

AUSSIES IN CONTACT - AGAIN

DIGGER SHOT IN THE BACK KEEPS FIGHTING



LIEUTENANT CLIFF DE LAINE GIVES ORDERS DURING AN EARLY MORNING BATTLE ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2007



LIEUTENANT CLIFF DE LAINE TAKES A BREATHER DURING A LULL IN FIGHTING ON 26 AUGUST 2007

WORDS BRIAN HARTIGAN
PICS CORPORAL JAMIE OSBORNE

Australian soldiers with the Reconstruction Task Force (RTF) in Afghanistan were involved in several battles with Taliban extremists in recent months and while enemy casualties are thought to be high, the Australians have fared much better.

In one incident, a TRAR section scout was shot twice in the back by 7.62mm ammunition but was saved by his body armour – and returned heavy fire on his attackers before stopping to check himself for holes.

Also notable about several of these attacks was that Joint Public Affairs Unit cameramen were on hand to film the action and capture our soldiers going about their business calmly and professionally. Full credit goes to Corporal Jamie Osborne in particular who not only captured live battle action on video, but also took the time to shoot quality still photographs as well.



AN AUSSIE SOLDIER COVERS HIS MATES DURING A FIREFIGHT, 26 AUGUST 2007



WATCHING FOR ENEMY ACTIVITY DURING A FIREFIGHT, 26 SEPTEMBER 2007

SHOT IN THE BACK

Private Philip Hodgskiss from 1RAR talks about the day he was shot twice in the back...

"I'm the lead scout for the section. Our section was forward left, which stopped for a short harbour at which time we were called in to receive orders for what we were about to do. I stood up and turned around to walk in to my section commander.

At that time I was shot in the back by a Taliban from the north west and, after that, all hell broke loose with bullets flying everywhere.

I turned back and faced where the bullets had come from to try and see if I could see the enemy. I then hit the ground as fast as possible. I crawled forward and popped back up and started shooting.

Initially, I knew I'd been shot because it felt like someone had run up behind me and punched me very hard in the back.

My initial instinct was just to maintain fire superiority – just to keep shooting, to get their heads down.

After I put my first magazine down, I checked myself to see if there was blood coming out of my front, and then my back, and let the rest of my section know that I'd been shot.

After the intensity of the firing had slowed down, our first-aider for the section came over to check me out and give me a once over. He removed my webbing and lifted my body armour and cut my shirt open to see if I was bleeding.

He said, 'Yeah, you've definitely been shot, but it doesn't look like anything has gone through'.

The body armour saved my life.

I didn't feel any pain to begin with. My training took over instinctive – just shoot back, just make sure that you've got cover – which for me was a pile of dirt about 30cm high.

I was actually worried that I might be sent back to the headquarters for the rest of the mission. I think it was very important that I just kept on going with the job."

PRIVATE PHILIP HODGSKISS, 1RAR, HOLDS THE CERAMIC PLATE FROM HIS BODY ARMOUR THAT SAVED HIS LIFE, AND THE TWO BULLETS THAT NEARLY TOOK IT

**ON ALERT AFTER A FIREFIGHT,
26 AUGUST 2007**

In one of the incidents captured on film, Taliban extremists fired automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) at an Australian patrol from the cover of an orchard. The patrol immediately returned fire, engaging in an intense confrontation over the following four hours.

Platoon Commander Lieutenant Glenn Neilson says the Taliban established strong firing positions and were reinforced with more fighters as the attack progressed.

"We were engaged with some very accurate fire from a range of about 300m and there were a lot of bullets coming our way," he says.

"Making use of all the weapons at our disposal, including the Australian Light Armoured Vehicle (ASLAV) and Bushmaster Infantry Mobility Vehicle (IMV), we held our ground."

Another Australian platoon supported the movement of RTF troops by providing essential covering fire as soldiers moved across hazardous open ground.

Afghan National Army troops, trained by the Australians, also participated in the patrol and performed admirably.

Dutch F16 fighters and Apache helicopters also lent support.

"Together we neutralised the positions that were causing us trouble," Lieutenant Neilson says.

RTF Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel Harry Jarvie says Australian soldiers have been regularly tested by Taliban extremists and in every case performed magnificently.

WHEN YOU OWN THE BEST TOYS, EVERYONE WANTS TO PLAY WITH YOU

Shooting the breeze

WORDS AND PICS
BRIAN HARTIGAN

So it is for 2 Cavalry Regiment in Darwin. Owning the best deployable equipment in the Top End and being one unit in a relatively small available pool, 2 Cav Regt soldiers have seen quite a few operations in recent years.

