

The Chief of Army, Lieutenant General David Morrison, AO

invites you to attend

*A Media Round Table on the Battle Honour Eastern Shah Wali Kot
held by former Commanding Officer of the Special Operations Task Group,
Lieutenant Colonel Paul Burns*

on

Thursday, 9th May 2013 from 9.30am to 10.45am

at the Department of Defence, Building R1, Russell Offices, ACT, 2600

Background:

The Chief of Army, Lieutenant General David Morrison, AO has approved the award of the Battle Honour Eastern Shah Wali Kot to the Special Air Service Regiment and to the 2nd Commando Regiment for their outstanding performance during the Shah Wali Kot Offensive from May to June 2010.

Former Commanding Officer of the Special Operations Task Group (SOTG), Lieutenant Colonel Paul Burns, will brief invited media on the Shah Wali Kot Offensive.

Lieutenant General David Morrison will introduce the briefing.

A vision package as well as an opportunity for interviews with SOTG members involved in the offensive will be available at the conclusion of the briefing.

Please note:

Attendance is limited and RSVP is essential to MediaOps@defence.gov.au by 5:00pm AEST on Wednesday, 8th May 2013.

On the day of the briefing, media attendees are asked to gather in the foyer of the R1 Theatre by 9.15am.

Some members attending the briefing have protected identity status and, as such, Defence Media will film the briefing. No other cameras will be permitted in the room, although audio recording equipment will be allowed.

Ends.

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BATTLE HONOUR EASTERN SHAH WALI KOT
Thursday, 9 May 2013

Media List

No.	Name	Outlet	Attending	Notes
1	s47F [REDACTED]	AAP		
2	s47F [REDACTED]	The Australian		
3	s47F [REDACTED]	Fairfax		
4	s47F [REDACTED]	News Limited		
5	s47F [REDACTED]	West Australian		
6	s47F [REDACTED] or s47F [REDACTED]	Ch 7		
7	s47F [REDACTED] or s47F [REDACTED]	Ch 9		
8	s47F [REDACTED] or s47F [REDACTED]	Ch 10		
9	s47F [REDACTED]	ABC TV		
10	s47F [REDACTED]	SBS		
11	s47F [REDACTED] or s47F [REDACTED]	Sky News		
12	s47F [REDACTED]	Radio ABC		
13	s47F [REDACTED]	Radio 2UE		
14.	s47F [REDACTED]	Radio 2GB		
15	s47F [REDACTED]	Army News		

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Action Items - MediaOps:

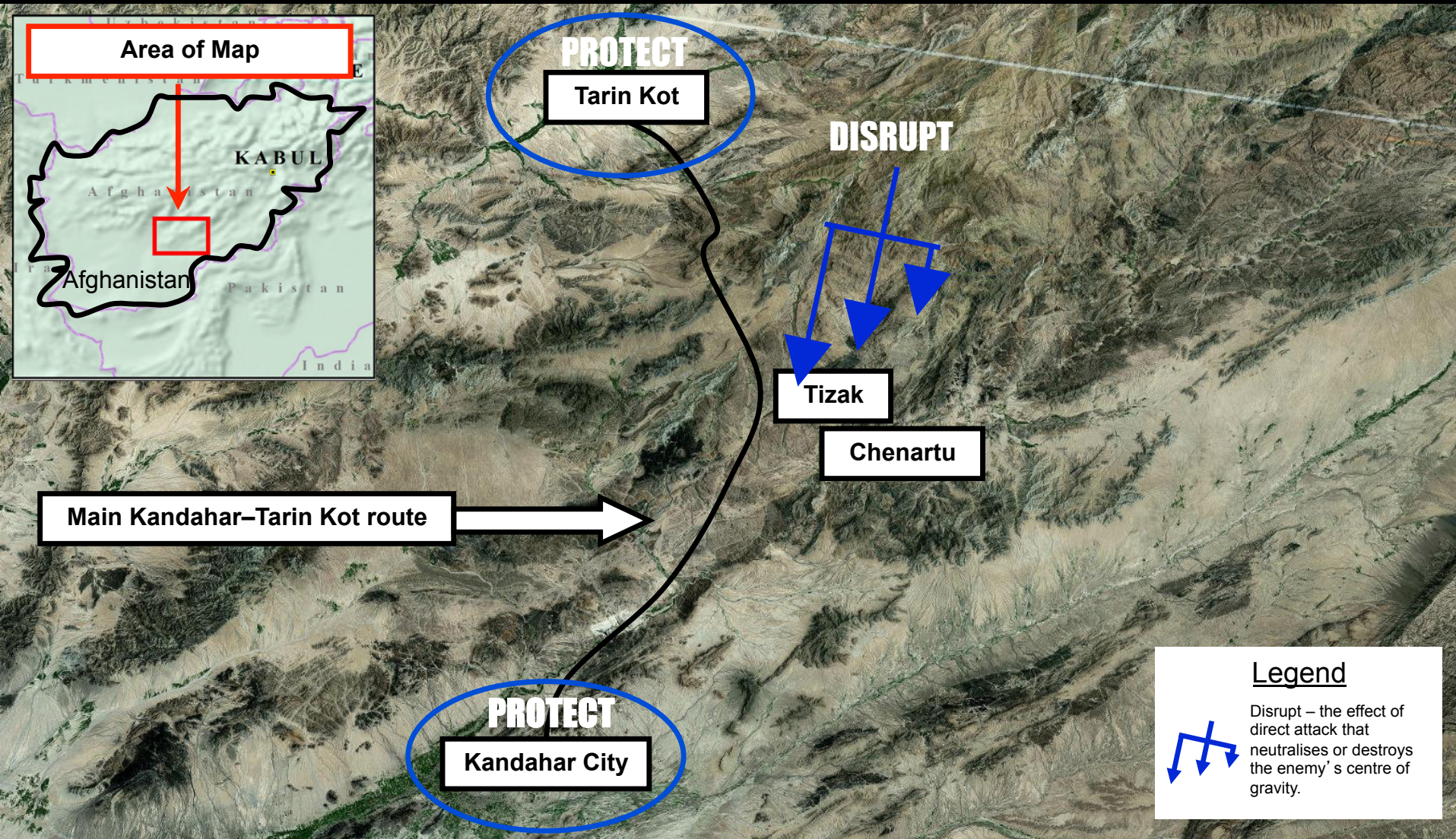
1. Issue the Battle Honour Eastern Shah Wali Kot Media Invitation to the specified media list only – please note the Media Roundtable is by Invitation Only.
2. Follow up the media list to collect outstanding RSVPs / confirm attendance
3. Provide AHQ-Media and PAO SOHQ (CAPT s47F [REDACTED]) with a final list of media attending by 1700 AEST the day before the event.

Notes:

- Where there are two names for the same outlet, please send the invitation to the journalist listed first and then, if they are unavailable, the second.
- If media do not RSVP, they will still be allowed into the Media Roundtable, however, the activity remains by Invitation Only to journalists' listed above. If they are unable to attend, then AHQ-Media will nominate replacements.

Ends.

Shah Wali Kot Offensive – 10–11 June 2010



Overall design of the operation

Shah Wali Kot Offensive – 10–11 June 2010

2 SAS SQUADRON

- Helicopter insertion 11 June 2010 targeting Taliban leadership under a hail of enemy fire
- 11 hours of close combat resulting in complete destruction of an enemy force three times the number of the SAS troop
- Selfless acts of valour and gallantry
- Extracted by helicopter

ADAM KHAN KALAY

ALPHA COMPANY COMMANDO GROUP

- Helicopter insertion 9–10 June 2010
- Defensive battle on 10 June 2010 repelling multiple attacks from a fanatical and well trained enemy force
- Commandos pursue fleeing Taliban north in 50+ degree heat on 13 June 2010
- Commandos clear south of Chenartu on 14 June 2010 and extract by helicopter

CHENARTU

TIZAK

PAY NAWAH

Legend



Clear – A tactical task that requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organised resistance in an assigned area.

MAY

JUNE

Intelligence gathering

SHAPING

Strike missions

EXPLOITATION

7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15

PRIME MINISTER MINISTER FOR DEFENCE

SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNITS AWARDED BATTLE HONOUR

Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Minister for Defence Stephen Smith today announced that the Australian Army's Special Operations Command will receive the first Army Battle Honour since the end of the Vietnam War.

The Battle Honour is for outstanding performance during the Shah Wali Kot Offensive in Afghanistan from May to June 2010.

The Battle Honour, titled Eastern Shah Wali Kot, has been awarded in recognition of the operational actions of the Special Air Service Regiment (SASR) and 2nd Commando Regiment (2 Cdo Regt) from the Australian Special Operations Task Group Rotation XII.

The Prime Minister congratulated the Special Operations Task Group on the Battle Honour, which was awarded under revised guidelines that acknowledge the way the Army fights in the modern era.

"The combined achievements of SASR and 2 Cdo Regt during the Shah Wali Kot Offensive are worthy of the highest praise," the Prime Minister said.

Minister Smith said "We acknowledge the efforts made by all elements of the Special Operations Task Group including significant contributions from Special Operations engineers, signallers, logisticians and headquarters support staff, as well as the United States 101st Airborne Division.

"Their outstanding performance has now been recognised in the same manner as similar performances have been recognised in the past."

The efforts of the SASR and 2 Cdo Regt during the engagement were highly commended by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) command for the contribution it made to overall ISAF efforts to disrupt insurgent activities in the region around Eastern Shah Wali Kot, one of their traditional stronghold areas.

The Chief of Army, Lieutenant General David Morrison, recommended that the SASR and 2 Cdo Regt. receive formal recognition for their outstanding performance during the offensive.

The Chief of Army directed the Battle Honour Committee to examine all Army engagements since the Vietnam War to determine whether actions since then are eligible for formal recognition under the revised guidelines.

The Battle Honour will be formally presented to the Regiments later this year.

