

Submission to the Royal Australian Armoured Corps Corporation Issues of concern to the Royal New South Wales Lancers Association

On 23 May 2013 Noel Mc Laughlin chairman RAAC Corp asked that we submit a list of the main issues that should be addressed by the RAAC Corporation. This paper details the issues currently faced by the Lancers' Association. All of the issues are, for this Association, important.

Summary

To summarise we consider those issues the Corporation should pursue are:

1. retention of historic units on the ORBAT, provision of effective equipment and training;
2. welfare of veterans and other past serving soldiers; and
3. maintaining and publicising the history of the corps.

Regimental Issues

Retention of the unit on the ORBAT

The 1st/15th Royal New South Wales Lancers is the oldest unit of the Royal Australian Armoured Corps with a continuous history. It is the only RAAC unit granted the title "Royal". It is the only RAAC unit still on the order of battle that fought in World War 2. At Belmont in November 1899 it was the first RAAC unit to see combat.

Soldiers serving in the Regiment today can stand in the shoes of our very first combat soldiers. Converted from lancers to light horse in 1903. They carry the heritage of those massacred at the Bloody Angle in 1915, and rode through the desert to Jerusalem in 1916-1918. That guarded Sir Isaac Isaacs in 1932 when de Groot tagged along, suffered mechanisation in 1936, then conversion to armour in 1942. In 1945 their Regimental Ancestors took part in the largest deployment of tanks made by the Australian Army at Balikpapan. Then followed the post world war period. Constant changing equipment/technology and regular Australian soldiers competing for resources, forever prepared to put down their part time counterparts. And it is the availability of resources that has a direct impact on unit viability.

You would think that losing the "Royals" from the ORBAT would be unconscionable. To us it is. The hard facts are that the unconscionable has been proposed on a number of occasions.

Training Days

The current training day restrictions (nominally 20 days per man) are so tight that there is not the time to effectively train soldiers to do the jobs they will be required to do in emergency let alone combat situations. We would contend that with so little training time available individual military skilling has to be the focus; meaning there is no time for teamwork. The soldiers will thus not be accustomed to working in military teams, and leaders, competent in their civil management fields, will be inexperienced in leading in a military context.

Maintaining community relationships must also be considered. Reserve units are the face of the Army in most parts of Australia. In Western Sydney, the face is the Regiment, the only unit in the area with a Band. There must be training days for such activities peripheral as they could be judged. Our Army is an army of the people, and must be able to market itself as such.

Equipment

It is essential that our reserve units are equipped in order to be able to operate with protected mobility. The recent withdrawal of armoured vehicles has seen the Reserve Armoured Units able to train for mobile warfare, and work in a peace keeping role, but quite unable to be deployed in a mobile capacity where the enemy may use an IED, or even fire at vehicles with small arms.

Roll out of PMVs to Reserve Armoured Corps units must proceed apace. At the moment we are getting PMV crews trained, but it is essential crewmen get experience in vehicle husbandry on an ongoing basis. An open mind should also be kept on other equipment. With the infantry unable to cope with the M113 vehicle family, there may be scope for these to be deployed to the Reserve. In the past the Reserve units were able to maintain a high standard of vehicle husbandry with their M113s.

A viable supply of live ammunition for training and skills retention must also be considered.

Combat Deployments

The mistake of Vietnam where the general population was alienated by un-necessary conscription whilst at the same time the desire by reservist volunteers to be deployed were ignored should not be forgotten. Just like their regular compatriots, reservists should be considered for deployment as units or sub-units should the requirement exist.

The contribution of Reserve RAAC units in sub/sub-sup unit groupings in Timor, Iraq, Malaysia and the Solomon Islands is a strong indication of what can be achieved when trained soldiers with civil career experience are called on to be twice the citizen.

Extensive Qualification Periods

For some time we have seen the time for ECN qualification expand exponentially. To such an extent that in some cases it is impossible for reservists to qualify. The reasons given for the expansion has been that time is needed for lessons to be absorbed by human brains and that family/recreation time must be allowed for. More likely permanent soldiers have the time available so why not spread the lessons.

I hold an MBA from Macquarie University, Sydney. It was obtained by two years of intense study, a few weeks off at Christmas, four semesters a year, lectures that ended at 23:00 twice a week and a few weeks full time. It is regarded as a prestige management qualification. When not at uni, I had a high pressure civil job and but for the last year, a Reserve career; not to mention two children in the latter stages of high school. So much for needing time for lectures to be absorbed.

I compare the two weeks spent on TAC5 with the four weeks I later spent as a student on the AOC. On the latter I found myself with every evening and weekend free, with my family 1,000 km distant. I am not convinced I learned more on the AOC.

