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QUICK ASSESSMENT BRIEF FOR SOCAUST

References:

- A. SOCAUST OPINST 02/07 OP SLIPPER, 29 OCT 07
- B. CJOPS OPORD 02/07 OP SLIPPER, 6 Nov 07
- C. DI(G) Hand Held Imagery 2003

RELEASE OF A 2009 AFGANISTAN TOUR DVD

Background

1. **Reason for brief.** This brief is written to provide SOCAUST and DSOIC situational awareness on incidents portrayed in a DVD circulating within FORCOMD and passed to CA in 2013.

2. **Background.** [REDACTED] s33(a)(1) 2 CDO REGT, conducted a tour of Afghanistan over the period [REDACTED] s33(a)(1). During the tour three members of the unit made two 30 min shows based on a "current affairs in front of an audience" style TV show. The DVD used a mixture of footage from weapon/helmet/team cameras collected from the field, hand held imagery from team or personal cameras around the base as well as that filmed in a studio.

3. **Parties interviewed.** The following members were interviewed via phone or email:

a. [REDACTED] (OC CCG for rotation);

b. [REDACTED] (CSM);

c. [REDACTED] (CO SOTG); and

d. [REDACTED]

4. I also spoke to a number of NCO's, WO's and OFFR's from this and subsequent rotations to ground truth actions and outcomes from exposure to this type of incidents.

Undesirable behaviour used in the footage

5. The footage depicts a number of actions that appear to breach extant policy. The segments of footage that required investigation and explanation are:

- a. **Standing on a quad bike being towed.** A quad bike was being towed back to FOB behind a BM and as the bike needs to be controlled at times, the rider remained on the bike. Standing on a quad bike and mimicking surfing while being towed behind a BM was clearly a dangerous practice. The footage only seen by PI staff when shown at end of rotation some two months later. While the act was foolhardy and dangerous and the lack of PPE breached DRTI's, DRTI's were not enforced while on OPS. When this act became known to the next rotation's CoC, the members were briefed that it was an unacceptable act and the next person to do this

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would be charged. When a PTE was subsequently seen (via a UAV) doing the same thing on the front of a vehicle being towed, he was charged.

- b. **Four separate segments that show members who appear to be intoxicated.** JTF633 policy at the time was to allow alcohol at the request of the TG CO. SOTG had 4-5 approved occasions. Two members were charged for drinking when unauthorised. When members were suspected of having drunk more than that authorised by the CoC they were dealt with under the DO system. Five members were charged with 'Failure to Comply' and had to do extra drill.
- c. **Punches thrown.** Two PTE's of the FE threw punches at each other during an authorised event. The members were separated and then they had a second go at each other later in the night. It was stopped by the SECT Comd and both were counselled by the PL SGT the next day. No further discipline action was taken but both had adverse reports written.
- d. **Fishing with EO.** Using EO to stun fish in rivers is a common ANSF/AFGAN practice. During a layover day the ANSF partner force prepared to conduct this (as they do every time at this location due to the depth of the water hole). The OC made the decision that this was best done as a controlled grenade practice and then set sentries and had a SNCO Mentor run the practice with the ANSF member. It was not an AS member who threw the EO.
- e. **Golfing.** While the hitting of golf balls off the berm wall was embarrassing, it is not illegal. (Some of the incidents depicted led to 'Extras' as the behaviour was alcohol based). The carriage of non mission related equipment in already overloaded vehicles shows a lack of maturity and/or mission focus.
- f. **Dress and PPE in a field environment.** The level of PPE adopted was at the unit commander's discretion. While it was expected that members would wear full body armour and helmet when conducting deliberate OPS or when moving. s33(a)(ii)
 s33(a)(ii) The dress depicted in the first segment of the footage, being shorts and not wearing PPE, was authorised by the CoC at the time due to the weather and type of operations being conducted. This was the first operation conducted in s33 when day temperature reached 45 C+. Much of this footage was taken during the day following long night moves. s33(a)(ii)
 s33(a)(ii) While much of the operational footage was cleared for official use and release, some of the segments used in the DVD were not authorised as the CoC felt they would portray the guidance on use of PPE incorrectly without context. Subsequent footage shows the members to be in PPE when conducting missions.
- g. **Release of unauthorised footage.** There were multiple layers of HHI policy extant in 2009 that forbade the use of any personal devices for the capture and storage of images: only military issued equipment was to be