During a live-fire exercise at Mount Bundy Training Area near Darwin in September, I travelled down range with Troopers Mathew Lindsay and Kim Jennion and Corporal Paul Portelli on board an ASLAV called 'Chewie'. Between them, the three cavalrymen have seen seven operational deployments to Iraq or Afghanistan, with Corporal Portelli looking forward to adding a fourth mission to his personal tally, early next year.

The aim of this particular live-fire exercise was also born out of operational tempo. Its purpose, to fully qualify new ASLAV gunners who had actually commenced their course

in Iraq, but needed one final competency on the range back home to get the all-important last tick of approval on their course reports.

To become a gunner on an ASLAV, soldiers must first qualify as an ASLAV driver and, after amassing about four years' experience in that role, complete a four-week gunners' course.

As a gunner, the soldier must learn to maintain the weapons on the ASLAV, service the turret and, of course, master the sighting systems to deliver accurate fire on both static and moving targets and while the ASLAV itself is also moving.

Because of the tempo of recent operations, 2 Cav was falling behind in its training schedule and had to do something to claw back lost time. So it was decided to commence the gunners' course while still in Iraq. However, with only static targets and a static firing point available on the range in Iraq, use of Mount Bundy's excellent

Armoured Fighting Vehicle Field Firing Target System was necessary – the range enabling armoured vehicles to fire at fixed and moving targets while on the move.

The ASLAV sighting system, as explained to me by Trooper Jennion, is pretty complex in terms of what it actually does and can achieve, yet is very user friendly, he says.

When the gunner takes aim through either the amplified optical 'day sight' or the infra-red 'thermal' sight, several computer algorithms set to work. The computers take inputs from gyros on the vehicle, calculate distance to the target using laser range finding, allow for the speed and direction of both the target and the ASLAV, factor in wind speed and direction as well as ambient temperature and humidity, before producing a firing solution that will keep the barrel locked on to the target, regardless of the myriad variables. Of course, this is done so quickly as to be undetectable to the human eye.

Computers aren't everything, of course, and gunner skills play a big part, especially making necessary minor adjustments in a rapidly changing environment. But, in the end when the trigger is pulled, the gunner and his commander can be almost certain of a first-round hit on target.

Despite all the technology, the human finger on the trigger remains the most

important factor in deciding whether a target lives or dies. And, in the case of the ASLAV, two humans make that decision. While the gunner is the one who ultimately fires the shot, the commander is the final arbiter, authorising his trigger man to do so.

With a target acquired and the firing solution locked in, the commander double checks that the gunner has selected the right target and the most appropriate ammunition type before finally making the decision to engage and ordering, 'FIRE!'

When the trigger is pulled, the gunner holds it until he hears the second round fire, then releases before the third goes down range. Without further instruction from the commander he continues to fire three-round bursts, adjusting aim as necessary, until ordered to stop or to change to a new target.

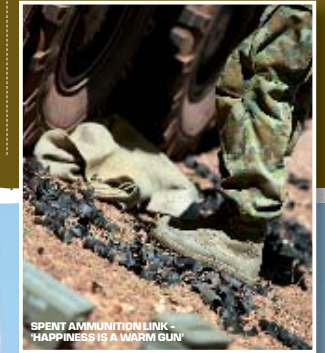
He could release just single shots or, if the circumstances dictate and the commander so orders, hold pressure on the trigger to sustain fire indefinitely, mindful of course of proscribed limitations on barrel heating and wear. In normal operation the 25mm Bushmaster cannon fires 200 rounds per minute or, by selection, 100 rounds per minute.

As simply as flicking a switch, the gunner can also select a different ammunition type – ball, high explosive or armour piercing. Or he can choose to use the co-axial 7.62mm

Mag 58 machinegun instead of the 25mm cannon.

After firing, the loading mechanism of the main gun holds the next round poised and ready and, when the trigger is pulled, sets it in place for the breach block and firing mechanism to slam it forward into the chamber, where it is immediately fired. When firing stops, the feed mechanism is again ready with the next round. Because of this cyclic action, the first round fired at the next trigger pull is always the same as the last round fired, even when a new ammunition type is selected.