**CANBERRA
26 MARCH 2013**

**PRESS OFFICE: (02) 6277 7744
MINISTER SMITH'S OFFICE: (02) 6277 7800**



Special Air Services Regiment

SPECIAL OPERATIONS TASK GROUP - ROTATION XII

The battle honour Eastern Shah Wali Kot is awarded to the Special Air Service Regiment and 2nd Commando Regiment to recognize the extraordinary heroism, exemplary combat performance and the relentless determination of a highly trained and disciplined Taliban enemy of international repute within the extremely inhospitable region of Eastern Shah Wali Kot, Afghanistan, from May to June 2010. During this period a series of daring daylight strike operations succeeded in disrupting and overrunning the enemy and set the conditions for two decisive actions.

During the early hours of 10 June 2010, Alpha Commando Company Group was alerted to establish a position inside the insurgent stronghold of Chikara. Shortly after first light, the company surrounded the compound and employed sophisticated tactics in an attempt to overrun them through the day. Holding their ground under heavy and sustained attack, the commando, determined to regain the initiative, launched several aggressive counter attacks. Supported by the ferocity of the commando response, combined with having lost significant numbers of fighters, the enemy withdrew to the village of Toka in the late afternoon to conduct deliberate planning.

Reconnaissance intelligence had a high level Taliban commander had been drawn to the village of Toka, a troop from the 2nd Special Air Services Squadron deployed on the evening of 11 June 2010. Upon landing in Toka, the team was immediately engaged by small arms fire and rocket-propelled grenades, resulting in two British soldiers wounded and three helicopters sustaining battle damage. Despite being outnumbered and harassed by machine gun fire, the troop pushed forward and being directed by the outstanding fire of three snipers. Drawing on the deepest reserves of collective courage, combined with the skills of individual soldiers and soldiers, the initiative was regained, representing a tactical success. The troop subsequently closed the remaining positions in close-quarter combat throughout the remainder of the day.

The Shah Wali Kot Offensive was superbly supported by elements from all Special Operations Command units, the wider Defence organisation and Toka Force No Mercy from the United States 101st Airborne Division.

The battle field excellence, courage, gallantry and determination displayed by the combat elements of the Special Operations Task Group Rotation XII, under extremely adverse and hazardous conditions has set them apart, and by their achievements they have brought distinguished credit on themselves and the Australian Defence Force.



Transcript

Station: **CANBERRA CONFERENCE UNIT** Date: **09/05/2013**
Program: **PRESS CONFERENCE** Time: **11:00 AM**
Compere: Summary ID: **C00053143923**
Item: **LIEUTENANT PAUL BURNS DESCRIBES THE RECENT SHAH WALI KOT OFFENSIVE IN AFGHANISTAN.**

Audience:	Male 16+	Female 16+	All people
	N/A	N/A	N/A

DAVID MORRISON: Good morning. For those who don't know me, I'm Lieutenant General David Morrison, the Chief of Army. I'd like to welcome the members of the fourth estate here to Defence Headquarters this morning. And thank you for your attendance and showing interest in what we are going to give you.

We're here to recognise the outstanding service of members of Australia's Special Operations Task Group in Afghanistan and it's with great pride in my Army or our Army and its soldiers that I announce that these two units, the Special Air Service Regiment and Two Commando Regiment, have been awarded a battle honour for their operational success in the Shah Wali Kot Offensive of May to June 2010.

Tomorrow, I will have the privilege of presenting the Second Special Air Service Squadron with the battle honour of Eastern Shah Wali Kot in Perth. And subsequently on 19 June I will be with the Governor General to accord the same honour to the Second Commando Regiment in Sydney.



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Now, let me tell you a little bit about the significance of the award itself and then I'm going to provide the briefest of introductions to the battle itself because Lieutenant Colonel Paul Burns, who commanded the operation, is here and it is my intention - his intention to take you through the battle in considerable detail and we will provide you with information that you can take away from that.

A battle honour is the public recognition and commemoration of an outstanding achievement on the battlefield by unit or formation of the Australian Army. This is the first battle honour to be awarded since the end of the Vietnam War. Customarily, the honour links the unit's performance to a specific geographic location, hence the name in this case, the Eastern Shah Wali Kot.

It's important to emphasise that while this award exemplifies and recognises the courage and professionalism of a particular group of soldiers in the most extreme of circumstances, it also pays an enduring tribute to the entire ADF commitment to this long and complex conflict

Australian soldiers, sailors, and members of our Air Force who have served in Afghanistan have upheld and indeed built on the finest of traditions of our Australian Defence Force. More importantly, they have given some of the best years of their young lives in most cases to improving a lot of some of the poorest and most disadvantaged people on earth.



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The reason it's taken a number of years, or number of decades, indeed since the awarding of the last battle honour is because the nature of warfare has changed. Now, I asked Army's Battle Honours Committee to review the process by which we award these honours. The guidelines now accommodate the current war fighting environment.

That committee has begun analysing all of the deployments of Australian units and subunits that have occurred since the end of the Vietnam War. Through this process, Shah Wali Kot Offensive was identified for the earliest consideration and it's entirely appropriate that it is the first Army battle honour since Vietnam.

I want to offer my congratulations to all of the members involved in the Shah Wali Kot Offensive, including its supporting elements, talented engineers, signallers, and headquarter staff. It was a job done superbly well and the outcome was decisive.

Apart from the large number of insurgent casualties inflicted, a significant quantity of insurgent weaponry was captured, a major insurgent supply line from Pakistan to Kandahar was and remains disrupted, and the insurgency in the region was rendered ineffective for the 2010 fighting season. These outcomes allowed ISAF to progress security and stability operations in and around Kandahar City.

The wider security operation was the main effort in Regional Command South during the 2010 fighting



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season and the Australian Special Forces' contribution was highly regarded. The SOTG success in Shah Wali Kot, when added to the success for April 2010 Offensive in Gizab, significantly degraded insurgent threats to the south and northeast of Uruzgan.

This reduction in insurgent threats allowed the Mentoring Task Force to focus effectively on partnering with the Afghan National Army's Fourth Brigade personnel in the Mirabad and Chora Valley regions.

Now, I'd now like to introduce the SOTG members here today who will tell you the story of the Shah Wali Kot Offensive which led to the Special Air Service Regiment and Two Commando Regiment being awarded this battle honour.

Lieutenant Paul Burns, the Commanding Officer of the Special Operations Task Group, at the time of the offensive will now brief you on the conduct of the operation. And after this presentation, Major M, who has still got protected identity, and Sergeant Gary Robertson, both members of the Second Commando Regiment and present in the Shah Wali Kot Offensive will be available to take your questions.

Thank you very much for your attendance.

Paul.

PAUL BURNS:

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. As the Chief of Army's indicated, I was a commander of the Special



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Operations Task Group, rotation 12, otherwise known as the SOTG, but also known as Task Force 66 within the broader coalition framework.

This morning it is my honour to describe to you my operational design for battle and how that operational design practically played in combat on the battlefield, resulting in a significant contribution to the broader campaign plan in Afghanistan and resulting in the first battle honour since Vietnam.

This morning I'm actually going to use quite a few of the original graphics and slides. Some of those graphics have got military symbols in there. I'll endeavour to explain what those military symbols are about and if you require further explanation on those symbols, please ask.

I'll also ask if you've missed part of the scheme of manoeuvre that you also ask so that I clarify that, because I'm very anxious to make sure that we record and capture this accurately as possible.

It's important to note that this morning I'm going to talk to you about the business of combat. We're talking about the ultimate clash of wills in combat. Fog, friction, chaos, violence, chance, uncertainty. I'll try to be as frank as I can with you this morning.

It's also important to note that this was not a simple contact with the enemy that just got big. This was actually a very carefully orchestrated sequence of events designed to draw the Taliban into a decisive - an



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operationally decisive battle for his defeat at the time and at the place of my choosing.

The arrayment of battles is really how we achieved the campaign objectives, which should lead to the obtainment of the strategic level of objective. And in the military, in the profession of arms, we call this the operational art. And me as a commander, I need to balance those objectives at those two levels to achieve the outcome that's required.

So, the first objective at the national strategic level is to make a significant contribution as a nation. That is to reinforce the US alliance to ensure that Afghanistan does not become or in the future become a safe haven for the export of terror and we had a very focused task of enhancing the force protection of the Australian Mentoring Task Force operating around Tarin Kowt and Uruzgan. We've generally restricted our radius of operation to the Uruzgan province.

The next level was about the operational level objectives, practically winning the war on the ground. Doing the stuff required to win the war really at two levels; at General Stanley McChrystal's level, Commander ISAF. His approach was based on the protection of the key population centres in those commerce routes that connected those population centres. So, you can imagine Afghanistan with a ring road essentially going around Afghanistan.

At the next level down, Major General Nick Carter, the Commander of Regional Command South East, his task



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was at the time focused on concluding the battle over in Helmand Valley and they had a pretty significant fight over there at the time. And then he was aligning himself to the extension of the legitimacy of the Afghan Government into Kandahar and Kandahar City predominantly. That became his main effort and we called that Operation Hamkari.

The aim was that the Coalition Special Operations Forces would provide a bugger around Kandahar City, enabling the conventional guys to get on with dealing with the day to day issues with the population.

Linking all that together was General Stanley McChrystal's view or overarching campaign approach as part of a full spectrum counter-insurgency approach. He strongly believed that the Afghan people comprised two groups. That group here in the white had already signed on to the alternate future that was being proposed by the Coalition and by the Afghan Government.

On the other side there's bad Taliban. I'll tell you right now, there is such a thing as good Taliban. There's are the people who have not made the decision yet to come on to the side of the Afghan Government and what the Coalition was proposing. The reason for that is because of the pervasive nature of the Taliban in their villages.

Last night maybe the Taliban come through and took their son. So yeah, I got to be a Taliban today. Maybe last night the intimidation and the intimidation and the



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violence and threats of violence against the people in the village forcing them to lay the IEDs in the village was just a fact of life. It's a bit like Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

So, our job working as a coalition and working with our Afghan partners, the Afghan National Security Forces, is to work together to coopt those undecided to bring them on our side, expose those who refuse to take the on-ramps, and we will kill or capture those individuals.

