

## ***AUSTRALIAN ARMY AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS IN THE SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC: 1942-45***

### **CLOSING ADDRESS BY THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF Lieutenant-General John Grey**

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Let me begin by thanking, firstly, the presenters for the high quality of their presentations; secondly, our veterans—it is a privilege to have you here and to have you sharing your knowledge with us. Next, the Australian War Memorial for both providing a facility and also the encouragement for this conference. Finally, I believe it would be remiss of me if I also did not thank Colonel Peter Leahy and his staff for the work they have done in putting this history conference together.

Having said that and pondered, what should we take away with us from today? The first thing I think is the issue of command at all three levels. Firstly at the strategic level. One of the disappointing things is that, even with the benefit of history, it is still unclear exactly what the combined Chiefs of Staff actually intended in their in the overall strategy in the South-West Pacific. The points come out, but it is quite clear that we had national interests vying for authority and that we were starting to take account of what the world might look like at the end of the war. This leads to confusion when you try and narrow it down and ask, 'What, first of all, was the political intent? How was that intent converted into a military strategy and what was the strategy?'

Secondly, when you look at the operational level of war you have MacArthur, and as we heard this morning, MacArthur was viewed by the Australian Government as operating at the strategic level. But in fact he was really operating as the Theatre Commander at the operational level of war. Yet we had General Blamey with his Headquarters and his very diverse responsibilities also operating at that operational level of war. It is clear that these two commanders were not sufficiently linked.

For the OBOE operations, it is my view that General Morshead's Headquarters operated at the tactical level with the operational level decisions coming from General Blamey and General MacArthur. I think there are some important lessons for us that come out of how we structure and how we record what we do. If I cast my mind back to some of the times in Vietnam and try to trace through that war's history, it is clear that a number of us did not keep sufficient records and did not commit enough of our thoughts for history. It is perhaps ironic that at this stage, as I come towards the end of my time as CGS, I am in fact trying to record now and what the Australian Army's achievements have been over the last nearly three years. I think it's important that we do that to capture why we did things and to explain the imperatives of the time. Perhaps, with that being so, history may judge some of us more kindly.

I think it is also important to look and think of the examples we have had and to consider where we should be going with 'jointery'. To me, a very important issue from today was that the first part of jointery is properly understanding your own service. You must be an expert in your own field first to enable you to balance out the different requirements between sea, air and land operations. And it is impossible to do that unless you thoroughly understand your own service. But it is then quite clear that we do need staff and commanders with the expertise to be able to massage that together and properly weigh all of the appropriate factors. Of course, this is where the planning comes in. The need for detailed, thorough planning which is tested. Which, for amphibious operations, takes account of the sea and surface fleet, sub-surface fleet, our air flank and, of course, land operations and the crucial change between being afloat and being ashore.

We talked about surprise. It seems to me that surprise is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve. If you wound the clock back when radar was first used then I am sure that people were saying also that surprise was becoming increasingly difficult to achieve. It nevertheless needs to be aimed for, and when you think that we now have satellite surveillance, electronic warfare, and we also have precision guided munitions with an over the horizon capability,

then there certainly is as need for surprise. But it is going to be difficult and, clearly, to do it we are going to have to be able to exploit technology. Having a technological edge and technology was something I mentioned first thing this morning. The technological edge, I believe, is a crucial factor. You cannot achieve this edge across the entire spectrum of warfare in all three environments. You must be selective about it and of course, if you want to stay towards the leading edge of technology, there is a big price to pay in dollar terms.

Last week I was over in Western Australia and spent some time offshore with the Pilbara Regiment, which is concerned about its offshore islands, the platforms that come ashore and the important pipelines in that area. It served as an important reminder that people from Canberra clearly need to get out and understand the country and the environment that we in the Army have to operate in. It is also an eye-opener to see the growth that is going on in this country. One of the things that really concerns me is that the planners in Canberra are not keeping pace with this rate of growth. I was astonished to get out there and find the number of platforms that are now in place and have been constructed since I was last only 14 months ago. So I think it is an important thing for us to recognise that these responsibilities are there. They are responsibilities that we cannot take lightly and we need to get out and see for ourselves.

In looking at the importance of amphibious operations the points have been made today that we have had some experience. Unfortunately, I would have to say that we have lost much of the expertise, although some of the doctrines still exist. I believe that we need to do more on it. On the other hand, we have to put it in the context of overall priorities and what we can afford to do. This history conference is an important reminder to us and will also reinvigorate the process of us developing our doctrine for amphibious operations. It should lead us toward more use of our craft and our expertise in the joint arena, to train and practise to operate in this way. And I take the point that was made, that if you have an option, a number would still prefer to go by helicopter rather than across a beach. That is a command decision and it is an operational decision for the theatre commander of how we will operate. But the point is, you ought to have the options in your inventory and that is really what we are talking about.

Another point that came out very late this afternoon was that Porton Plantation operation. I said last year on a visit to the Western Front, as I stood at Fromelles, that if I had my way I would invite all commanders to visit that place. There is a place where we lost an enormous number of Australian lives yet the Australian Commanders at the time were aware that the operation was highly unlikely to succeed. To me, that reminds us that we ought to take note of history. And secondly, that commanders ought to take away the lesson of not surrounding themselves with 'yes men' and listen to field commanders who have experience. You cannot, in isolation, always be right. You need to have the wisdom of your experienced field commanders so that you can test and evaluate the planning that has been done by your staff, because ultimately it is the commander that carries the responsibility.

The final point I would like to make in terms of what we have done today, is the lesson that has come out about leadership. Quite clearly, there is a need for good leadership from each of our commanders. I said at the 11th Business Congress in Melbourne yesterday, when we were talking about leadership in the business community, that within the Army people are led and resources are managed. Commanders not only need to lead, but they need to have the respect of the men they lead and the confidence of those men. You cannot get that if you throw your headquarters together at the last minute, or your men have not trained with you under your command. Following on from that, there is a need for us to settle down some of our organisational structures and ensure that our soldiers do have the opportunity to train with their commanders and have confidence in them.

Finally, in closing, let me say that I believe this has been a successful day and that the book that will follow will enable us to establish a benchmark in terms of where we are going with amphibious operations. It is also appropriate that we run a 1995 Army History conference and I have opted for the topic of Land - Air Operations.

Thank you for attending and thank you for the enthusiastic way in which you participated.