



The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Defence Sub-Committee
Visit to
Queensland and the Northern Territory
5–8 August 1996



Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Soon after its re-establishment in the 38th Parliament, the Defence Sub-Committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade decided to conduct an inspection of certain defence facilities in Queensland and the Northern Territory. The purpose of the inspections and associated briefings was to give Members, particularly those who had not previously been associated with the Committee, the opportunity to familiarise themselves with a range of defence establishments in the northern sector of Australia and to discuss with Service personnel topical defence issues.

1.2 The continuing interest in defence cooperation with regional allies and associated focus on the strategically important region to Australia's north was central to the design of the program of visits and inspections agreed to by the Sub-Committee. The latest forward program of Defence exercises has a strong focus on the northern sector of Australia and the neighbouring region. For example, a joint exercise *Pitch Black* was conducted in the area north of Darwin in the three weeks preceding the Sub-Committee's visit.

1.3 The Sub-Committee was particularly interested to see the progress being made with the APIN Project - Army Presence in the North - which had its beginnings in 1987 and will extend into the year 2001. The APIN Project is a key element of Australia's long-term defence planning. It recognises the size of the continent and the existence of large areas in the northern sector which previously had no permanent Defence Force presence. APIN provides mobile ground forces able to defeat enemy incursions in remote regions of Australia and to sustain operations away from logistic support centres. While in Darwin, members of the Sub-Committee saw evidence of the phased development of the Robertson Barracks site, which will eventually see the relocation of some 2300 soldiers and 2600 family members from other defence establishments in the south, particularly Holsworthy. Further detail relating to the APIN Project is contained in the body of this report.

1.4 There were several occasions during the tour when the topic of the report titled *Army of the 21st Century* (Army 21) was raised in briefings or subsequent discussions. The Sub-Committee understands from recent media reports and references made during the tour that Army 21 represents a major change in direction for the future Army, with a radically different structure which gives emphasis to smaller, well armed and highly mobile task forces. These forces will be able to respond rapidly and to deploy over the vast distances of the north in order to counter short warning conflict situations. Following the tour, the Sub-Committee has sought a briefing from the Minister for Defence on the content of Army 21.

1.5 The Sub-Committee wishes to acknowledge the successful efforts made by the 5th Aviation Regiment in Townsville to re-establish operational effectiveness quickly and sensitively after the tragic accident involving two Black Hawk helicopters during a Special Air Services training exercise at the High Range Training Area west of Townsville on 12 June this year. During its visit to 5th Aviation Regiment at RAAF Base Townsville, the Sub-Committee was briefed by senior officers on the measures taken to comfort and sustain the families of those servicemen who were killed and injured and to re-build the spirit of the

squadrons and morale of the Regiment as a whole. The support services including counselling have been instrumental in returning the Regiment to full operations with a renewed faith in the future.

1.6 Although the tour of inspection was relatively brief, it encompassed a range of defence facilities. The Sub-Committee visited defence establishments in a major capital city (Brisbane), bases and training facilities on the outskirts of expanding provincial centres such as Townsville, and undertook a longer inspection of both well-established and newly-developed joint facilities in Darwin.

1.7 The Sub-Committee is most grateful to the many people who contributed to the success of the northern tour. At all stages in the familiarisation program, the Sub-Committee was impressed with the organisation and quality of the briefings and demonstrations provided by members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The considerable efforts of the Commanding Officers and liaison personnel in the various regional locations were similarly appreciated by the Sub-Committee, recognising that the success of the trip relied to a large extent on coordinating the program arrangements in conjunction with the Committee Secretariat.

1.8 In particular, the Sub-Committee is grateful to the Minister for Defence for making available the Falcon aircraft from No. 34 Squadron which transported the Members from Brisbane to Townsville, Darwin and return via Brisbane, Williamstown and Canberra. To the flight crew, the Sub-Committee also wishes to express its appreciation for their unfailing cooperation and friendly assistance in ensuring that the travel arrangements for the tour (and occasional revised schedules) operated smoothly. The Sub-Committee also wishes to thank Base Area Support Command North Queensland for arranging ground transport in Townsville and Darwin.

1.9 The Sub-Committee's tour of inspection covered three widely separated locations over four days. This itinerary and the busy schedule of inspections and discussions which were arranged did not allow the Sub-Committee to explore in depth all the issues which were presented during the four day program.