The aim is to create a self sustaining environment in Afghanistan that is viewed as legitimate by the people in their eyes, not our eyes. In their eyes. And that's important.

The other important piece is this requires a full spectrum approach and highlights complexity of a fight. Special Operation soldiers, indeed the - all the coalition soldiers there, and we're talking about the Special Operations Task Group here, the same place at the same point of time, they would go through having cups of chai with the Afghan locals, understanding their fears, worries, hopes, and dreams all the way through to prosecuting a very violent match against key Taliban insurgents all in the same period of space.

Very, very complex and it requires a great deal of agility of mind.

So, with that understood, my job was to array a battle plan, a schema manoeuvre, that would achieve those national objectives and synchronise as part of the



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campaign plan under a COIN strategy. And this is actually the campaign - the map that we used to apply the operational art.

The first thing you'll notice here is that there is no Uruzgan on this map. We needed to come outside of Uruzgan. Now, I work with General Carter, Commander RC South, in Bosnia in 2009 and he confided in me. He said hey, look, the Australians are doing a great job, Paul. But it really is a secondary piece to the fight at the moment at this stage in the campaign. We need you to come down and operate on my main effort, which is the securing of Kandahar City.

He said you do that and you have my personal assurance that you'll get all the support, the helicopters that you require to achieve that because you'll be working on my main effort.

So linking it together, General Stanley McChrystal's view, secure the key population centres and the commerce routes coming out; General Carter's view, secure Kandahar City. What he wanted us to do as a Coalition Special Operations Force, was to create that buffer. So the UK, the Canadians, and the Americans were all tasked to secure the southeast and western approaches into Kandahar City.

Task Force 66 was tasked with the vital role of protecting the northern approaches to Kandahar City, coming out of Uruzgan Province, operating in the Shah Wali Kot region.



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The key to success on the modern battlefield is task organisation, and that is taking all the bits and pieces that you require as part of the Army, Navy and Air Force to achieve that task. You're trying to create an organisation that is greater than the single sum of its parts.

The headquarters for the Special Operations Task Group comprises men and women from across Special Operations Command. And originally we were located down in Kandahar City, but I moved the headquarters from Kandahar up to Uruzgan so I could fuse and synchronise the efforts of all the components of the task force. And we left a small liaison node down in Kandahar City to engage directly with the commander of Regional Command South.

The two key combat elements of the task force comprise 2nd Squadron of a Special Air Service regiment. A highly skilled, focussed, stealth-orientated force of about 25 operators that rely on speed, stealth and precision to target key leaders.

Complimenting this small force is the larger force of Alpha Company 2nd Commando Regiment, a very powerful strike force of about 100, 120 operators, designed more like a sledgehammer to disrupt the battle-space. And the complimentary effect between these two organisations; the Commando's disrupting the battle-space, disrupting the enemy, and with a smaller SAS force circling above the top, ready to pick up to kill or to capture those key leaders is how we use those two organisations.



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Supporting those two elements was a Special Operations Engineer Regiment teams, who provide the survivability and mobility for those combat elements. They're the brave men who are out the front looking for IEDs, disarming IEDs. Supporting all of that was a Special Operations Logistics Squadron who provide the sustainment support for the guys in the battle, in the fight at the time, and also back in Tarin Kowt.

There are two other very important components of the task group. The PPRC - the Provincial Police Response Company. Now these very special policemen were hand picked by Mathula Kahn (*) in close cooperation with us. They are trained as legitimate policemen and they are absolutely critical in making sure that the Afghan population sees the Afghan authority as legitimate. So whilst they share the combat burden with us, they also were the direct interface with the population. And we would really be standing behind them, enabling them to carry out the rule of civil law.

At the time, all the missions that we conducted, we had to have at least 20 per cent of the force comprising the PPRC. Today the PPRC are planning and leading the majority of these operations, and we are less than 20 per cent [indistinct].

The other piece is a very brave and courageous aviators from Task Force No Mercy from the 101st Airborne. And it's important to note when these guys arrived in theatre in February 2010 they were a conventional aviation battalion. And because of the very close relationship that we've forged with this organisation, I



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believe they became one of the finest Special Operations aviation outfits in the world, undoubtedly.

And largely, I put a lot of credit towards their commander, who is the son of a Special Operations operator from Vietnam that had the right mindset. And working together we achieved great things on the battlefield. And their courage and valour - if it wasn't for their courage and valour we probably wouldn't have achieved the outcomes that we sought.

Righto, my job as a commander is to put all of this together, to make a roadmap for the guys to follow, to have a plan. To be thinking three or four steps ahead of the guys in the fight. The Shah Wali Kot District is bounded by the two major population centres of Kandahar and Tarin Kowt, and it's split down the centre, north-south, by the main supply route called Route Bear. And here's a photo of Route Bear, with our PPRC partners at the front leading a Task Force 66 patrol. And the road at the time was a combination of sealed and dirt road. Because of the relationship we had with the PPRC and Mathula Kahn, we could make that trip very, very quickly and without interference.

I asked the intelligence staff to tell me what they believed was going on from the enemy point of view, and they deduced that the majority of the enemy was coming in through this very complex terrain here out to the east, moving along the myriad of mountain trails, small villages, donkey trails, supply routes - very difficult for us to detect their movement. Moving into the Shah Wali Kot area and pushing reinforcements



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across to the main fight in Helmand at the time, pushing IED componentry up into Tarin Kowt that we know killed some of our Australian soldiers before the Shah Wali Kot Offensive. And importantly moving out onto Route Bear or taking a more indiscript approach into the northern approaches of Kandahar City, which was General Carter's main concern.

The main task being Kandahar City and the protection of the northern approached of Kandahar City. But we've also thought, well there may be a secondary effort but we also have that national task of making sure that we protect the Australian Mentoring Task Force up there. So we wanted to do both. It wasn't one or the other.

This symbol here represents a disrupt. A disrupt is a - at a time and a place where you render the enemy ineffective but he is able to regenerate after a period of time because you will have moved away from that particular engagement. So logically we should go and disrupt, go and disrupt those avenues of approach. I'll tell you, it's very hard firstly to find them moving on those mountain trails, and then mobilising quickly enough to actually go and interdict and disrupt them.

So the analysis continued and an area called Chenatu kept coming up in our assessment. And in actual fact the OC of the Commandos had identified this as a key area of concern before we even left Australia. We believed that if we focussed all our effort on that pressure point then we would achieve all of those objectives at the same time. But what we didn't want



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to do was simply just turn up and have a fight and have to go back there another month later and have another fight. We wanted to create an enduring effect. So we broke the Shah Wali Kot Offensive into three phases.

Firstly, a preliminary phase or what we term the shaping phase - that's setting the conditions for the eventual demise of the Taliban enemy. And that shaping phase actually took the largest amount of time - it's indicated down there on the timeline.

The next phase was the decisive phase or the offence. That's where we had planned, when the conditions were right, the enemy was going to be defeated at the time and place of our choosing, which then led to the exploitation, the pursuit. We would run them out of town so that they would never come back. But more importantly we would make sure that we would get the Afghan governance into that area, so their local people could see that their government was a legitimate authority and that they were being looked after by the government, not the Taliban; so that they could make that decision to come on to the... our side.

Chenatu itself - first thing we needed to do was work out what was going on down in Chenatu. The Commando's were tasked with this job. It was the first part of the shaping piece here, and they spent hours and hours and hours - tea was pouring out of their eyes - talking to the locals, understanding what the situation was like in their area, understanding their hopes and fears. But we were also able to develop a very positive information network, which we were able to use later



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on during the Offensive, and after the Offensive, so that they could tell us what was going on and give us the atmospheric in around that region.

We also pushed the Commando's out to the west here, where they encountered minefields, IED fields just littered everywhere. And we lost several Bushmasters during the conduct of those missions. Chenatu itself, down in the valley floor there, is very well vegetated. In actual fact when you're up on the high ragged mountains looking down it's actually very difficult to penetrate the canopy. It's a bit like jungle to see what's going in... going on underneath the vegetation. And a lot of the enemy were able to manoeuvre through there undetected because of the thickness of the terrain... of the vegetation in that area.

The local population, they live in there mud-walled compounds and houses as they have done for centuries. The temperature gets to well below zero during winter, and during summer, baking hot, 55 degrees to 60 degrees, which was the temperature during the time of the Shah Wali Kot Offensive.

Historically coalition forces had tried to penetrate into Chenatu previously. In two years prior to the Shah Wali Kot Offensive a coalition aircraft, which was conducting a raid into the area and was destroyed in place. Several ground approaches had been applied or attempted. And every time they tried to penetrate this fortress, you can imagine going down the mouth of a valley trying to get into Chenatu. You're driving further and further in and it's closing in on you to the point where



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one of your vehicles hits an IED and explodes. And then you've got a rain of fire from the high ground a [indistinct] site of machine guns and rocket propelled grenades just raining down upon you. Every time these guys tried to get in there, they were checked, and they had to do a fighting withdraw; quite often with casualties. It was an amazing fortress, well sided.

The second part of the shaping phase involves some very bold day light raids, helicopter raids. So the two Commando platoons and the SAS troop going out hitting these isolated villages. In some of the villages, they were so isolated they actually thought that we were the Russians. They had not seen coalition forces at all. And the guys were moving through their compounds and they saw photo... you know, children's diagrams and pictures of Russian helicopters. That's how isolated some of these areas were.

But the majority of the time the guys would land in the helicopters. They would disembark and go straight into the fight - it's a lower level fight as we try to resist them. And every time they try to tackle a Task Force 66 element, they were basically defeated, died, neutralised to the point where the last lot of raids they didn't want to fight us because they knew what the outcome was going to be. But the whole aim of these raids, these daring, day light raids was to create confusion and friction and create some fractures in the network. To put some stress upon them to start to really shape them.



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So we got to the point where the last raid occurred on about the 6 June, and our analysis started to indicate that there were four key Taliban leaders operating in the Shah Wali Kot District. These key leaders were getting tasked and getting quite a bit of pressure from some key outer province commanders, who were saying, what are you doing, commander? Shoot down some of these helicopters and start getting some kills against these Australians. We need some tactical victories. What are you doing?