During battle runs, the driver, situated towards the front left of the vehicle, is invisible as he steers us through this bush-track battle run, battened down below his hatch, using thick glass periscopes to view the road ahead and to the sides. The gunner is also seated wholly within the vehicle, eyes peering through one of two sights, while the commander is normally seated, head above

SPENT AMMUNITION LINK
'HAPPINESS IS A WARM GUN'

AUSTRALIAN LIGHT ARMoured VEHICLE (ASLAV)

SIZE/WEIGHT

Length: 6.53m
Width: 2.62m
Height: 2.69m
Empty weight: 11,680kg
Combat weight: 13,200kg

MECHANICALS

Engine: Detroit Diesel 6V53T
Power: 275hp
Transmission: Allison MT653 auto (5 forward, 1 reverse)
Suspension: 8-wheel independent
Drive: fulltime 4WD – selective 8WD
Power steering: 4 front wheels

PERFORMANCE

Speed: 100km/h+
Range: 660km
Max trench crossing: 2m
Max grade: 60%
Max side slope: 30%

WEAPONS

Primary: 25mm M242 'Bushmaster' chain gun
Secondary: 7.62mm M240 machinegun
Supplementary: 7.62mm MAG58 machinegun
Ancillary: 2 x 4-tube 76mm grenade launchers

M242 BUSHMASTER CHAIN GUN

Calibre: 25mm NATO
Firearm action: chain gun
Manufacturer: ATK
Barrel length: 2175mm
Effective range: 2000m
Max range: 6800m
Rate of fire:
200 rounds-per-minute max rate
100 rounds-per-minute low rate
single-shot semi-auto
Muzzle velocity: 1100m/s
Weight: 110kg

CREW DEBRIEF - TROOPER KIM JENNION
(LEFT IN GUNNER'S HATCH), TROOPER
MATHEW LINDSAY (FRONT IN DRIVERS'
HOLE) AND CORPORAL PAUL PORTELLI
(RIGHT IN CREW COMMANDER'S POSITION)

deck, watching for alternate, higher-priority targets in the peripheries. At any moment, however, he too can disappear inside to monitor systems and, if necessary, over-ride the gunner's control. He might do this if, for example, he wanted the gunner to take aim at a new, more pressing target where explaining his intent might take longer than to show.

So, at the end of this shoot, I get a chance to ask what do these experienced soldiers think of the vehicle they drive?

Corporal Portelli says that after receiving numerous modifications and upgrades over the years since its introduction, the ASLAV is an exceptional machine.

He says the sighting system currently installed on the Australianised LAV is about fifth generation, while some American counterparts he spoke to in Iraq were still making do with first generation.

Another important upgrade, he explains, is that turret operation is now electric instead of the original hydraulic system. This, according to the man who has used it for several years and in countless situations, is much quieter, a little faster and much easier to maintain. It is also much easier to make small adjustments in position and for the sighting system to keep the weapon on target – and it stays on target, regardless of what the rest of the vehicle is doing beneath it.

Incorporation of spall lining is another modification and, while it is a very welcome addition for crew peace of mind, the added weight means the modern ASLAV is now too heavy to 'swim'.

In summary, Corporal Portelli tells me something I thought was very unusual for an operator of any piece of equipment, military or otherwise – "It's just about perfect as it is. I can't think of anything else you could add to it to make it any better, except maybe an anti-tank missile system – but they trialled that and it didn't really work out."

How did he assess Trooper Jennion's performance on the range? Not too bad – but, it seems, it was almost a formality after the time they spent in simulation recently. With the unavoidable gap between completing all other aspects of the course in Iraq and the final mobile shoot at Mount Bundy, a little revision was appropriate, so, Trooper Jennion spent, "All day every day for the past two weeks in the CPT" [Crew Procedural Trainer – one of three ASLAV simulators, currently installed at Robertson Barracks].

"The CPT is excellent. It's exactly the same on the inside as the real thing and does everything the real thing does, except fire live rounds," Trooper Jennion says.

"With the cost of live ammunition, there's no way you could do that much training

on the range. But, to be able to do that much training is so great in terms of getting familiar with the equipment and procedures. It becomes second nature."

Corporal Portelli says simulated training is even better than a live range in some respects.

"You can actually take on 'real' targets in scenario-based missions in the CPT instead of just flat timber targets out here.

"And, the whole mission is recorded on harddrive, so you can go over it for debriefing straight away.

"It's a fantastic tool."

With three fully networked CPTs at Robertson Barracks and six more on the way, 2 Cav is looking forward to even greater flexibility in complex and effective training opportunities, even when local ranges are closed during total fire bans, the wet season or when other units are using them.

But then, there's always the chance of seeing the real thing overseas.