1.10 The following report therefore is not exhaustive. Essentially, it describes the extent of the Sub-Committee's program of visits and the main features of the information gathered by the Members.

David MacGibbon
Sub-Committee Chairman

SECTION 2

BRISBANE

1 Division

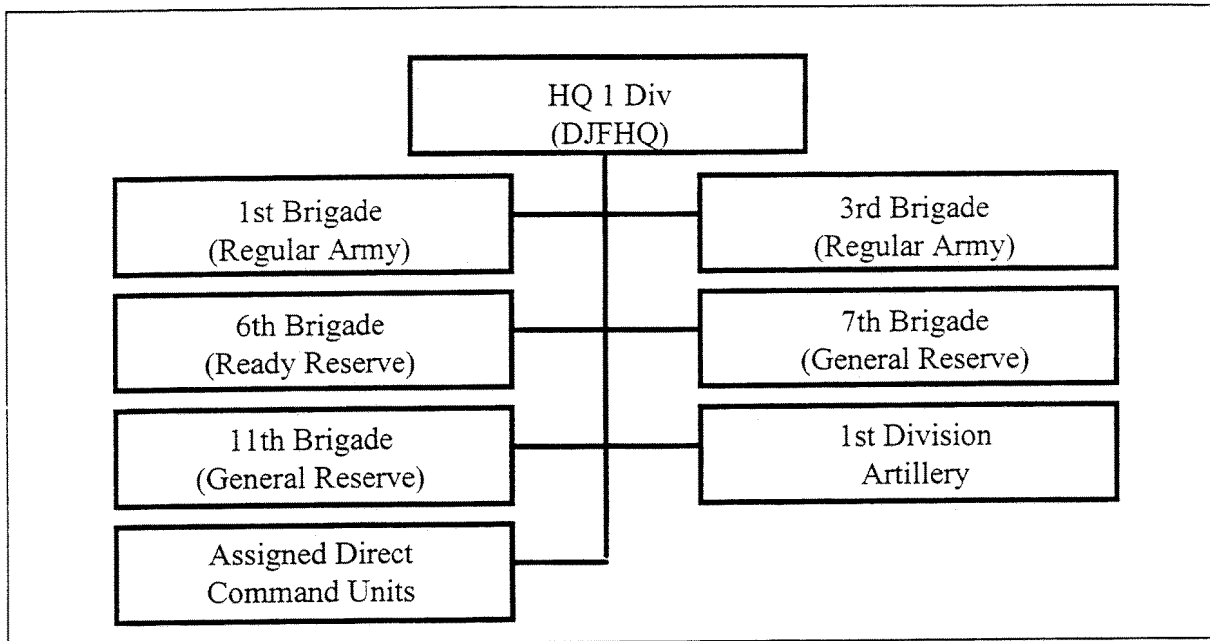
2.1 The Sub-Committee visited the headquarters of the 1st Division in Brisbane, located at Gallipoli Barracks, Enoggera. On arrival, the Sub-Committee was met by Major General Tim Ford, Commander 1 Division, who welcomed the Members and outlined the history, organisation and role of the Division, its headquarters and major command units. Further briefings were provided by Brigade Commanders Brigadier Maurie Meecham (6th Brigade) and Brigadier Darryl Low Choy (7th Brigade). Lieutenant Colonel Mark Wheatley explained the Division's two aviation units, 1st Aviation Regiment and 5th Aviation Regiment.

2.2 The history of 1 Division closely parallels that of the Australian Army. The Division was established 82 years ago as part of the Australian Imperial Force. During World War 2 the main part of the Division was retained in Australia as a home defence formation deployed in the Sydney and Port Kembla areas. However, the Commander of 1 Division and his staff were used to form the headquarters of Milne Force which in 1942 inflicted the first major land defeat on the Japanese at Milne Bay. From 1950 to 1972, formations or units from 1 Division campaigned in Korea, Malaya, Borneo and South Vietnam.

2.3 In 1973 HQ 1 Division was relocated to Enoggera to command three full time brigades. Subsequently, two general reserve brigades were allocated to the Division. In 1990 the Chief of the Defence Force established the headquarters as a Deployable Joint Force Headquarters (DJFHQ) and in late 1995 it became DJFHQ-Land.