And so these commanders here were putting pressure on their lower-level fighters and the lower level fighters weren't fighting because they knew what was going to happen, which made these commanders look incompetent, making the outer province commanders go, well, we need to arrest this situation and we need to put some of our own commanders to replace these incompetent commanders.

So the last raid occurred of the sixth, and we just let the vacuum fill; we did nothing, we just watched and waited. Creating the conditions for that moment for us to transition into phase two, the decisive phase.

The plan was for a complementary task force operation into Chenartu by placing about 100 commandos right in the middle of the lion's den. And I was pretty confident these boys were able to stand up and fight for themselves, that's what they do.

The whole aim was to disrupt and turn that defensive position Chenartu inside out, and to attract a fight. The



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Taliban would be attracted to try and dislodge the commandoes. And watching it circling, waiting for those key commanders to come out was two SAS squadron ready to target those key leaders.

So in the period of darkness - 9 10 June, Alpha Company deployed using two CH47s in two turns onto the objective. Due to their size they were able to saturate the village of Chenartu and move through already pre-planned and identified target areas of interest to clear the entire area and to get the immediate advantage. Before sunup they moved into hastily prepared defensive positions in Chenartu.

And the disposition is November Platoon to the north, Oscar Platoon to the south, a sniper-heavy position that was able to provide observation and direct fire support to all elements of the task force in a very exposed knoll - actually very, it was key terrain for them. And the Taliban also knew that that was key terrain.

And the headquarters component; co... located with some mortars, located by themselves in the vicinity of Oscar Platoon.

So as the sun came up there was immediate movement up on the high-ground. The Taliban were moving around on the high-ground trying to work out what had just lodged in their safe haven in that period of darkness, and they were trying to work out what size of the force and their dispositions.



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The first engagement occurred when enemies started to probe up towards the exposed sniper position. It was at this point were Gary, and his off-sider - his number two, were able to get into a position, positively identify that threat moving towards them, engage using precision fire killing three Taliban.

Enemy were then seen moving around to the high-ground, but predominantly down to the south. Moving in a position and posturing in around Oscar Platoon. A raising amount of small arms fire and rocket propelled grenades started to progress, probing in close to the commando positions. Putting pressure on them, trying to work out what actually was there.

It was at this point the commandoes employed observed mortar fire, breaking a strong probing action by the enemy, killing a further two insurgents.

A larger force was then observed moving around in the south-south-east, and a helicopter air weapons team using hellfire missiles and a 30 millimetre chain gun was employed, killing a further seven insurgents, breaking the back of that initial probing action.

It was at this point that we started to - the commandoes started to observe women and children starting to move out of the village, which is an indication for us that there's a fight on its way. And they were moving out to the north.

At 10o'clock precisely every single position was exposed to a hail of gunfire; heavy machinegun fire,



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rocket propelled grenades, in a very well coordinated manner. There was a lot of shouting, there was a lot of use of handheld radios; they were very very well coordinated attacks. And it showed a degree of tactical prowess on behalf of the enemy. And the commandoes knew that they were in a pretty pitch-battle fight at that time.

The snipers again were engaged, Gary Robertson and his number two engaged and killed a further two insurgents. Company headquarters; a machinegun opened up so close to the OC commanding the commandoes, it just narrowly missed him as the opening burst erupted straight into his headquarters. It was at that point all the guys including the guys on the mortar line, provide sustained fire back into that machinegun fire neutralising that position.

But it was Oscar Platoon that was under the most amount of pressure. Instead of just sitting in their defensive position, the guys started to actively and aggressively manoeuvre forward through compounds, using the terrain to their best advantage and actually took the fight directly into the attacking enemy, pushing them back. Pushing them back all the way back into their forward operating - their initial assault positions.

As the guys moved through there was numerous blood trails and enemy equipment, as they were able to exploit all the way through. This first assault by the enemy was soundly defeated.



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During the day nothing really happened. There was a lot of movement up around the high-ground. The commandoes were able to engage with the population, and confirmed our deductions that indeed Chenartu was a jump-off point for the Taliban into the broader Kandahar region, in particular Kandahar City.

They were very happy to see the coalition forces there because they viewed the Taliban as coming through and basically taking all their food, using their own homes and their own facilities, and the area was in a state of drought. So they're basically sponging off the local population.

Then in the afternoon the same probing action occurred on the sniper position. Gary again observed two enemy moving up towards his position; using precision fire, kills two Taliban.

30 minutes later the entire position is engulfed in a hail of fire again, but more coordinated and more precise this time because they've spent the day doing their reconnaissance and [indistinct] every single position. Every single commando position was pinned down pretty much by a heavy machinegun or rocket propelled grenades.

At a high rate of return fire every commando fought and tried to suppress the enemy. It was at this point the OC needed to call in extra support and they called in an A10 Thunderbolt aircraft to break the back of the majority of the enemy positions up on the high-ground



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overshadowing the commando position. We're probably talking a force of parody; one to one.

Probably surprised by the ferocity of that commando response, and the significant air power that we were able to draw upon, the enemy broke contact and withdrew again to lick their wounds.

Throughout the entire day back at the headquarters, two SAS squadron are monitoring the situation with absolute detail; looking for those key commanders to come out. No indications.

We were also, whilst I was very confident in the commandoes' ability to sustain the fight, they were very isolated and we were conducting planning just in case we needed to get the boys out in a hurry, which would have been a pretty tough deal to do.

Through the night nothing really occurred, but we knew generally that the enemy would assault the commando positions in the morning, and we were expecting that. And we're all tuned, ready, poised, waiting for that major assault, but it never happened.

But what we did notice; about five kilometres away from the commandoes over in the west a small village of Tizak some concentration and a lot of movement, and then we got some indications that there were a couple of key Taliban leaders in the area. It was at that point that I launched E Troop from the two SAS squadron to go and do a kill-capture mission on those commanders. Anticipating that it would only take a



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couple of hours for a standard package to do that using four Blackhawk Helicopters and two AH64s.

[footage of assault]

At 0919 hours E Troop landed in Tizak, and that's what they received when they landed. That footage is from the overwatch position which is located up here. These symbols indicate helicopter landing positions, and these are the enemy heavy machinegun positions.

So they're landing up here with the troop commander, a young Captain, in an overwatch position. And that's the sort of hail of fire that they got, received from across the valley floor, and started to come out across the high-ground across to the east.

What you saw in that footage was a dust plume, and that's the other two Blackhawk helicopters landing down in the valley floor there. As soon as the guys got out of the aircraft one of the PPRC guys is shot straight through the stomach, and becomes a pri 1 casualty. If we don't get him out within about an hour, he's going to die. Which isn't a good start to the mission.

The fourth aircraft is kept circling and we have a reserve assault team located in there for any unforeseen circumstances that need to be responded to. The weight of fire is quite significant coming from the high-ground in well-prepared positions.



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The reality is the ground call sign was absolutely fixed. The amount of fire that was coming in - all they could do was crawl into a position so that they didn't die. The amount of times a guys said I was digging a hole with my eyelids was pretty much - articulates the environment that they were in. They were unable to really return fire because of the weight of fire coming down. They couldn't pop their head up otherwise they'd get it shot off.

The weight of fire was that heavy that out of the four Blackhawkes, three of them got so much battle damage through bullet holes that they couldn't fly for the remainder of the day. And one of the AH64s had to make an emergency landing in a nearby forward operating base. Just shows how much lead was flying around in the environment at that time.

The troop commander's up on the hill, he's got a machinegun and several sniper systems, and he's immediately directing the guys to start suppress the machinegun positions down on the valley floor and up on the high-ground here. The AH64s were immediately in a package to try and suppress those machinegun positions, and you can imagine the Apaches, one after another, just going through trying to neutralise those positions. And we've got more Apaches on its way from Kandahar and from Tarin Kowt to support - to stack the aircraft up to try and suppress those positions.

This aircraft crew up here they were tasked to assist in the suppression of the high-ground, and you can imagine an aircraft on its side, coming in so the



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operators can expose their small arms, firing into those machinegun pits. The team commander's sitting in the middle monitoring their ammunition to the point where they're about to run out of ammunition. He would yell out 'flip!' the aircraft would do 180 degree exposing the other two guys on the other side so that they could neutralise the position, allowing the other guys on the offside to reload their ammunition. The aircraft was doing that to all of these positions along here to try and suppress the amount of fire that was coming down from the call-signs down in the valley floor.

The guys were able to crawl forward to what we call a support by fire position, so they were able to get to a position where they can return some fire, but it's not that effective because of the weight of fire returning back upon them.

Also down in the valley floor there the vegetation's that thick it made command and control and observation very very difficult. The gun runs of the AH64s continue.

It was at this point that that reserve assault team is actually landing in the vicinity of some of these gun positions. The boys are getting out, they're assaulting through those positions, and they're calling the aircraft back in and jumping back in the aircraft. The amount of RPGs that were thrown at that aircraft is unbelievable, and it's unbelievable that not one of those RPGs hit the aircraft. But the pilot had a bullet hole right between



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his legs in his seat when they landed back in Tarin Kowt, so fortune was on our side undoubtedly.

It was at this point that the troop commander, young captain, he's assessing the situation, and back in the headquarters we're monitoring what's going on. He's got a couple of decisions - one, that the situation has changed on the ground and he's probably within his rights to abort and pull out. He could call in close air support. The problem is there's a whole lot of civilians down in there, and we will not risk the lives of civilians. The third option: he's got a mission. He's come here to achieve the kill or capture of those senior leaders, and he decides to drive on.

It's about this time where one of the SAS guys also gets shot through the arm. It's a clean shot straight through the arm, and he tasks the reserve assault team to now find and set up an aeromedical evacuation to get our PPRC member to a medical facility immediately. They were able to get the aircraft in. It took a couple of goes to get the aircraft in. They got the aircraft in and backloaded the two casualties. The aircraft is loaded, they've got the casualties on, and low and slow that aircraft takes off straight up the valley floor. Low and slow, it becomes this magnet for the enemy machine guns. You know, not one round hit that aircraft. Not one round. Again, fortune was on our side that day. Unbelievable. The soldiers, the SAS guys, just looked in amazement. You know, what is that guy doing? They got away with it.