AN ELEVATED BARREL DENOTES 'WEAPON SAFE' ON THE RANGE



RAPID ENGAGEMENT OF MULTIPLE TARGETS ON THE MOVE

LAND WARFARE

DSTO's annual conference hits Adelaide

WORDS AND PICS BRIAN HARTIGAN

Chief of Army Lieutenant General Peter Leahy officially opened the annual

Land Warfare Conference in Adelaide in October, saying the contribution of science and industry was vital to ensure that the Australian Army could continue with its combat operations in the field and further develop the larger Hardened and Networked Army.

"Events such as the Land Warfare Conference are one way in which the Army, defence scientists, academia and defence industry can communicate to solve the problems that military forces face in the modern world," he said.

"Land Warfare Conference brings together those very people who can provide the solutions to networking the Army in today's digital world.

"The conference provides a forum to share visionary ideas, canvass business opportunities, consider new acquisitions and seek collaborative research arrangements.

"This is a very focused audience. I applaud their efforts to support our soldiers today and into the future."

Lieutenant General Leahy said the annual conference attracted delegates from DSTO, Army, academia and Australia's growing defence industry, as well as international military and industry representatives.

Displays at the accompanying trade exhibition included a huge range of military and related hardware, software and everything in between, from a very diverse range of companies – CONTACT magazine among them.

SOME ITEMS THAT CAUGHT OUR EYE AT LWC...

UTM RANGE



A live-fire simulated-ammunition shooting gallery demonstrating some of the options for 'pain-incentive' training, with real weapons, available from XTek. The perspex-walled shooting range was brilliant in its simple yet vivid showcasing of a product, bringing a semi-dangerous activity safely into the very heart of a busy trade-show exhibition hall.

Carmen O'Keefe, Army HQ, under instruction from XTek weapons' expert Cole Cairn, aims to shoot 'friend' and colleague Richard Barwise, DMO, at the UTM range

BULLARD TACSIGHT S2



A light-weight, versatile, and very tough thermal imaging camera. I say tough because, as was heart-stoppingly demonstrated on the Highgate Group stall, it could be dropped (repeatedly) on a hard floor without ill effect. The camera can be operated single-handed, allowing a weapon to be carried in the free hand. With very nifty accessories, it can be monitored by remote receiver up to 1km away – ideal for covert surveillance.

Richard Hope, Highgate Group, demonstrates the Bullard TacSight S2 remote receiver

M113 AS4 APC



Chassis number five, just off the production line looked brand spanking new and, to all intents and purposes it is. With more than 600mm added to the hull, and two fuel tanks added to that, she certainly looks bigger than the old model – and with the fuel on the outside, not only would I feel a whole lot safer inside, I'd probably be happy with the extra leg room as well. Apparently the engine has an alternator "bigger than Mars" attached to it, so there's power aplenty to run all the modern (and future) battlefield accessories.

Refurbished and stretched M113 AS4 displayed by Tenix

FLASH TARGETS

WORDS AND PICS
BRIAN HARTIGAN

POLICE AND SERVICES AUSTRALASIAN CLAY TARGET CHAMPIONSHIPS



The 2007 Police and Services Australasian Clay Target Championships were held in Canberra this year with a record number of shooters on hand for four full days of competition.

Organised by the AFP, this year's championships saw more than 100 competitors from as far afield as Queensland, Victoria Tasmania and even New Zealand compete for a total prize pool of more than \$35,000 worth of trophies, medals and other prizes.

Competition was intense, with shoot-offs required in several categories after more than 300 targets failed to decide a number of placings over four full days of competition.

Organisers were delighted – and exhausted – as the weekend wound up, after hosting one of the biggest turnouts in the event's 27-year history.

Organising committee member Sergeant Trevor Cootes says clay target shooting is a fast-paced, intense sport that is both physically and mentally challenging, and can be as rewarding and as frustrating as other skill-based sports such as golf.

Officer Cadet Nicholas Wells, a second-year Army cadet at ADFA, agrees.

"Raising a shotgun that weighs between 5 and 7kg, to engage 100 or more targets per day, and standing out front for long periods in the sun, can be very tiring physically," he says.

"But it's the mental challenge that can really take its toll. You might

only be concentrating for a couple of seconds at a time, but the concentration required is intense, especially in a big competition like this and, again, when you're facing 100 or more targets a day, it really adds up."

He also says that the concentration and discipline required in clay-target shooting can assist an Army career.

"When you are out on the range shooting Steyr or Minimi, the ability to concentrate and focus on the task really helps out.

"But more than that – being able to concentrate in intense blocks and to be able to switch it on and off can definitely help in general Army taskings."

Next year's championships will be hosted by NSW Police at Coffs Harbour, from 17 to 19 October 2008. Contact math1ric@police.nsw.gov.au for details.

