: A History of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command Fifth Fleet*, Naval Historical Centre, Washington DC, 2007, p. 85.

There is no doubt that the dust-covered United States Marine Corps (USMC) major commanding the Air Combat Element (ACE) and its supporting Seabees demonstrated individual resilience; but it was the Seabee unit's cohesion and performance that best illustrated that team's resilience. The challenges were significant and setbacks regular, with airfield maintenance supplies often failing to arrive overnight and airfield damage routinely exceeding expectations each morning. But the team regularly adapted its approach and seemingly thrived in this austere environment. The fact that the tactical commander, the then Brigadier General James Mattis, USMC, had prioritised this task, no doubt had something to do with the successful outcome, but it was clear to me that team resilience delivered the master stroke in this instance.

When I reflect on the factors that underpinned this team resilience, I note that each individual behaved as a member of the team: they trusted one another. I believe that they also recognised the contribution of the quite diverse elements of the team and these two factors brought an apparent sense of cohesion. When I watched the team at work, each member appeared to adopt a selfless approach and they all valued helping one another to achieve the goals assigned to the ACE. At a broader level, the ACE commander communicated well with both his team and General Mattis alike.

Similar characteristics are evident in other successful teams that I have watched or commanded on operations. In each instance, I am confident that team resilience characteristics such as trust, performance, values, cohesion and communication have played their part, either contributing to success where present, or hindering success where absent.

In December 2001, the Australian Army suffered its first casualty of the Afghanistan campaign when a Special Air Service soldier stood on an anti-personnel mine. While this had been an infrequent experience for

the Australian Army in the period since the Vietnam War, its training had nonetheless prepared the task force for this type of incident. The wounded soldier was evacuated and the patrol continued with its mission.

The weather was inclement, with night-time temperatures dropping to -15°C, causing diesel fuel to gel and wind chill to hinder any vehicle movement. Mechanical problems in the patrol's vehicle fleet were increasing, supplies were diminishing and the risks were escalating. But, like the Seabees at Forward Operating Base RHINO, the patrol went on to achieve its vital mission. In so doing, these team members demonstrated their belief in one another, the focus on performance and mission success, and the cohesion that is evident in resilient teams.

It would be easy to say that adapting to circumstances such as these is merely a factor of good military practice. While this argument has merit, I contend that recovering after the first casualty, adapting to unanticipated fuel and mechanical challenges, and thriving in an environment of risk, challenge, danger, complexity and adversity are also fundamentally a matter of resilience and, in this instance, team resilience.

Like many, I can provide countless examples of where exceptional resilience has led to success, such as the young British soldier I spoke to in his isolated forward operating base near Musa Qala in the violent Sangin district of Afghanistan in mid-2010. His company had taken significant casualties in the preceding weeks while fighting to seize the piece of terrain where its forward operating base was now established. They were still being regularly engaged by insurgents, but he and his mates were proud of the fact that they were now able to venture more than 100 metres outside the forward operating base before being engaged by the enemy.

What struck me about this private soldier and his section was their positive character and goal-setting. They were justifiably proud of the small progress they were making each day. Undeterred by the austerity of their environment, they had learned to tolerate the ambiguity and uncertainty they were experiencing. Despite the loss of their mates in battle, they were supporting one another and it was clear that there was strong trust across the team. While this is yet another example of resilience playing its obvious part, it is also useful to look at an example in which team resilience was less evident.

While commanding the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan, I noted that one particular coalition task force was unable to venture too far from its compound to undertake its mission. The enemy knew this, seizing the initiative and capturing the momentum. In a purely military sense, the mission was clear; it was the ability or willingness to execute the mission that was the problem. Sensing that this might be an issue of leadership or military capability, I visited the task force to discuss the next steps with them.

