

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND DOCTRINE

THE STRATEGIC CORPORAL

SOME REQUIREMENTS IN TRAINING AND EDUCATION

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'The era of the strategic corporal is here. The soldier of today must possess professional mastery of warfare, but match this with political and media sensitivity.'

Lieutenant General Peter Leahy, Chief of Army, 18 October 2002

In most modern Western armies, soldiers are expected to be not only technically proficient in warfighting, but also capable of supervising civil affairs, providing humanitarian aid and performing a range of activities relating to order and stability. As networked technologies flatten command structures, new doctrine and revised training regimes are likely to be required in order to prepare individual soldiers to assume greater responsibility on the multidimensional 21st-century battlespace.

As a result of these trends, the Australian Army must begin to foster a military culture that is aimed at preparing non-commissioned officers (NCOs) to become what has been described as 'strategic corporals'. The term *strategic corporal* refers to the devolution of command responsibility to lower rank levels in an era of instant communications and pervasive media images.

This article has three aims. First, it seeks to investigate the idea of a strategic corporal and to identify the skills that such an individual should possess. Second, it examines whether the current Army training system is capable of producing strategic corporals. Finally, the article attempts to identify those adjustments that may be necessary in land force training in order to develop soldiers that are capable of assuming greater responsibility in a complex and multidimensional battlespace.

THE IDEA OF A STRATEGIC CORPORAL

The notion of a strategic corporal has become popular in the Army in recent years. This situation has arisen largely because of the increased responsibility that is being assigned to junior military leaders and to small military teams across a spectrum of military operations, ranging from warfighting through peace operations to humanitarian missions. In military circles, the basic premise underlying the idea of a strategic corporal is a general belief that future operations will be more complex in character and will require an increased level of junior leadership.

As a result, the Army may need to consider new training requirements in such areas as the Law of Armed Conflict, cultural awareness, and the discriminate use of force, as well as improved liaison and mediation skills.

While there is no general agreement on the meaning of a strategic corporal, for the purposes of this article the term is defined as follows:

A strategic corporal is a soldier that possesses technical mastery in the skill of arms while being aware that his judgment, decision-making and action can all have strategic and political consequences that can affect the outcome of a given mission and the reputation of his country.¹

In some respects, a type of strategic corporal has always been a feature of the Australian Regular Army's small-unit military culture. As the US commander in Vietnam in the 1960s, General William Westmoreland, noted in his memoirs:

Small in numbers and well trained, particularly in antiguerrilla warfare, the Australian Army was much like the post-Versailles German Army in which even men in the ranks might have been leaders in some less capable force.²

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This 'post-Versailles' tradition continues in the Australian Army but arguably must be adapted to 21st-century conditions. Discussion of the strategic corporal often includes supplementing traditional military proficiency with modern media awareness, cultural and foreign language knowledge, and understanding of the Law of Armed Conflict. There is also a requirement for soldiers to grasp specific Rules of Engagement on particular missions and to be capable of adapting to a spectrum of operations that embraces peace, crisis and war.

PRODUCING A STRATEGIC CORPORAL: TRAINING, EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Army regards military training as a planned process to modify skills, knowledge and attitudes through learning experiences in order to achieve effective performance in an activity or range of activities. The Army has a well-developed training continuum that focuses on individual and collective training as a means to develop proficiency. The purpose of individual training is to produce a self-confident and disciplined soldier who is physically fit, well motivated, and equipped with the basic competencies and fighting qualities needed to survive in the battlespace. Such a soldier should also be capable of operating as a member of a team or crew.³ For its part, collective training builds on individual training and team drills to develop cohesive, competent and operationally ready units. Collective training embraces every aspect of a unit's or formation's mission, including tactics, all-arms cooperation, command and control, and control and administration. When applied correctly, collective training can be a significant force multiplier.⁴

In the land force, education is defined as those activities that aim at developing the knowledge, skills, moral values and understanding required in all aspects of life, rather than skills and knowledge relating to only a limited field of activity.⁵ Soldiers require more than skill to perform their tasks. They must also have a broader understanding of concepts and processes, and the knowledge and understanding to justify their actions. The essential function of academic education in any context (both civilian and military) is to develop an individual's intellectual capacity. Academic education seeks to achieve cognitive development and allow individuals to question and hypothesise, and to explain and solve problems. However, military education is also concerned with how people, individually and collectively, apply their non-material resources of intellect, emotion, motivation and leadership.⁶ The ability to apply these resources is regarded in the Army as a critically important element in the human dimension of warfighting. Although soldiers may need further education to perform their various tasks, it is important to note that the skills involved in developing a potential strategic corporal do not

necessarily require an academic approach. Rather, what is needed is the development of a soldier's professional education. Making a distinction between academic studies and professional development is of great importance when discussing the idea of a strategic corporal.

THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development occupies a position between academic education and military training.⁷ Education in topics such as military law and leadership, military history, current affairs and ethics should be considered as part of professional development studies. Such studies should be aimed at providing knowledge that is of direct value to soldiers in the execution of their duties. Most soldiers do not require in-depth academic education in subjects such as military history or international relations. Rather, they require a basic applied knowledge of these subjects alongside a 'lessons learnt' approach that assists in soldierly decision-making and judgment. The Army needs to recognise that the cultivation of the skills and knowledge necessary for a soldier to be operationally effective is an outcome that draws on both training and education processes. It is not a choice between two opposite poles of activity but a question of embracing both in the right balance and proportion. In short, training and education are complementary in the professional development of military personnel. For example, training routines teach soldiers to perfect procedures in order to master their military environment. For its part, military education provides the individual soldier with a deeper understanding of the profession of arms.

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Achieving an effective balance between training needs and education requirements is one of the most important challenges facing the Australian Army at the beginning of the 21st century. The challenge is to retain the land force's excellent training regime while ensuring that new educational requirements are not neglected. In order to inform future training decisions, the Army needs to be fully aware of both the strengths and weaknesses of its current training system, of lessons learnt from past operations and of trends in military education. In general terms, the Army training system is robust and is effective in producing good-quality soldiers and junior non-commissioned officers. The Regimental Sergeant Major of the Army considers that Australian soldiers are highly trained in basic infantry skills and have a good knowledge of such areas as Rules of Engagement and the Law of Armed Conflict.⁸

TRAINING LESSONS FROM EAST TIMOR

An examination of the experience of the 5/7 Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (5/7 RAR), on Operations *Warden* and *Tanager* in East Timor is also instructive with regard to Army training.⁹ The battalion was in East Timor from 7 October 1999 until 21 May 2000. Before its deployment, officers and NCOs detected a number of training deficiencies. One of these deficiencies was that reinforcement personnel received only six weeks of Initial Employment Training. This period of training was insufficient to prepare soldiers for operations and further training in collective infantry skills was necessary before reinforcements were deployed.¹⁰

The bulk of security work that 5/7 RAR carried out in Dili, the capital of East Timor, concerned the security of the population, vital asset protection and management of relations with the Indonesian armed forces. In addition, soldiers had to engage in humanitarian assistance and the supervision of internally displaced people. The battalion was highly successful in handling these diverse tasks on its tour of duty largely because of the abilities of its platoon and section commanders.¹¹ In this respect, training in the Rules of Engagement and in standard operating procedures governing operations in East Timor were important measures in preparing junior commanders to assume responsibility on the ground.¹²

Briefings by military liaison officers and language training for soldiers prior to deployment were also invaluable in readying soldiers for service in East Timor. During the mission in East Timor, Australian soldiers at all rank levels were often called on to mediate or negotiate with a variety of institutions, ranging from civilian police to non-government and humanitarian agencies. The Army subsequently identified that an increased emphasis on mediation and negotiation training would be a necessary part of military training in the future.¹³

Based on the experience of East Timor, the training of soldiers during pre-deployment should, in the future, include improved Asia-Pacific cultural awareness and language training wherever possible.¹⁴ For example, all soldiers in a deploying force should be able to exchange greetings with local citizens and should be made aware of indigenous cultural courtesies. There is, however, also a need for soldiers to possess sufficient skills to understand basic guidance requirements in more complex legal areas such as the provisions governing ceasefire resolutions and memorandums of understanding.