2.4 As it stands today, 1 Division consists of the Headquarters, a mix of regular and reserve Brigades and some Direct Command Units. The total strength of the Division is over 13,000 all ranks, of which approximately 6,900 are Australian Regular Army, 3,500 are General Reservists and the remaining 2,600 are Ready Reservists either undergoing one year full time training or subsequent part time training. The current organisation of the Division is shown in the chart at Figure 1, which illustrates the Division's structural formations and its assigned Direct Command Units. Direct Command Units are scarce capabilities that are centrally controlled and allocated to increase the Division's operational flexibility. The main units allocated to the Division are: 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment (Queensland Mounted Infantry), 3rd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (Parachute Battalion Group), 4th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment, 1st Signal Regiment, 1st Aviation Regiment, 5th Aviation Regiment and 1st RISTA Regiment (Reconnaissance, Intelligence, Surveillance and Target Acquisition assets).

Figure 1: Structure of the 1st Division



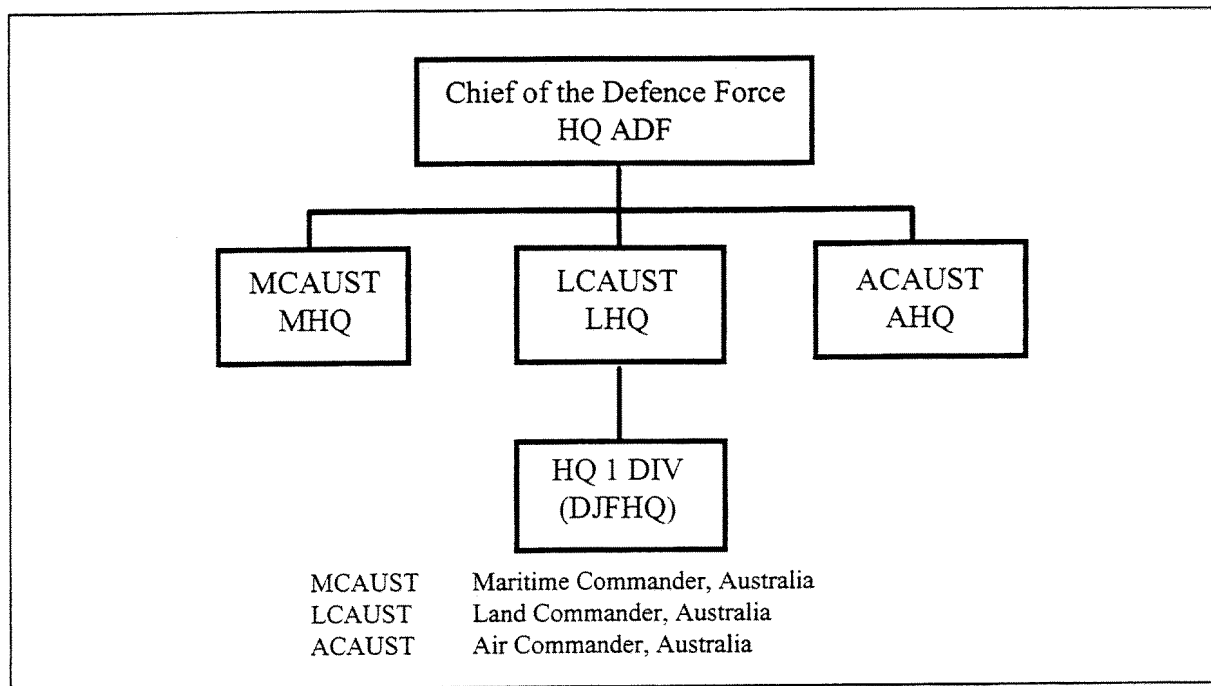
2.5 The Sub-Committee visited several of the Division's units based outside Brisbane during the northern tour. In Townsville, these were 3rd Brigade, a high readiness ready deployment force and 11th Brigade, a General Reserve Brigade based on two infantry battalions. In Darwin, the Sub-Committee visited 1 Brigade's 2nd Cavalry Regiment, which commenced relocation to Robertson Barracks from Holsworthy in 1992.

2.6 The brief provided by HQ 1 Division described it as a flexible and versatile force able to conduct agreed tasks in defence of Australia or for peace support operations. 1 Division is an integrated formation which is based in Darwin, Queensland and Sydney. The Division trains for operations throughout Australia and the region. The Division is not aligned as a whole formation to any one area of operations, but is deployable within Australia and the region (or anywhere in the world). The General and Ready Reserve formations, however, have been allocated primary areas of responsibility in northern Australia in which they are prepared to conduct protective operations.