What I discovered was that this was not simply a matter of leadership or capability. The contingent was well equipped and the individuals were, apparently, appropriately trained. What seemed to be lacking were the characteristics that produced the sense of 'a team', let alone a sense of confidence or trust in the team. There was little reflection on the performance of the team or willingness to learn, and communication appeared stifled. While there is no doubt that this particular task force had suffered setbacks since arriving in theatre, it was its inability to recover from those challenges and adapt to confront the enemy that was holding its members back. Perhaps at the individual level, but certainly at the team level, resilience was clearly lacking.

The question that this prompts me to ask is: could more have been done to teach and develop this capacity before this task force



deployed? It was clear that some resilience was present and short duration patrols were continuing, but the task force's performance was notably sub-optimal. My concerns were validated when a senior ISAF general from this particular nation asked me privately what might be done at home to better prepare his nation's deploying forces.

This example demonstrated to me that resilience is a major factor in military success or failure. While training and equipment are important, other coalition task forces with similar capabilities and challenges elsewhere in Afghanistan were thriving. Leadership is also absolutely and undeniably crucial, but I commanded successive task forces from the same nation that were fundamentally different in terms of the outcomes they delivered. Leadership may have differed, but the equipment, mission and environment were relatively constant. I am of the view that individual and team resilience, and all that these entail, played an important determining role.

This next section concerns the perhaps less well understood concept of organisational resilience. The year 2010 marked a very difficult period for the United States-led coalition in Afghanistan; an American soldier was killed in action, on average, every 18 hours and ten Australian soldiers lost their lives in this year alone. The task of the coalition was to halt insurgent momentum and regain the initiative, but the resilience of the organisation was being tested.

Organisational resilience is about being able to adapt and respond to early warning signs of change, to plan strategies to manage vulnerabilities and opportunities, to manage and mobilise resources, to create a positive command climate, and to build a strong organisational culture.

The value of the United States' 'surge' of an additional 30,000 troops and the adoption of a counter-insurgency strategy will be judged by others, but these two factors, coupled with the major offensive

operations conducted throughout the 2010 'fighting season', certainly demonstrate elements of a resilient organisation. President Obama's statement that 'I make this decision because I am convinced that our security is at stake' further supports the notion that these steps were taken to build organisational resilience.<sup>21</sup>

It is also relevant at this point to articulate the role of the commander in leading resilience. Since I reported directly to General Stanley McChrystal and then General David Petraeus throughout 2010, I had the opportunity to observe the role of the commander in this respect. Individual resilience was clearly evident in both generals and this was underpinned by what I sensed to be a strong understanding of the importance of the physical, cognitive, psychological, character, and social dimensions. A biography of General Petraeus described him as a leader with a 'relentless intensity to prevail in war'.<sup>22</sup>

Beyond their own personal attributes, both also played a central role in leading actions to develop the organisational resilience of the ISAF in Afghanistan. Their engagement with senior leaders in Washington in order to build organisational resilience in the force has been well documented and the efficacy of other steps taken to adapt their approach is evident in the evolution of the Afghanistan campaign design throughout their tenures.<sup>23</sup>

Closer to home, the Australian Army's Plan Beersheba is an example of action taken to enhance organisational resilience. Recognising that the Army's foundation war-fighting capabilities were at risk through enduring operational demands and a force structure that was not optimised to enable sustainable collective training, Beersheba anticipated the risk

---

21 Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2010, p. 334.

22 Bradley T. Gericke, *David Petraeus: A Biography*, Greenwood Publishing Group, US, 2011, p. xii.

23 Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 275.

and took steps to better prepare, protect and preserve the force.<sup>24</sup>

Coupled with this were measures to renew the Army's culture and embed a continuous process of learning and sharing. By being agile, adaptable and prepared to change to protect vulnerabilities and to seize opportunities, the Army's organisational resilience has been enhanced.

In terms of the Army's individuals and teams, measures to enhance organisational resilience must be embedded as a foundation of service and as part of a continuous learning culture. This is no more evident than in the evolution of Australia's amphibious force and what it means for the Army.