QUESTION:

[Inaudible question]



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PAUL BURNS:

No one knows.

QUESTION:

[Inaudible question]

PAUL BURNS:

I haven't spoken to the pilot. I don't know.

QUESTION:

[Inaudible question]

PAUL BURNS:

Mate...

QUESTION:

[Inaudible question]

PAUL BURNS:

He could've, but it's about situational awareness. Now, I said at the beginning that the battlefield is full of fog, friction, uncertainty, chance and, you know, when you're a pilot coming in your priority is to evacuate that casualty. And so, situational awareness - he probably didn't know. You can't see the bullets when you're flying in, because of the dust and the noise and all those bits and pieces. It's just what happens, and it's a good example of what happens on the battlefield. It is not a clinical environment. There's uncertainty and chance everywhere.

So we're now at the point where that captain has said righto fellas, we need to break into this position, we're here to achieve our mission. So the guys are now all consolidated down on the valley floor, and they move to a position which is about 100 metres from the main defensive position. There's three machine guns located here, a supporting machine gun here and several machine guns in depth. In our doctrine, one machine



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gun equates to a platoon-level attack. One machine gun, 32 blokes, one to three ratio to make sure you're going to get success. This should've been a company plus or two company-level assault. We've got 20 SAS operators on the ground.

The guys move into a position where they're starting to throw grenades, but they're largely ineffectual. Two teams move around on the left flank into - to try and suppress this supporting machine gun here. Another team, Echo1 ,moves around to the right and attempts to suppress or find a point where they can do a flanking manoeuvre in on these machine gun bits. They try to throw several grenades, but largely ineffectual.

It's at this point where Ben Roberts-Smith observes an area off to the right, which is a run-down structure. He moves around there with his number two. As he's moving around there, he sees an enemy grenadier about to throw a grenade at his team. He engages and kills that individual point blank. He looks over his left shoulder and he sees the rest of his team. He sees his team commander, his team commander's got a grenade, and Ben Roberts-Smith dashes 40 metres across open ground straight into the teeth of that machine gun nest. The team commander uses that opportunity to throw a grenade, which helps Ben to do a little bit of the break-in, but then Ben moves through with his number two and clears out that position - three machine guns.

We've now got the break-in. We've now turned a situation that wasn't that advantageous to us into a



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point where we're able to now regain the initiative - absolute courage and valour to achieve that. It was from that point until about 1410 hours that the guys systematically broke down that position by pieces and destroyed every single enemy machine gun position, every enemy in that village, in amongst all the population. Not one civilian casualty, except for one old gentleman who got a bullet through his hand as the result of an insurgent weapon - absolutely remarkable. The guys, throughout the day, are using so much ammunition they have to redistribute ammunition frequently. They're running out of water, so they're busting into compounds and using the wells in those compounds to refurbish their water, to keep going, remembering the temperatures in the area.

The guys then conducted a detailed fight-back and identified every single individual within the village that was killed, and confirmed that they were all indeed Taliban and combatants. A shura was conducted with the locals, and they all agreed that the only people that were killed that day were the Taliban - there were no civilian casualties. It was at that point where we needed to make a decision whether or not to extract E Troop. The helicopter crews had been flying non-stop and they were getting to the end of their endurance, so we made the call to extract them.

At three o'clock in the morning on the 12th they arrive back into Tarin Kowt, back into their ready room. The guys walk straight in, you know, the first thing that they said, hey boss, what do you want us to do now? Hey boss, what do you want to do? Get ready, fellas,



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commandos are still in the fight, so re-bomb and get ready to go. And one of the guys stood there in front of me, took out all his magazines, placed them on the table and said, hey boss, look at this, my last round. My last round.

So the guys were then put on standby to support the commandoes in the remainder of their efforts. That's an indication of the equipment that was captured and the machineguns.

The commandoes are still in the fight, we've now got a situation where the enemy is in rapid withdrawal, they are in a rout, they are trying to get out of the area.

They task the OC to push his guys after the commandoes in a pursuit, so we're now into phase three, the exploitation. We put a blocking position up here which was like an anvil, and I wanted the commandoes to be the hammer that smashed them against that anvil. Unfortunately they were running that fast, it was hard for the commandoes in 55 degree heat, travelling across 18 kilometres of rugged terrain, to catch these guys who were light scales and just running for their lives.

At the end of the day commandoes are running out of water, and I said mate you need to turn around and you need to now exploit down to the back. They moved back down through the village of Chenartu, did a night manoeuvre - actually quite complex terrain, onto an SAS anvil with the commandoes acting as the hammer again.



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As they swept through and cleared the entire area there was not one enemy to be seen. And it was quite clear that the entire position had been well established - gun positions which were chiselled out of granite.

So, in summary, we started with the operational plan and the operational design based on this enemy scheme of manoeuvre. And we had confirmed that the enemy were indeed manoeuvring through this very complex terrain here into Chenartu as a key distribution jump-off node, pushing IRDs up through [indistinct] Khalay into Tarin Kowt, pushing elements across to the fight in Helmand, but a massive amount of effort was coming down into Kandahar City.

But remember we wanted to get an enduring effect out of this, and it was all based on a contest of will of the local population. So the first thing that we did was have a shura with district chief - the legitimate district chief of Shah Wali Kot, and explain to him what we'd done, and exposed him to the opportunity that was there. The locals wanted to get their figs to market, they need a road to get their figs down to Kandahar.

And so we worked closely with him to try and facilitate his access into the area, to try and extend the governance into the Shah Wali Kot, Chenartu region.

The in states, linking it right back to those original objectives, we had made a significant contribution to Operation Hamkari, and Major General Carter personally flew out to thank us for our contribution to his scheme of manoeuvre down in regional command



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south. We had defeated - not four senior leaders, but a far more significant number of senior leaders, right across Afghanistan. And General McChrystal also indicated that the impact that we had had down in Shah Wali Kot was Afghan-wide because of the level of commanders that we were able to neutralise as a result of those actions.

A major supply line had been removed, a safe-haven had been removed, and we had rendered that area inoperable for the Taliban for that fighting season and beyond.

At the strategic level we had made a significant national contribution. We had protected the population, which is absolutely critical, and we'd enhanced the force protection of the Australian soldiers operating in around Tarin Kowt.

You know all that luck that we had on the battle field, and during the pursuit phase we did several mop-up operations. The last raid as part of this operation to mop-up. Unfortunately luck did not shine on us. And we, in a early morning raid, one of the task force no mercy helicopters crashed on its way into an insertion into another village, killing three brave commandoes and seriously injuring several others. And one American air crew was also killed. The same pilot that showed absolute valour and courage during Tizak - that's the battle space that we operate in.

Quite a few awards were issued as a result of the actions in Chenartu and the Shah Wali Kot offensive,



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including the Victoria Cross, Star of Gallantry, and a swag of distinguished service and gallantry awards.

So I hope that's given you a good insight into what the Special Operations Task Group is doing. Just giving you a good inside into the, I believe, quite sophisticated approach that we take to conducting our operations in Afghanistan resulting in this significant battle, and therefore resulting in the first battle honour since Vietnam.

I'm sure I speak on behalf of all the members of the Special Operations Task Group, the Special Air Service Regiment and 2 Commando Regiment; they were all very humbled to receive this award, but they know that there's still a job to do.

* * END * *

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Station: **CANBERRA CONFERENCE UNIT** Date: **09/05/2013**
Program: **PRESS CONFERENCE** Time: **12:00 PM**
Compere: **0** Summary ID: **C00053144971**
Item: **AUDIO SUPPLIED BY CLIENT**

Audience:	Male 16+	Female 16+	All people
	N/A	N/A	N/A

QUESTION: ...clearly was a remarkable military agenda. Can you explain to us what the situation in this particular area is now and what you think are the prospects of this area being maintained by the Afghan Government after [indistinct]?

PAUL BURNS: I can really only answer the first part. I'm aware that the SOTG subsequent rotations have gone back into Chenatu and they've found the area quite benign largely. But the current situation as it is today, I'm unable to talk to that.

QUESTION: To what do you attribute that? The fact that you have managed to maintain that relative stability and peace in that area for so long. What...?

PAUL BURNS: I'm a believer in the overarching COIN strategy. It's all - you know, COIN, we make it very complex but in reality it's about the people wanting an alternative future, you know, which in my mind is free from Taliban intimidation. It's not us that's going to win the fight, it's going to be them. We stand behind them and they have to reject them.



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So, you can imagine the Taliban coming in to Chenatu, you know, you got to look after us. No, no. Last time the Coalition were here they defeated you soundly and we don't like what you're offering. We don't need your intimidation. We like what the Coalition and what the Afghan Government is producing.

And so there's going to be a degree of risk to the locals, but at the end of the day, they are the ones who need to reject the Taliban. They're so pervasive but it's people power, you know? We don't want your type of government - Taliban government - here in Chenatu.

And saw that up in Gizab. You know, it was the Gizab - the population up in Gizab that did the uprising. We flew in to support them and we now have 30,000 people living, you know, free from Taliban intimidation. And our role was then to provide that buffer to remove those Taliban leaders.

So, this is COIN 101.

QUESTION: You gave them the opportunity to make that choice?

PAUL BURNS: Yes. Yep. But at the end of the day, primacy of civil law, we stand behind them to reject the Taliban.

QUESTION: Just on - you mentioned a number of figures of Taliban casualties. One, did you get their leaders killed or captured them? Two, is there a global figure for insurgent casualties from this?



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PAUL BURNS: I don't have any figures for casualties.

QUESTION: How about the leaders? The Taliban leaders?

PAUL BURNS: You know, we're still in the fight, so, you know, there's things that we need to protect. And it's important. I can say we are - we have - we are having a significant degradation effect on the Taliban leaders. And, you know, in 2002 when I was there, we were fighting some very senior Taliban leaders. We're now fighting some very junior Taliban leaders.