The Army's current training continuum effectively equipped soldiers for the deployment to East Timor and provided some instruction in cultural awareness and language training. However, training in negotiation and mediation techniques was often either insufficient or *ad hoc* in character. As a result, the current training continuum probably needs to be expanded to include courses in media awareness

and an advanced interpersonal skills program that embraces instruction in liaison, negotiation and mediation techniques. The experience of the British Royal Marines in these areas may be of value to the Australian Army. In the Royal Marines, the rank of corporal is now considered as the first critical level of junior leadership. The training approach of the Royal Marines is a direct legacy from the British military experience of small-unit operations in Northern Ireland and the Balkans. The Royal Marines supplement this operational experience with specific preparation for contingency deployments. An understanding of strategic issues and theatre-specific problems that may occur at junior level are stressed in training and linked to operational performance. The Royal Marines also conduct media and cultural awareness training for junior NCOs.¹⁵

TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL CULTURES

Observers have suggested that, in order to meet a more complex operational environment, the 21st-century Australian Army must move beyond a 'training culture' towards an 'educational culture'.¹⁶ It has also been argued in some military circles that the constabulary role of troops on peace operations demands a range of skills that are qualitatively different from those of conventional military training.¹⁷ For example, on peace operations, soldiers are often confronted with incidents that require restraint in the use of force, impartiality in action and the resolution of crisis by mediation. Developing such skills may require a new balance between training and education that transcends competency standards in favour of more educational and cognitive problem-solving skills.¹⁸ The 2004 Senior Officer Study Period argued that there is no overarching training philosophy within the Army that encompasses education, training and professional development. As a result, individual military training is often 'just in case' training.¹⁹

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HNA AND THE STRATEGIC CORPORAL

The emerging debate between training and education is an important one for the current Hardening and Networking the Army (HNA) initiative. Under HNA, the Army is undertaking studies designed to illuminate operational requirements over the next decade. These studies have included the 2004 Senior Officer Study Period on 'Social Learning in the Army Environment'; tactical lessons learnt from the Land Warfare Development Centre at Puckapunyal; and the development of complex warfighting doctrine and a projected rewriting of Land Warfare Doctrine 1 (LWD1)

by the Directorate of Future Land Warfare in Army Headquarters. In addition, the Combined Arms Training and Development Centre at Puckapunyal has undertaken a 'gap analysis' of tactical and training requirements between Army-in-Being (AIB) and the future HNA Objective Force. Finally, the Land Warfare Studies Centre is examining some of the cultural changes that might be required in a hardened and networked land force.

Under HNA, it is likely that individual soldiers will require a broader, more 'educative' approach to training. Indeed, there has been some speculation that future junior NCOs may need to possess attributes that traditionally have been the province of the Special Forces, particularly in the realms of cultural awareness and language proficiency. However, it is important to note that an enhanced training regime designed to produce a strategic corporal does not necessarily require wholesale Special Forces training. Rather, what is needed is a systematic program to master a range of additional proficiencies, most of which are currently being taught within the Army but on an *ad hoc* basis.

Areas such as media awareness, improved foreign-language proficiency, comparative cultural differences and educational measures to develop a soldier's basic understanding of Australia's strategic circumstances demand greater formalisation in training and education programs. An enhanced command and leadership component focused on legal issues and Rules of Engagement in the context of the US Marine Corps' formulation of 'Three-Block War'—in which warfighting, peace operations and humanitarian action may occur simultaneously in a concentrated area—might also be useful. Finally, the acquisition of new equipment and weapons platforms—including the Armed Reconnaissance Helicopter, Abrams tanks and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs)—are likely to necessitate a revision of both training content and delivery.²⁰

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FUTURE TRAINING, RECRUITMENT AND THE STRATEGIC CORPORAL

How are new training and education measures to be achieved in the Army? In terms of the current training system, promotion courses offer one obvious vehicle for specific training courses relevant to strategic corporal requirements. Unit collective training is another avenue in which tactical and operational problem-solving could be practised, thereby honing soldierly judgment through simulation. A carefully designed, scenario-based individual and collective training regime might represent an additional method for training alongside a greater use of experimentation.

When considering changes in training, observers need to appreciate that the Australian Army's individual and collective training system cannot be disrupted or overloaded. Although complex warfighting doctrine may require a soldier to participate in both a military and a humanitarian role, the intrinsic warfighting role of the soldier must

always be first and foremost. Accordingly, the best option for the Army may be to reinforce the current individual training regime and to enhance collective training through standardisation and improvements in specific areas of pre-deployment training.