Every effort needs to be made to condense courses both for regulars and reservists. A qualifying course is not an end in itself. It can only provide the tools; the honing of those tools takes place on exercise. Exercises large and small, be they a troop training weekend for a reserve unit or week for regulars or a lengthy brigade exercise in an exotic location are the one way short of combat where training can become skill. Reservists have experienced this in their civil occupations; and know how to make it work. Short courses; lots of practice.

Accustomed to short courses, when we are confronted with the need to deploy large forces in major conflicts, we will then know how to run the necessary short courses to churn out the number of trained soldiers required.

The recognition of prior learning (RPL) must also be considered. Members of the Lancers' Association executive have experience in TAFE and University course management. They note that this appears to be a one way street, recognition of military qualifications and experience by civil educational institutions not vice-versa. It is not just medical doctors and lawyers that have directly transferable skills. A delivery driver will have transferable vehicle husbandry skills as will a bank IT manager have transferable skills in technical communication.

Regimental Home at Lancer Barracks

The (later Royal) New South Wales Lancers have occupied Lancer Barracks, Parramatta ever since K Troop of the Sydney Lancers ;(NSW Cavalry Reserves) was raised there in 1891. This location is the Regimental Home. Given the land value, as it is prime real estate in Parramatta, Sydney's second CBD, there have been many attempts over the years to sell it off. There are two buildings classified 'A' by the National Trust, with the rest an historic precinct and the National Trust organisation is quite happy for Defence to continue to occupy and maintain the barracks area.

The prospect of losing the Army's link to the oldest occupied military barracks on the Australian mainland while at the same time removing an iconic recruiting location at Sydney's population centre is a cause for us to fight for.

Retention of the Honorary Colonel's position

The Regiment has benefited greatly from a long line of honorary colonels able to project the unit's interests at the highest level. The first, Lord Carrington did not return to Australia after his time as governor of NSW, nonetheless he gave us our Regimental badge, hosted our soldiers in the UK in 1893, 1897 and 1899; and more importantly as a Liberal politician lobbied against Tory 'Federation of Empire' proponents that would have seen us as minor colonies, at each other's throats economically with major policy dictated from the antipodes. A policy that would surely have seen us subject to Japanese occupation in WW2.

Our second Honorary Colonel was General Cox. He had commanded Lancer Squadron at Aldershot and initially South Africa, the Regiment, then 1 LH Bde in WW1. As a senator he was well placed to take over from Lord Carrington when he passed away in 1928. He saw us through as a hands-on Honorary Colonel until he passed away in 1944.

In later years we have had many hands-on honorary colonels General Macdonald and recently General Glenny. Men with many friends at all levels of society and the military able to offer good counsel to those currently at the Regimental helm, and lobby where necessary in the regiment's interest. Our current Honorary Colonel, Colonel Long is from the same mould, doing just the job the Regiment needs at present at very little public cost.

At present the roles of the Association and Honorary Colonel complement each other. There are some issues that cannot be raised and approaches that cannot be made by the Honorary Colonel; and others the Association does not have access to the right channels to raise. If one cannot make the point; the other usually can.

Yes, should the Honorary Colonel's position be abolished, we in the Regimental Association and as represented on the RAAC Corporation executive will step up. But we will I'm afraid

lack the prestige of predecessors with the honorary colonel title, and it is this prestige that backs-up the counsel offered and enhances the lobbying possible.

Association Issues

Welfare of remaining WW2 veterans

Those who served with the Regiment as young men in World War 2 are all 90+ with a couple of survivors over 100. It is a difficult time for them, this year was the last time they could march on ANZAC Day; in 2014 they will be in vehicles. We need to do everything we can to make their last years special. To this end we continue to produce our journal Lancers' Despatch in hard copy making certain there is a special story about the Regiment in WW2 in every issue.

When we know about the passing of a veteran, we make certain the association is represented at the funeral, and commemorate each passing in Lancers' Despatch. Should we know of someone in need of help, the assistance is offered.

We can do more, why not in 2014 have these special veterans carried in PMVs possibly even led by a Matilda on a low loader rather than carried in Land Rovers. This group leading the younger association members. In 2013 the 4 WW2 veterans who marched were not allowed to march with the 100 post war association members. Worth a try to put this to the RSL.

Welfare of those who served in the Solomon Islands

We can be thankful that our recent regimental veterans served in an area that did not see the horrors of WW2, Vietnam, Iraq or Afghanistan. However, they did spend a long time away from their families, and civil careers were disrupted. Welfare assistance must be offered, issues monitored, and where necessary assistance given.

Welfare of those who served from the 1950s to the present

Those who served from the 1950s to the 1980s are now in retirement and in need of the interest and comradeship to fend off dementia. We have addressed this in part by the 'men's shed' work we offer through the Regimental Museum. Here old soldiers can work self-managed to restore and maintain the Museum's vehicle collection or offer any other skill they might have; many things to be done. Volunteering in this field is also available for any former RAAC soldiers who can make it to Parramatta.