QUESTION: The expectation is that you're going to be there for years to come in an SOTG role, so what do you anticipate that being? Is that continuing to take over the Taliban leaders and that's the role for Australia?

PAUL BURNS: It is - our role as per that Shah Wali Kot example there is to provide a buffer. To allow the fledgling government of Afghanistan and the people to get on their feet. And so we provide that buffer to protect them, so they can get on with their lives and start to build those Afghan institutions that are critical for a civil society.

And so that's what I see the SOTG doing in the future, is just keeping the head - keeping a foot on the head of the Hydra so that the Afghan people can create that self-sustaining environment in Afghanistan.

QUESTION: Can I ask the Major, is there a point during the operation where you thought, you know, bugger this for



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a joke, we've got to get out of here? And what was it like? What actually happened when the bad guys took off and it ended? What actually did you observe at that point?

MAJOR M:

No, there was no stage where we thought it got out of hand. I guess the part that's missed is there's months of planning and analysis that goes into the conduct of an operation this scale. So, we were aware what we were getting into.

And once the fighting died down, especially when the Tizak action occurred, while that was going on, we were, you know, gaining a better understanding of the population, speaking with them. And some of the tangible benefits we got was we actually got a better understanding of the tribal, you know, break up of the area, we understand what the issues were in the region, and that enables us to then feed that to the Afghan Government.

And we had, you know, a significant number of Afghan elements with us so they could actually speak to the people and understand where - how the government could help.

QUESTION:

[Indistinct] what was the signal for that? Did the local police guy say they're leaving? Let's get after them or how did that come about?

MAJOR M:

Sorry, I'm not quite understanding.



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QUESTION: When they broke off the fight...

MAJOR M: Yeah.

QUESTION: Was it like a point where they - you said the white flag's gone up, there out of here, let's get after them. Or how did they...?

MAJOR M: No, not really, because the, you know, it's like - combat ebbs and flows. You know, so through that first day when we got there it ebbed and flowed through the day. You know, there were constant small scam issues, there was probing action, then it built up at several different times.

So what we were aware of is that they pulled out. There is an - there were a couple of opportunities where we, you know, potentially could have called in air support in areas to treat them more heavily as they were withdrawing, however, the choice was made, and I think rightly so, that the threat to the civilian population and infrastructure was too great to do that.

So we were aware with our moving - we were aware that they were - that their actions had died down. That - really that's what tells us that their activity is dying off. But...

PAUL BURNS: That movement north, the counts that were coming back from the guys in the field, you know, I remember it very clearly over the radios that, you know, these guys - there's only women and children left and the



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indications from the locals is that all the men are running. They are - they were running.

QUESTION:

Question for the Major. We've seen some the vision today, the battle on the ground, but can you describe the feeling of being in the village there when it's at more than 50 degrees. What - how did it feel to be there? What was the experience like?

MAJOR M:

It's hard to say, you know, it's one day of an entire rotation, so - but it - you know, the conditions were demanding. You know, the first day there was a lot of battle going on, but the subsequent movements, you know, through the - for the four days following, you know, the conditions are - it's hot, you're going through a lot of water, and the terrain is rugged and in that type of area you need to have - you need to own the high ground.

So if you're moving up through the valley, then you're going to have elements that are going to be moving through the mountains on either side, and that's tough going. You know, in the - it's I think indicative of the capability of the guys that, you know, they can cope with those sort of conditions.

QUESTION:

Gary, we heard there about [indistinct] how extraordinarily difficult this operation was for our guys. The large [indistinct] flat on your stomachs, digging holes with your eyelids. Can you give some of your personal recollection about what that was like. Do you guys get scared? Was it tense? What - just how tense was it? [Indistinct] like that?



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GARY ROBERTSON: There were times there where we were all tense. It was very hot and arduous, the condition we were all trying to fight in, but it's more just part and parcel with my job, I think. I was pretty much getting used to it. Yeah.

QUESTION: Did you feel as though when you were face down in those situations that really your life was seriously under threat?

GARY ROBERTSON: I was always under threat. There's always that chance of something - the worse could happen - unforeseen happening. But my training just got me through much of the job.

QUESTION: Had you ever been in a situation like that in previous time?

GARY ROBERTSON: Not that intense, no. By no means.

QUESTION: Bullets flying everywhere.

GARY ROBERTSON: Definitely.

QUESTION: How close were they coming to you?

GARY ROBERTSON: Close enough. Yeah. Within a couple of feet, if that. Very close.

QUESTION: What's your most vivid memory? Like, is it the heat, the smell, the sound?



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GARY ROBERTSON: Might say the heat. Yeah. Definitely the heat. Just the conditions we were trying to work in and fight in. Yeah. It's very dry and dusty.

QUESTION: You were in the sniper position in the Chenatu area. Did you know that you'd be there when went - when you were inserted in there, did you know you'd be there for that long? You obviously had difficulty getting more water.

GARY ROBERTSON: Yeah.

QUESTION: Did you have a sensory thought, this is stretching a little longer than I thought?

GARY ROBERTSON: I always knew I was going to be there a while until the job was done. There's no real time limit on how long I was going to be there for. There's always scope for resupply where needed, but other than that I knew I was going to be there a long time.

QUESTION: They were after your position because you had a key position...

GARY ROBERTSON: Definitely.

QUESTION: [Indistinct] What was your - what were you doing all day? Were you looking at people sneaking up at your trying to ping them off as they were coming or what was the sort of hour by hour role?



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GARY ROBERTSON: It was pretty much - in a nutshell, but I was essentially the eyes and ears for the OC trying to give as much information as I can so he could paint his own picture of what was going on on the ground.

QUESTION: Are you - you were able to with your unit - I don't know what the euphemism is - but basically kill Taliban people coming up on you.

GARY ROBERTSON: Yep.

QUESTION: How close would they get?

GARY ROBERTSON: Under 50 metres, the closest point at a K and a half away. Very close in some stages, yeah.

QUESTION: So, because you're in the high point, they were sneaking up the hill trying to get rid of you.

GARY ROBERTSON: Yeah.

QUESTION: Getting rid of [indistinct]...

GARY ROBERTSON: They couldn't physically see us [indistinct] until they were pretty much right on top of us. Knew we were there but they couldn't quite establish where we were and how many were there.

QUESTION: Gary, is that the first time you've had to perform that duty?



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GARY ROBERTSON: To that extent, yes.

QUESTION: Did you ever think that you might be overrun in that position?

GARY ROBERTSON: Always. Yeah. The ground itself was very isolated but because of the height in there, the visibility I had, for someone to overrun me was pretty much non-existent, yeah. Hard to do.

QUESTION: You don't want to say how many of you there were?

GARY ROBERTSON: Not exactly, no.

QUESTION: Small group?

GARY ROBERTSON: Small enough.

PAUL BURNS: Yeah. There's a team up there.

GARY ROBERTSON: Yeah.

QUESTION: How would you characterise the intensity of fighting [indistinct]?

GARY ROBERTSON: Very intense, yeah. Very intense.

QUESTION: And you fired the first shot?

GARY ROBERTSON: Possibly, yeah.



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PAUL BURNS: Yes.

QUESTION: [Indistinct]

GARY ROBERTSON: Yeah.

QUESTION: It seems remarkable someone asked before what was your main memory and you said your main memory was the heat.

GARY ROBERTSON: Yeah.

QUESTION: Must have been bloody hot.

GARY ROBERTSON: It was hot, definitely.

QUESTION: That is your main memory?

GARY ROBERTSON: Yeah.

QUESTION: Lieutenant Colonel, you spoke a bit about the overarching mission standing Afghan Government [indistinct] Taliban. Given there still is obviously that big Taliban presence and it's likely there's going to be some sort of agreement down the track, is that hard to take in terms of thinking of why you were there, what sort of victory that you claim?

DAVID MORRISON: No, I think the current commanders in Afghanistan have indicated that, you know, this is - it's all about influence and if we're able to influence the key leaders



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who do have influence over the population, they're willing to take those on ramps and accept our terms and conditions and where we want Afghanistan to be in the future and where the Afghan people want to see it, then if they're willing to provide that influence to achieve that end state, then we need to do it.

Not everything is black and white in war, particularly in a complex environment like Afghanistan. And I...

QUESTION: So, I suppose it's another one of those modern warfares where...

DAVID MORRISON: Yes. Yep.

QUESTION: And - sorry - and so, I mean, I guess in part it's just about trying to have every bit of influence you can get at that bargaining table, I suppose...

DAVID MORRISON: Yep.

QUESTION: ...is a part measurement for you guys?

DAVID MORRISON: As long as you got a clear vision of where you need to be in the end and understand how war is a compromise. Nothing is black and white and, you know, at this point, if you need to create an alignment and the terms are right, then - and it's going to get you to your end state, then maybe that's what you need to do.



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QUESTION:

And you also spoke about a lot of those local villages, how thankful they were [indistinct] being sponged off from Taliban. Did you encounter or have any of you encountered much reluctance from locals? People that are not happy to see you?

DAVID MORRISON:

We did a mission earlier on in the tour where we - it was a very large task force operation into a valley and we - the aim was to engage with the local population. And they were scared. They were very scared because they knew that if we had given them aid or medical supplies or food or they were seen to be even talking to us, then they could probably die that night when we left.

So, you know, the brave ones came out and engaged and spoke to us, but they were very clear. They said well, you know, if you're not going to be here tomorrow, then it makes it difficult for us. But then what we actually started to see was some of those locals stand up and we saw some of the locals kill one or two of the Taliban in that valley several weeks later because they were sick of it.

But we need - you know, the difficulty is we need to be there to help them over that first hump and then they'll take control. Again, I think Gizab's a great example of that.

QUESTION:

You mentioned that you were expecting the four Taliban commanders in Tizak and the number of those killed was significantly higher, is it fair to say that you



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were pleasantly surprised by the impact of this particular operation?