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used for the capture, processing, and storage. The policy also forbids the release of media that has not been cleared by the SOTG CO. The sub unit CoC did not know of the DVD until two days before departure. The OC did not support the use of the DVD as there were scenes that were clearly inappropriate. As many copies had been distributed and it would be impossible to locate them all he stipulated that it was for unit use only and that it was to be held at Coy level only. There is some conjecture on what DVD was shown to the SOTG HQ's and support members. There were two DVD's made; the one in question and a second that had predominantly operational scenes with "lots of explosions and UAV footage" plus training and with no commentary. Both were shown at the end of rotation function and a majority of the SOTG HQ element based in TK saw them and no objections or issues were expressed with respect to the content. The CO stated that he had not seen the DVD in question but had seen the operational and training DVD.

Action taken

6. It appears that whenever an infringement of the directives was discovered then action was taken. Based on the facts known at the time and the CoC's judgment of the impacts, the accountability and/or punishments varied. Some examples are:

- a. Many individuals who had consumed more alcohol than allowed were infringed under the DO system and given extra duties, ROP's or drill. In some cases this was conducted by NCO's guilty of the same offences. A number of these NCO's were removed from their command or administrative role and [REDACTED]
- b. When there was not sufficient proof to support admin or discipline action then it was notated in their reports that they had poor discipline/leadership and/or were not suitable for command appointments.
- c. Some OR's/NCO's were moved into OPS or Trg jobs and one was sent home for admin reasons.
- d. The OC and/or CSM took strong action whenever they became aware of issues and on the occasions when they were permitted alcohol the OC, CSM and selected NCO's would regularly rove through the lines and observe events – the events in the video were not observed.

7. From discussion with RSM's and SSM/CSM's from other rotations they have all had to stop sub-unit functions where drinking had been authorised but excess alcohol had been acquired or consumed. On multiple occasions the sub-units had invited and supplied alcohol to members from other contingents that were not authorised to drink. It appears that many of those invited were due to gender not interoperability, and again this was with the knowledge of the sub-unit CoC. Alternatively on discovery by the sub-unit CoC, no formal action was taken (outside counselling). Although this did not appear to have happened on this rotation where the CoC was adamant that the celebrations were for the FE only.

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8. The CoC of the last and current rotation were informed of the DVD and it was reinforced that no unauthorised footage was to be released.

9. It has been confirmed that the HHI policy is still part of the RSO&I program in theatre.

Assessment

10. The operational imagery used was cleared for limited use in an official capacity only; the compilation of the video was not.

11. The distribution of the DVD to FE members occurred before it was known to the OC, but while he informed the members it was not appropriate, he and the CSM did not try to recover the copies. The distribution was without the consent of the CO SOTG who was the authority for release. As it appears SOTG HQ staff (and not confirmed who actually saw it) saw this DVD and no objections or questions were raised, this was misconstrued as not warranting any further action to recover copies or pursue action against the makers of the DVD.

12. Many incidents have been relayed without evidence of formal follow up and therefore a perceived lack of accountability.

a. Many acts have been dealt with through the DO system and therefore are not recorded with SOHQ or at unit level and again this has led to a perception of not being dealt with.

b. While some of the unacceptable/discipline acts were known to CPL, SGT and CAPT level members, it appears that many valued mateship/friendship over leadership/command and doing the right thing, there were many other acts that when known to the CoC were dealt with appropriately.

c.

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13. The imagery on the DVD needs some balance. The FE members go out into harms way and fight for their lives time and time again. In this rotation there were no atrocities or deaths of civilians and there were some great outcomes and so perhaps context is something that is really missing here.

Recommendations

14. The following recommendations are made:

a. Due to the lapsed time frame, appearance of complicity of SOTG HQ and nature of released footage, a discipline investigation is not recommended.

b. The number of unacceptable events and the outcomes need to be broadcasted to enforce that it is happening in all the units and that it is not acceptable to allow this type of behaviour and attitude to continue.

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- c. CPL/SGT and CAPT ranks need to be made aware of the cultural expectations and standards expected in the command and what they walk past is the standard they set.

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