Younger association members who have not served overseas have their own issues. In particular should there be an accident in training. Compensation for reservists is limited and Legacy do not step in should a soldier die in training, leaving a young family. The Lancer Association has had to take up this slack on a number of occasions.

Expanding Association Membership

We need to encourage those who have recently left the service, or are still currently serving to join the association and become involved in association issues.

To this end there are no fees to join the Association, and a substantial long standing internet presence.

A group of younger Association members also run a Facebook presence though this is outside the ambit of the Association committee of management.

Honouring those who served

The Association has taken and is taking steps to ensure the Lancer Barracks Memorial now includes the names of all those who died in combat and in training while serving with the Regiment and the 1 LH AIF.

Aid to the Community

The association has over the years also looked beyond the Regiment. In 2000, an Association team was assembled to manage a communications and control centre for the Sydney Olympics. That same team gathered again in 2001 to run a similar centre for the NSW bushfires.

Museum Issues

Preservation of the Regiment's History

The Regimental Museum at Lancer Barracks is housed in an 1828 relocated building on land (150 square metres) leased from the Department of Defence within the Lancer Barracks perimeter. The Museum is an incorporated body within the State of New South Wales and a dedicated War Memorial. It is officially known as the 'New South Wales Lancers Memorial Museum Incorporated' ABN 94 630 140 881. When the Army History Unit attempted to persuade the Museum executive into accepting a takeover in the year 2000 this was resisted. A very effective step as all other such Museums in the Sydney metro area have been effectively closed (the Army Museum of New South Wales, Victoria Barracks, is open for 2½ hours only on Thursdays).

The Museum is dedicated to the preservation of the Regiment's colourful history and does this due to the dedication of a team of volunteers with experience in a range of skills from vehicle restoration to display preparation, guiding, administration, website maintenance and management to the skills necessary to access the community grants that keep the Museum financed.

Continuance of the Museum at Lancer Barracks

Many attempts have been made over the years to curtail Museum operations at Lancer Barracks; from the AHU seeking to convince the Museum to join it by demanding commercial rent for the site to the attempts to sell the barracks site mentioned above. There have also occasionally been problems with the grace and favour arrangement whereby the Museum has access to a hangar area for vehicle maintenance. The access rules often changing with the whim of the most recent barracks staff.

The constant changing of the rules on how we need to deal with weapons is of concern. We at one point were required to damage historic weapons, damage no longer required. The bureaucracy associated with managing weapons is also quite extreme, and changes regularly.

Compared to other Army museums the Lancers' Museum costs the Department of Defence practically nothing. It is important that the Museum continue to exist, preserve the Regiments' priceless history, and display it at the centre of Australia's most populous city.

Access to the Museum at Lancer Barracks

AHU museums now have a requirement that a serving soldier is present and on duty at the museum for it to open. This has seriously curtailed Museum operations. I mentioned before

that The Army Museum of NSW can only open 2½ hours a week; because of this restriction. The restriction is incongruous. Museum collections are for the most part owned and managed by Museum volunteers as an incorporated body. There do need to be restrictions on access to a defence site, but these are able to be managed by other means.

The current situation where there is a standing allowance for the Museum to open Sundays, provision for working bees (no public access) on Thursday; and the capacity to organise tours and take out our vehicles, with clearance, on any day works very well.

Restrictions on physical access other than in cases of emergency (the Museum closed physically for 18 months after 11 September 2001) would be of concern.

Support of Defence and Community Activities

Our road-worthy vehicles (3 Ferret Scout Cars, two vintage Land Rovers, a Champ and a Bren Gun Carrier) are regularly supplied to support community activities such as Reserve Forces Day, Battle of Greece and Crete Commemoration, local RSL ANZAC Day services, charities, schools; and the Regiment for parade ground holding etc. In 2014 we are planning a parade to commemorate the formation of the 1 LH AIF in Parramatta. This will also involve the appearance of our latest restored and mobile vehicles, a Staghound Armoured Car and a fully restored Matilda. When possible our Centurion also makes tracks.

We have our own registered car club so we can control our own heritage vehicle registrations and movements.

We need every support possible to continue with these activities that are able to show Australia's armoured heritage on the streets of its largest city.

Use of Technology

Since 1998 the Museum has had a major web presence, 150,000 to 200,000 hits a month. This is continually expanding, and is about to be integrated with a school curriculum programme.

We are lucky to have the technical expertise in-house to deliver. We simply have to husband and utilise the resources to continue to deliver and adjust in accord with changing technological opportunities.

Re-publication of the Regimental History

Our Regimental History was last updated in 1985, of interest members of the current Museum and Association executive committees were the same people who organised the publication then. It is currently being updated. Within the next two years (just about when we will have run out of the hard backed editions published in 1985) the revised volume will be available.

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29 June 2013