DAVID MORRISON:

Absolutely, absolutely, absolutely. We had created a situation where we were able to defeat the enemy on the ground of our own choosing. That's the name of the game in the profession of arms; so that we can attain that strategic and operational end-state. It's what we do.

QUESTION:

Major, I wonder, in the battle what your sort of [indistinct] memory is from it all?

MAJOR M:

Yeah look, it would probably be when the Taliban launched their first coordinated assault on all the positions. You know, it was just the noise. You know, it was - we were aware that they were getting ready to do something and we'd got ourselves into a position where we could certainly defend ourselves as needed. But yeah, the noise of the - just the machine guns and rockets coming in at that stage, that's probably my enduring memory of it.

QUESTION:

Have you heard anything like that before? I mean, like, in other battles?

MAJOR M:

No. Yeah, obviously we've had rockets and, you know, been fired at before but not to that extent. Not where - you know, all up the valley in different locations had you heard the - everything open up at one time. I hadn't heard it that coordinated before.



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QUESTION: You mentioned that some of the [indistinct] were heavy machine guns. That's [indistinct] machine guns, [indistinct] and stuff, is it? Or just [indistinct] machine guns?

MAJOR M: No. There were heavy machine guns around but it was pretty hard to identify exactly what calibre was coming at you, so.

QUESTION: Just clarifying; are you able to give us a sort of overall number of roughly how many of your people were there and how many insurgents where there [indistinct]

MAJOR M: I don't think we were going to go specific with numbers.

PAUL BURNS: From the Commando side of things, we've already made that estimate of about 100-120.

QUESTION: And the insurgents?

PAUL BURNS: For the Commando fight it was parody. So, you know, I said the force there was about 100 [indistinct] parody. The force in Tizak - we're probably looking three times their number.

MAJOR M: The only thing I'd say about the parody number is that the weight of effort was certainly on the southern elements. And in particular, up against Garry's team. So they had probably - definitely more than parody on those guys.



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QUESTION: [inaudible question]

PAUL BURNS: So we had a troop of SAS guys on the ground. Three times their number, were neutralised.

QUESTION: What, so three times the enemy force...

PAUL BURNS: Three times the number of the SAS force.

QUESTION: twenty-eight times three...[laughter].

QUESTION: So the weight of fire and the volume of fire that was coming from the other side, and we've seen this a lot in this war, they've put a lot of [indistinct] range, but they don't have much - are they bad shots?

PAUL BURNS: No. You know, actually that's a good point. From the analysis we did from the...at the end of the operation, the group that was operating in Chenatu were actually very, very well trained. So they were foreign fighters moving into the area as a - and using Chenatu as a jump-off distribution node. These weren't low level fighters who have been told by the Taliban to carry a gun and try and kill a coalition soldiers. They were actually very sophisticated in their security. They were very sophisticated in their tactics, as per the Commando position, they spent the majority of the day doing a detailed reconnaissance of their positions. And then they were able to coordinate, which is quite significant job, to coordinate fires onto all of the Commando positions at the same time. And they were actually very fanatical. I put it down to the training of



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the guys, both the Commandos and the SAS guys, and the experience.

So a lot of these guys have not - this isn't their first outing. They know what its like to be shot at, and they know that they need to do to make sure that they can survive, get into a position and then return effective fire. So I wouldn't say that these guys in particular are poor shots, no. And the fact that they - the way that they'd sided their machine guns and their fire discipline was actually very good. I think they were just out matched on the day by a superior force.

QUESTION:

When you say foreign fighters, what nationality were they?

PAUL BURNS:

Not Afghans. Or they may have been trained. They may be Afghans trained elsewhere.

QUESTION:

Just from a battle strategy point of view, my knowledge is limited to video games [indistinct], when things were particular dire often there was air support. Is there a reason why that isn't called in more often? Is it to avoid civilian casualties or is it...[indistinct]

PAUL BURNS:

I'll get Mick to talk about parts of that, but from my point of view, the Shah Wali Kot Offensive was the biggest show in town. So there was no shortage of air support. And in actual fact the amount of Apache's that he had thrown at us and other support elements was significant. It comes down to the commander on the ground and his discretion on whether or not to use that capability.



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MAJOR M: And look, some of it was about what we're trying to achieve. If you demonstrate overwhelming force straight up, you know, you're not going to actually be able to identify anything. You know, if you don't identify it, then you're not going to be able to achieve a hole lot being in there. So you've got to be discretionary...

QUESTION: [Indistinct] key Taliban leaders....[indistinct]

MAJOR M: That's a hypothetical.

QUESTION: [Inaudible question]

PAUL BURNS: The guys all - I need to confirm that but it's - to me - we had a policy where the commanders need to make that decision. And, you know, not - again not everything is cut and dried. And if they needed to increase their body force protection then the commander on the ground would make that. But there is a compromise. I'm not - and I'm moving away from the helmet issue here, but if you weigh yourself down with so much stuff, you're actually an easier target to shoot. I'm pretty sure the guys would have had their helmets.

MAJOR M: I think the other factor there is that the footage is from an overwatch position going into the high ground where I think the anticipated temperature was quite high as well. The assault elements going in, you know, in the low ground definitely would have had all their equipment on.



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QUESTION:

Is that a big factor....[inaudible question]

PAUL BURNS:

Absolutely. Like I said, everything's a compromise. If you want to move fast and light, you've got to drop some gear, therefore increase risk to yourself. And battle is not black and white. And I never second guess a guy who's been in battle because the noise, the sounds, the smell, the confusion. His understanding of the environment, what's going on, his overwhelming amount of information coming in - he's going to make the decision that he thinks is best and right at that time at that place. You know, you can't second guess that, you know, three or four days down the line in a clinical environment. You can learn some lessons from it, but I tell you, you can't replicate the feeling that the guys are going through. And the commanders, in particular, you know, making those calls.

QUESTION:

Were you surprised by the lack of casualties on your side from such an intense operation?

PAUL BURNS:

No, I'm not. We're a better force. We have a better force. Australian Special Operations Command; your best soldiers in the world.

QUESTION:

Any [indistinct] that when a coverage is being dominated by IED and road side bombs, how much of a moral boost has it been for the ADF that we're having a successful operation like this?

PAUL BURNS:

Absolutely. And, you know, we had lost a couple of Australians up in Tarin Kowt prior to this operation, and, you know, parts of this operation was for them.



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We take that job very, very seriously. Our job is to enhance the force protection of our other Australian comrades and other coalition partners, and every death means something. And therefore we will go out and make sure that the environment is safe for them to operate.

QUESTION:

[indistinct] in that context, Gary, your accredited, if that's the term, with a number of - killing a number of the insurgents on that day. Reflecting on killing people in a foreign country, how do you view that on reflection...?

GARY ROBERTSON:

It was either kill or be killed, I guess. They were trying to kill or the people around me, so they weren't be neutralised quickly or efficiently. It was either me or them. I've got no remorse over it at all.

PAUL BURNS:

It's a good question, you know. The - at the end of the day when it comes down to it, if you look after your mate on the left, and you look after your mate on your right, that's the most important thing at that time and place. And if everyone's doing that, you'll get through.

QUESTION:

Can I just get a [indistinct] comment from Major and Gary on what it means to have this battle be awarded a battle honour given that so few have been awarded recently?

GARY ROBERTSON:

I'm very, very honoured to receive it, yeah, to be part of it - be part of history, yeah.



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MAJOR M: I think it's just - it's quite humbling. You know, there's - you know, it's difficult because there's always - there's a lot of - there's a lot that goes on. A lot of battles that are occurring that people aren't necessarily - that people don't know about. Obviously the nature of Special Operations mean that we don't really talk about it. So in that regard it's both humbling but it's also an acknowledgment of a lot of the unacknowledged actions that do go on.

QUESTION: [inaudible question]

MAJOR M: So most of the - in fact are we going to go into any of that?

DAVID MORRISON: We don't generally talk about insurgent [indistinct]. And we're talking about [indistinct] insurgent deaths [indistinct]. If the Australian forces came across somebody who was wounded on the ground, then we would treat them. But we just didn't encounter anyone...

PAUL BURNS: The boys are well trained under the laws of armed conflict. If there's a wounded enemy then he's treated in accordance with the laws of armed conflict. Same with the way that we process individuals who are detained as a result of the operations.

QUESTION: Were their prisoners taken? Unwounded...

PAUL BURNS: None in Tizak.



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MAJOR M: Yeah, and there was - I don't know - there were none taken in Chenatu.

QUESTION: [inaudible question]

PAUL BURNS: It'll be one of those. I understand that there are other - Chief of Army spoke about the process that the Battle Honours Committee is going through at the moment. So, you know, there's been some significant other [indistinct] around. This is a notable one. It meets all the requirements for a battle, you know. To me a battle needs to link to the attainment of the campaigning, or a campaign approach. That's not to say that other fights that the enemy has [indistinct] - and we've got into a decent fight like Long Tan. But, you know, this should be one of those significant battles as a marker for the Afghan campaign.

And the important part of it is now to take some of the lessons that we've identified and collocate those into the broader army so that we're a better army as a result of it. We're not just coming back to Australia. We're going to be a harder, stronger, smarter, more sophisticated army as a result of this.

QUESTION: Quick question for Gary and for the Major...[inaudible]

MAJOR M: Yeah, look, it'll be a - yeah, no, it's always good to get back to see the guys and get everyone back together. It does make you reflect on the guys that didn't get there. It won't be their activity.



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QUESTION: How do you feel? Both Gary and the Major, like when you touch down on the ground for the first time, what's going through - what are you feeling? Is it adrenaline? Is it [indistinct], are you pumped up? Are you shit scared? What's the sort of thing that's going through your mind?

GARY ROBERTSON: I think adrenaline's probably the biggest contributing factor, yeah.

QUESTION: How do you manage that? Does it sort of tire you out? Does it just keep going?

GARY ROBERTSON: I think long-term it does tire you out, but I think it just keeps you going, yeah.

MAJOR M: I think the other point there is that it's just drilled so instinctively into the guys what to do, when the helo touches down. Everyone knows what needs to be done and gets on with it. So you don't really notice those other things because it's outside of the mission at that point.