Chain of Command

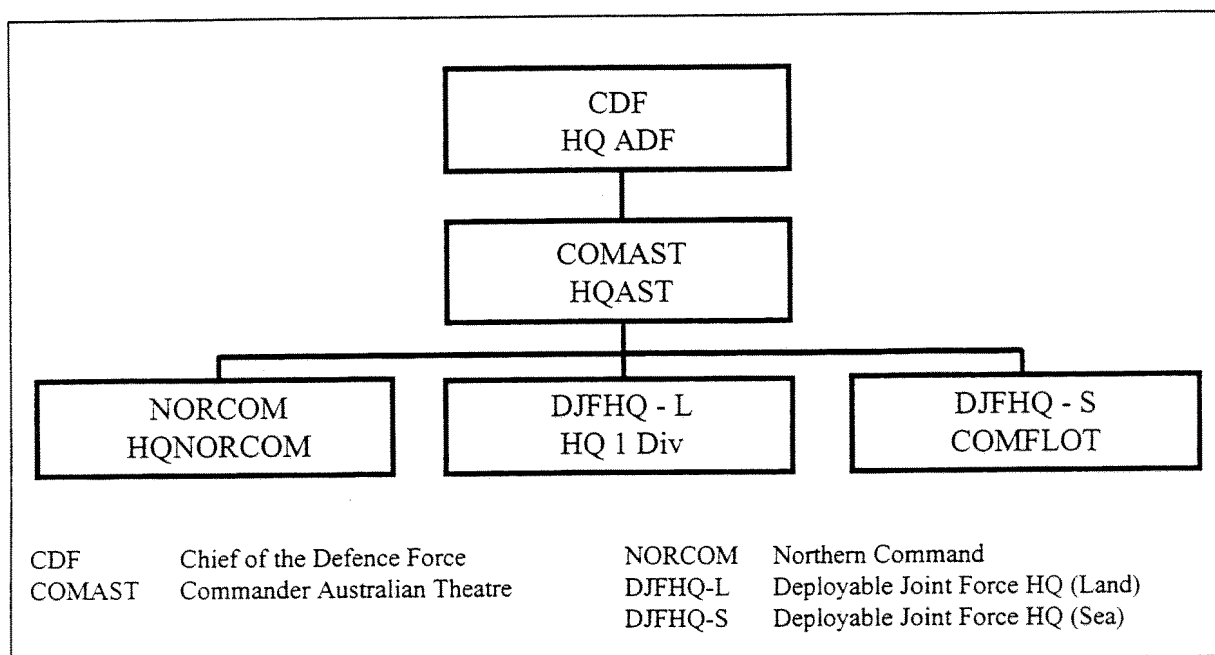
2.7 The current chain of command within which the Division operates is shown in Figure 2. While the Division is normally under the command of the Land Headquarters in Sydney, there have been occasions when 1 Division has been commanded by other superior Headquarters. The most recent example of this scenario was during the planning for contingency operations off-shore as part of *Exercise Kangaroo 95*, when 1 Division was allocated to the Air Commander Australia.

Figure 2: Chain of Command



2.8 As shown in Figure 3 below, HQ 1 Division is being restructured with increased Navy and Air Force personnel in order to develop into the DJFHQ-Land by the target date of 1 July 1997. However, this timetable has not been finalised, pending the outcome of the Army 21 review, *Army of the 21st Century*, which has been submitted to the Minister for Defence.

Figure 3: New Command Arrangements



Training and Preparedness

2.9 The Division participates in a range of training exercises designed to practice and test preparedness for its role. These activities involve joint training with the other armed services and combined training with the services of other nations, particularly the United States and New Zealand. The four types of training activities conducted by 1 Division formations are:

- strategic level exercises such as *Kangaroo* and *Crocodile*, which involve the three Services of the Australian Defence Force and the participation of one or more of our regional partners or the United States;
- preparedness tests such as *Exercise Swift Eagle* and *Exercise Sea Snake*, which are designed to test and evaluate readiness for short notice force operations;
- joint offensive support firepower exercises, which are conducted annually with the purpose of practising and evaluating joint and combined offensive support operations; and
- internal HQ and command/control processes training, achieved through a series of command post exercises.