As the development of the Army's contribution to the joint amphibious capability continues, imposed constraints will undeniably put pressure on its existing organisation. For example, the Army's 'enabling' aviation, logistics and combat support formations are already in high demand and finely tuned to deliver directed capabilities. Similarly, ground combat elements contributing to the amphibious capability may also be required to fill other roles to ensure the Army's preparedness.

An organisation lacking resilience would be unable to adapt and unwilling to change and potentially thrive when confronting these challenges and organisational risks. The fact that the Army is discussing these issues, is seeking to learn through development, and is prepared to change to seize opportunities is a clear indication of its organisational resilience. This might also suggest that organisational resilience is well evolved in its training system and modernisation processes.

The question is whether there is more that can be done to build these individual, team and organisational outcomes as a foundation of service.

---

24 '2013 Defence White Paper: "Plan Beersheba" - Restructuring the Australian Army', press release by the Hon. Stephen Smith, Minister for Defence, Canberra, 3 May 2013.

## Resilience development in Forces Command

With more than 30,000 soldiers under command, and with responsibility for generating forces for a wide range of contingencies, Forces Command is well placed to significantly and positively influence and institutionalise resilience development within the Army.

This goal was identified as a key requirement in the Commander Forces Command '100 day assessment' in 2015 and has been a stated priority since that time.<sup>25</sup>

Translating a concept that is so deeply ingrained in strategic culture into specified tasks and objectives is a challenging aspect of command. Commanders will routinely face internal and external resistance to new concepts or changing priorities, and this is particularly the case when addressing a quality such as resilience that is assumed to be inherent in every Australian soldier.

The benefit of clear prioritisation and allocation of resources in driving organisational change has been starkly evident. While acceptance of the importance of resilience is not new, its designation as a Forces Commander's priority has led to enhanced focus and awareness that resilience is a process that can be learned and developed.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, there is growing acceptance that resilience is a dynamic process, and there is a deeper understanding that enhancement must move beyond the basic measures such as hard physical training, with which some leaders are most comfortable. I would argue that, if resilience had not been specified as a command priority, it is likely to have remained an implicit part of strategic culture with uncoordinated and disparate actions that did not recognise resilience as a dynamic

---

<sup>25</sup> Gilmore, 'Commander Forces Command 100 day assessment', p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> For example, the Hardened and Networked Army initiative sought to improve the survivability of personnel and equipment against more lethal enemies. See Department of Defence, *The Hardened and Networked Army*, Canberra, 2005, p. 3. The VCDF-sponsored LASER-Resilience Study is another.

process, and with an inability to measure the resilience of individuals, teams and the organisation.

The vast majority of initiatives taken and actions performed within Forces Command in recent times have focused on individual resilience. Planning has consistently gravitated towards the individual and away from the organisation. Michael Evans writes that 'Australian historiography and literature have been ... a saga of individual soldiers rather than a phenomenon of military organisation and collective training.'<sup>27</sup> It is possible that the gravitation towards individual resilience, despite the declared scope for resilience development of individuals, teams and organisations, is an extension of Evans' observation. Ensuring a focus on all aspects of individual, team and organisational resilience remains an ongoing leadership challenge.

Despite this, significant actions to improve individual resilience are occurring throughout the 2nd Division and all brigades and training centres within Forces Command. The establishment and allocation of resources to Soldier Recovery Centres and similar unit-led initiatives, physically and mentally demanding training activities such as Exercise Kokoda and Exercise Shaggy Ridge, and efforts to ensure that families are quickly provided with support in a new posting locality, have been ongoing for a number of years.<sup>28</sup> Although often not explicit, Forces Command, and more broadly the Army and Defence, also make certain selections based on resilience — for example, in the choice of new equipment, or through the recruiting and corps allocation processes.