An expansive interpretation of the concept of a strategic corporal is likely to founder. Any presumption that superior fortitude, endurance, intellect and training readiness can be induced in every soldier is unrealistic and may even be counterproductive.²¹ The Army must be coldly realistic and must understand that the training system can only deliver what finance and time—both of which are always in short supply—can permit. The land force also needs to consider seriously whether all, or only some, of its junior NCOs need to be trained as strategic corporals. There may even be a case for a degree of specialisation that runs counter to the generalist ethos of the Army. The key task for trainers is to conduct a systematic analysis of the skills that are likely to be required on operations for general-purpose soldiers in the future.

Another important area with which the Army needs to come to terms is Australia's faltering demography. This factor will critically affect recruitment and retention. Over the next decade, the Army will have to compete against corporations and industries that will be seeking an economic version of the strategic corporal. The Army, in common with the other services and with the Defence Department as a whole, is short of a range of skilled and educated personnel. For example, in the area of artisans, the land force has identified forty-seven trades as being 'problematic' and twelve more as being 'critical' in terms of manning.²² The greatest problem that the Army may face is this: can a strategic corporal be produced in an Army whose parent society is scrambling for human resources because of demographic decline?

The publication of *The Defence Personnel Environment Scan 2020* in August 2001 noted that interest in military service among young people is in deep decline. One of the report's major conclusions was that, without major changes being made to personnel policies and conditions of service, the ADF would struggle to meet adequate recruitment and retention rates. These warnings were echoed in a subsequent *Defence Personnel Environment Scan* published in April 2003.²³

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CONCLUSION

In some respects, a ‘post-Versailles’ type of strategic corporal has been a feature of the Australian Regular Army’s small-unit military culture since the 1950s. There is, however, no exact belief within the Australian Army as to the skills that constitute a strategic corporal. Although the concept is open to continuing debate, in general many senior officers view a strategic corporal as a highly trained professional soldier whose competence in warfighting must be supplemented by specific areas of educational knowledge that permit him or her to operate effectively in multidimensional operations.

The current Army training system is robust and effective, as is evident from the performance of soldiers on recent operations. However, some refinements in education are probably necessary in order to develop modern proficiencies in foreign language, cultural awareness, media training, negotiation techniques and conflict-resolution skills. These educational skills need to be formal rather than *ad hoc* in character and must be aligned to effective pre-deployment training. The main task facing trainers and military educators in the early 21st century is how to best equip the individual junior leader both mentally and physically for the challenges of a transformed security environment. In this sense, the strategic corporal concept is about adapting the Army’s ethos and older values to a range of new attitudes and codes of behaviour that today’s complex battlespace demands.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Author’s definition.
- 2 General William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, Doubleday & Company, New York, 1976, p. 258.
- 3 Australian Army, Land Warfare Doctrine 7-2, *Collective Training*, Puckapunyal, Vic., 2004, p. 2.6.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 1.3.
- 5 Australian Army, Land Warfare Doctrine 7-1, *Individual Training*, Puckapunyal, Vic., 2004, p. 1.14.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 1.16.
- 8 Author’s interview with Regimental Sergeant Major—Army, 29 July 2004.

- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 Australian Army, '5/7 RAR (Mech) Post Operational Report: Operations *Warden/Tanager*, East Timor, 7 Oct 1999 to 21 May 2000'.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Australian Army, 'Operation *Tanager* Post Operation Report by COMASC, 24 Jan 2000 to 31 Oct 2000' and 'CSQN 2 Cavalry Regiment, Post Operation Report—Operation *Warden*, March 2000'.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 Draft Report, Senior Officer Study Period 2004 on Visit to Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States, June 2004.
- 16 Address by Lieutenant General Peter Leahy, Chief of Army to the Land Warfare Conference, 28 October 2003. Copy in author's possession.
- 17 David Schmidtchen, 'Preparing Capable Australian Defence Force Personnel for Peace Operations: Principles and Foundations, December 1999, p. v.
- 18 *Ibid.* See also Colonel R.J. Breen, 'Guiding Lessons for Combined Operations in the Near Region', Short Notice Offshore Deployment Seminar, Centre for Army Lessons Learned, Puckapunyal, 7 August 2000.
- 19 Senior Officer Study Period team conclusions presented at the Chief of Army Exercise, Canberra, 11 October 2004. Notes taken by author.
- 20 Sanu Kainikara, 'Effective Wargaming: Impact of the Changing Nature of Warfare', *Aerospace Centre Papers*, Paper No. 13, Department of Defence, Canberra, 2003, p. iii.
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