QUESTION: [inaudible question]

PAUL BURNS: It validated that our training during the pre-9/11 period has set us up for success for the post-9/11 period. I think our training has advanced absolutely. Our leadership is demonstrated by the courage at the Trooper and at the Private level, all the way through. And I think we are now in a sophisticated space with the way that we manage the information systems that



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we have, or source information that comes in. But it comes down to the fusion of that information to achieve a practical outcome. And that's the role that we have when we're targeting key leaders. That's a very sophisticated approach. And, you know, that would be one thing that I would like to make sure we are able to maintain as we commence the draw down.

QUESTION: [Inaudible question]

PAUL BURNS: We had unmanned assets.

QUESTION: [inaudible question]

PAUL BURNS: They provide situational awareness for us on the battlefield and it's part of a capability that I use, as a commander, to build my situational awareness. Now it's not so that I can tell Mick that he should go left or right. It informs me for the steps three, four, down the track. So whilst he's in the close fight, I should be setting up the right conditions for him to seamlessly slide into the next piece to create a degree of tempo on the enemy that he can't think and move as quick as us. And that's how we use those assets, to get the intellectual, cognitive leap on him.

QUESTION: You're in command of a lot of people who are extremely exposed, from what you've described. What did it feel like for you? Had you ever been in a situation like this before? Did you feel at some stage that you had to make [indistinct] yourself to avoid losing your own nerve and pulling people out? What did it feel like personally?



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PAUL BURNS:

Personally, I have a great deal of trust and confidence in the guys. This is not my first fight. I've been in a few fights as a commander. I operate under a mission command construct. That is, I use - give the guys clear direction on where they need to - what they need to achieve, give them the resources that they require, and then I'll leave it to them to achieve the results. And nine times out of ten, they surprise me with what they come up with. And it's a far better option than what I would have come up with. So degree of trust. And I have that confidence that guys, Mick and Gary are able to achieve what we require.

When we started getting reports of casualties, you know, it's a bump in the road. But there's no time to stop. You've got to be thinking about what we're going to do about it, and how we're going to make sure that we achieve the outcome.

QUESTION:

This was a very significant defeat for the insurgents. Are you aware of any recriminations down the days later? Was there sort of radio chatter saying we really got our butts kicked down there, how did this happen?

PAUL BURNS:

Yeah, the Taliban, the first thing they did was plaster on the internet that they had a significant win against a coalition force, and that we'd killed a lot of civilians. Now we knew that was coming, that's a schoolboy sort of approach, and that's why we take a lot of time to make sure that we confirm, you know, the people that we have engaged are neutralised are indeed enemy combatants, and we're comfortable in that approach.



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Yeah we did get indications that yeah, they took a pretty heavy hit.

QUESTION:

When [indistinct] with civilians do you have a sense of what ordinary Australians outside the Defence Force, what sense they have of what's been going on in Afghanistan. Do you have the sense they're well informed or have any idea of what we've been up to?

GARY ROBERTSON:

I always know they've been informed partially, but whether it's to the right extent I'm not too sure. But how much information is passed on, I don't really consider or think about it.

QUESTION:

Do you get a sense that people just have no idea what sort of things you've been doing?

GARY ROBERTSON:

Um, in some cases yeah. Realistically, yeah.

QUESTION:

Is that also your impression? We're having a conversation about stuff we haven't had a sense of privilege and access to some of this information. But...[indistinct]

MAJOR M:

No, look I don't think there'd be a wide understanding of exactly what's going on over there, but nor is that necessarily an issue of itself. You know, it's...

QUESTION:

Do you feel like you're supported, or do you feel like the country is pretty divided about it all?

MAJOR M:

No I think we're well supported.



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QUESTION:

Michael, can you just actually talk us through how the battle unfolded for you? How did start? What were you doing during the...[indistinct]

MAJOR M:

Yeah it's hardly - it's a whole day of activity, you know, draw it out. We went in by night, we simultaneously cleared I think it was around 11 different main locations.

And then we went into assume what we call strong points up and down the valley. We weren't in a large defensive position, we're in strong points based around a couple of key locations and key train that we needed to hold.

And then Gary's team supported us through holding that key ground, which - from where he could observe everything and report on any movement moving through the area. And from there we started engaging with the population, and then once that became untenable due to activity and then switched to the fight and switched back, and back to the fight. That's the nature of it.

QUESTION:

Were you leading a section or where you...

MAJOR M:

So I lead the company, but we were a group, so we had the - so there was myself, my command team and yeah we two other teams that also had - we were in mortar roles. So we had our own organic protection in that regard as well.



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QUESTION: If we were to try and quantify the intensity of it, can you tell us something like, how many magazines did you go through?

MAJOR M: Ohh yeah, look I went through a few magazines, which is unusual for the OC. It's probably not the right place for the OC to be going through magazines. But yeah, look we went in prepared knowing that there was potential for it to be a pretty large engagement, so we were comfortable with what we went through.

QUESTION: [indistinct question]

MAJOR M: No that's from over in Tizak. Yeah so that's over in the other valley. So we could hear that the following day, but no that's not where we were. So...

QUESTION: Is that the nature of what quite a few ... [inaudible]

PAUL BURNS: Yeah I mentioned the idea of a full spectrum approach, and just mentioned it you know. One moment he's off a helicopter, he's cleared through, he's probably talking to some locals so that he can use their compound to hold up in and use as a strong point. And then they're in this close combat, and the OC is shooting several magazines - that implies how close the combat is.

Because as an OC he's got these units out there and he needs the bigger picture, but if he's fighting for his own life it shows how close the combat was. And then it stops, and so he's going down to talk to the key leaders



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and having a shura with one of the mullahs down there and having a cup of chai.

And then, maybe 45 minutes later, he's back in the fight again. All in the same period of time; it just highlights the complexity of the fight and the agility of mind that the guys need to transfer very rapidly for survival.

QUESTION: How much tea did you drink?

MAJOR M: Yeah I had my fair share of chai, sitting down speaking to people. But it's essential, you can't connect with a population if you're not prepared to sit down.

QUESTION: How many cups of tea did you drink?

MAJOR M: I have no idea how many cups.

QUESTION: How many bullets and how many cups of tea?

[laughter]

MAJOR M: Yeah that's right.

PAUL BURNS: This is Afghan culture, this is how they solve problems. And from a western point of view, we'll go hey mate, I want to do a deal today and we're signed up, we're good to go.



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That's not how they do it. It might take you three days of tea drinking to understand the real issues of the problem and then come to an agreement. And that's important from understanding - from the Australian public. This is not Sydney, this is Afghanistan and it's very unique with its own cultural norms and peculiarities.

And again I take my hat off to the guys that they're able to do that. You know, this is their culture and we respect it. And by respecting their culture we'll achieve long-term results.

QUESTION:

You come off that route, through the back [indistinct] Chenatu was obviously the cross-roads to a certain degree. The consensus is that that's been a long-term change that you've affected there. Have they simply shifted to a different route? Go through another valley? Or is there a profound...

PAUL BURNS:

You're exactly right, it's about surfaces and gaps. If we put a surface here then they're going to move around it. And the insurgency's like water, you put a dam here they're going to move around it, and that's just the nature of warfare.

Right from the beginning I said this is the ultimate clash of human will, and they want to inflict their will on us and we want to inflict their will on th... and they're going to keep going to manoeuvre round to achieve their end-state.



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But you're right. But the key to this is the population, and if we can make their route so much further and harder and longer to get to the population, then that's a good thing. Because we've got the vital ground, which is the people of Afghanistan.

QUESTION:

Colonel, you mentioned during your earlier presentation about the Tizak [indistinct] the commander officer on the ground would have been in his rights to withdraw. I wonder if you could talk about, just a little bit [indistinct] conditions were much worse than they expected, what that [indistinct] expecting them to go into...

PAUL BURNS:

Yeah so that troop commander - and I don't think he gets enough acknowledgement actually. And we talk about the weight of decision making, you know, he makes the decision whether these guys live or die. And if it had gone bad he would have held that responsibility of killing the troop.

So it's a huge responsibility, but you've got to do what you know is right, and you've got to have confidence and you've got to have courage. It's like a rugby game, if you go in half of the tackle then you're going to get hurt.

So that young troop commander made the decision we're going to keep doing this. But also based on the feeds from his sergeants that are coming back, they had done several missions prior to this, and actually quite a few missions that were very focused and very



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quick to achieve the kill or capture of several key leaders.

So the initial thought was it would be a similar sort of mission; two hours turnaround and we'll bring back the key leaders. We had not anticipated that the situations and the shaping operations were so successful to draw all those additional fighters in. But he made the call at the end of the day.

COMPERE:

We might limit it to say four or five more questions and that's about it in order to get on with our days. Otherwise you'll have filing problems... [indistinct]

QUESTION:

Gary, if I can ask about the helicopter crash, I know it is obviously a fairly sensitive issue. Do you remember anything at all about the crash, or the events leading up to it?

GARY ROBERTSON:

I've got no recollection at all. Even a week prior to - a week and after prior to, I've got no memory of at all. Even a few months afterwards, I've got no recollection, yeah...

QUESTION:

And Major, what was the moral like when you heard about the crash...[indistinct]?

MAJOR M:

No I think you can imagine what it's like to know you've just lost guys, and also you've got some guys are seriously wounded. But at the same time you're still on operation, you've still got missions to do and... you know, we had some significant missions too following



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that crash. That's the thing - you've got hardened professional - special operators there, you just get on with the job.

QUESTION: Gary, how are you going with your recovery?

GARY ROBERTSON: I'm getting there. Still going through the recovery process now, three days a week. So won't be before I'm back at work one day, still getting there.

QUESTION: Would you like to stay in the army?

GARY ROBERTSON: Yeah I want to stay in the army, I want to stay in the army yeah.

QUESTION: Gary, were you a sergeant at the time this happened?

GARY ROBERTSON: Yes.

PAUL BURNS: Yeah Gary was the team commander of that team that was up there.



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