Forces Command will seek to build on these initiatives and, in some cases, ensure consistency across different formations. The fact that

---

27 Michael Evans, *The Tyranny of Dissonance: Australia's Strategic Culture and Way of War 1901-2005*, Study Paper Number 306, Land Warfare Studies Centre, Canberra, 2005, p. 52.

28 Department of Defence, 'RMC Cadets Take Part in Exercise Shaggy Ridge', at: <http://video.defence.gov.au/play/2568#> (accessed 1 March 2016).

such valuable individual training has occurred over a long period of time indicates that commanders have always viewed individual resilience as an important quality. An ongoing leadership challenge will be to ensure that sufficient emphasis is placed on both pre-incident and post-incident resilience. How the Army's leaders work to prepare for the shocks associated with military service is just as important as how they respond to and recover from these events. The ability to learn, adapt and grow as a result of these experiences must be developed.

While measures have been implemented within Forces Command to improve organisational outcomes, this has occurred to a lesser degree, and often without an explicit aim to improve organisational resilience. For example, contingency planning to ensure that the force generation cycle can withstand shock, such as a large-scale deployment or the evolution of amphibious concepts, occurs every year. The force generation cycle is key to the Army's future major acquisition and it must be as resilient as possible.

Efforts to enhance the 2nd Division's capabilities are fundamental to organisational resilience as Australian defence policy has long tasked the Army Reserve with providing an expansion base for land forces when national security challenges emerge. For example, the 1976 White Paper outlined the key requirement of achieving 'timely expansion [of the force in being] to deal with any unfavourable developments' and this approach has remained consistent.<sup>29</sup> As a large and experienced workforce, historically respected and with geographic dispersal and close community ties, the Reserve represents a basis for organisational resilience that is unparalleled in almost any other organisation. Ensuring that the Army Reserve remains a significant pillar of Australia's national security by delivering organisational resilience to the full-time Army must remain a key focus of any modernisation initiatives.

---

29 Department of Defence, *Australian Defence*, White Paper, Canberra, 1976, p. 12.

Finally, it is worth highlighting a number of key Forces Command initiatives over the past 18 months which will continue to evolve throughout 2016. A 'commander's directive' to Forces Command has provided guidance to the organisation, and I monitor the progress of resilience initiatives on a weekly basis. The enhancement of structures to support wounded, injured and ill soldiers has been a notable achievement, building on excellent work from within and outside Forces Command. Resources have been assigned to units and formations, with 'resilience training' now explicitly considered in training programs. In training centres, work to incorporate resilience into individual training is ongoing.

Within Forces Command there will always be far more that can be done to develop individual, team and organisational resilience. However, with a broader understanding that resilience must emerge from being implicitly embedded within Australia's strategic culture to become more central in the Army's consciousness, there is enthusiasm across the organisation for the further enhancement of resilience to ensure that the Army is ideally postured for the next operational contingency.

## **Conclusion**

Whether it be the Battle of Long Tan or the 1996 Blackhawk tragedy, the resilience of the Australian Army has been tested in peacetime and at war. Resilience encompasses its ability to adapt to, thrive during and recover from periods or situations of risk, challenge, danger, complexity and adversity. How the Army prepares to do this at the individual, team and organisational level is a matter of preparedness. Ensuring that resilience is institutionalised and prioritised, and not an implicit part of Australian strategic culture, is essential for the Army's future and for its future operational success. The role of the Army's leaders in ensuring the institutionalisation of resilience is paramount.

History has shown that resilience is a vital element of military capability. Throughout the ages, armies and their soldiers have thrived in a climate of risk, challenge, danger, complexity and adversity, and have re-emerged to embrace the challenges and opportunities in the months and years ahead as a result of their resilience. But history's pages are also littered with too many examples of where this has not been the case.

Resilience can be learned and developed in individuals, teams and organisations. It is the responsibility of its leaders at every level to ensure that the Army does just that.



**Notes:**