2.10 The Division makes extensive use of the Townsville Field Training Area in northern Queensland and Shoalwater Bay Training Area in central Queensland as well as a number of smaller training areas. It was pointed out that there are sensitive environmental issues to be considered when designing realistic training exercises.

2.11 The move of 1 Brigade to Darwin has placed pressure on existing training areas in northern Australia, for example Mt Bunday, which is located near Kakadu National Park. The Sub-Committee heard that it is now vital to accelerate the development and availability of the proposed Bradshaw Station Field Training Area north of Timber Creek in the Northern Territory and to allocate sufficient resources to maintain existing training areas in northern Australia.

2.12 *Exercise Northern Predator* was conducted by 1 Brigade as a mechanised force exercise near Kununurra in the east Kimberley area in August 1996. 1 Division was also involved in *Exercise Swift Eagle* (September 1996), a short notice call out exercise involving participation by a New Zealand battalion group and considerable air and naval assets. The Division will also participate in *Exercise Tandem Thrust* (March 1997), a joint/combined crisis response planning and field training exercise to be held in Shoalwater Bay Training Area, with participation from United States units.

2.13 Since 1993, 1 Division has provided units and individual personnel for operational duty in Somalia, Cambodia, the western Sahara and Rwanda.

Development of DJFHQ - L

2.14 Although the timetable for change to new command arrangements as a Deployable Joint Force HQ - Land has not yet been confirmed, 1 Division HQ plans to restructure for joint operations before the end of 1996 and to be operational by 1 July 1997 with increased Navy and Air Force personnel. As well as tasks integral to the defence of Australia, DJFHQ - L will be capable of commanding forces for a wide range of support operations such as:

- services assisted evacuation;
- services protected evacuation;
- natural disaster relief;
- peacekeeping operations; and
- staff supplementation to joint or combined headquarters.

Impact of Modern Technology

2.15 1 Division HQ has recently been accredited for access to ADFDIS (the modern and sophisticated tri-service Australian Defence Force Distributed Intelligence System) and has participated in the development of the AUSTACSS Project (the Australian Army Automated Command Support System). AUSTACSS will provide the Army with a modern deployable computerised system which will enhance situational awareness and reaction. The Sub-Committee heard that the next phase of the project will evaluate AUSTACSS' deployability in the field.

2.16 The Division has also been involved in the Defence Science and Technology Organisation's Project Takari, which is developing links between AUSTACSS, ADFDIS and the ADF joint force command support system project JP2030. In addition 6th Brigade is working on Project Bushranger, which has a focus on acquiring enhanced mobility vehicles for infantry purposes, further details of which are provided in the following section.

6th Brigade

2.17 In 1991 the 6th Brigade was designated as a Ready Reserve formation of 1 Division. The Brigade's role is to be capable of conducting operations in Australia and the region as a follow-up brigade of 1 Division. Its core fighting elements are three infantry battalions (6 RAR, 8/9 RAR and 49 RQR), supported by a combat engineer regiment, an administrative support battalion and a signals squadron. An artillery regiment (1 Field Regiment) and a tactical armoured reconnaissance squadron are usually allocated to the Brigade as vital elements of its overall combat capability.

Project Bushranger

2.18 6th Brigade is currently equipped as a light infantry brigade and it has the weapons, vehicles and other equipment to reach its operational level of capability within 90 days. However, the Brigade is in the process of converting to a motorised formation, the first unit to do so under Project Bushranger.

2.19 As an interim measure, Project Bushranger is adding 321 wheeled vehicles to make a total fleet of 850 vehicles in the Brigade. Vehicles currently being introduced are

Land Rover series variants. From 1998 these unprotected vehicles will be replaced with a new fleet of lightly armoured wheeled vehicles which are more specialised and more capable than the Land Rover series. The ultimate choice for Bushranger is between three options which will provide more strategic and tactical mobility and protection for the soldiers than the existing Land Rover series variants.

Termination of the Ready Reserve Scheme

2.20 Ready Reservists, other than some technical grades, undergo one year of full time service, followed by four years of part time service consisting of 50 days per year. The full time service period involves recruit training and initial employment/specialist training to the same levels and standards required of Regular Army counterparts.

2.21 The Sub-Committee learned about 6th Brigade's training cycle for Ready Reservists, which is different from cycles operated by other formations. With the decision to end the Ready Reserve Scheme in February 1997, the 1996 intake will complete their training by March 1997. There are five options being offered to Ready Reservists :

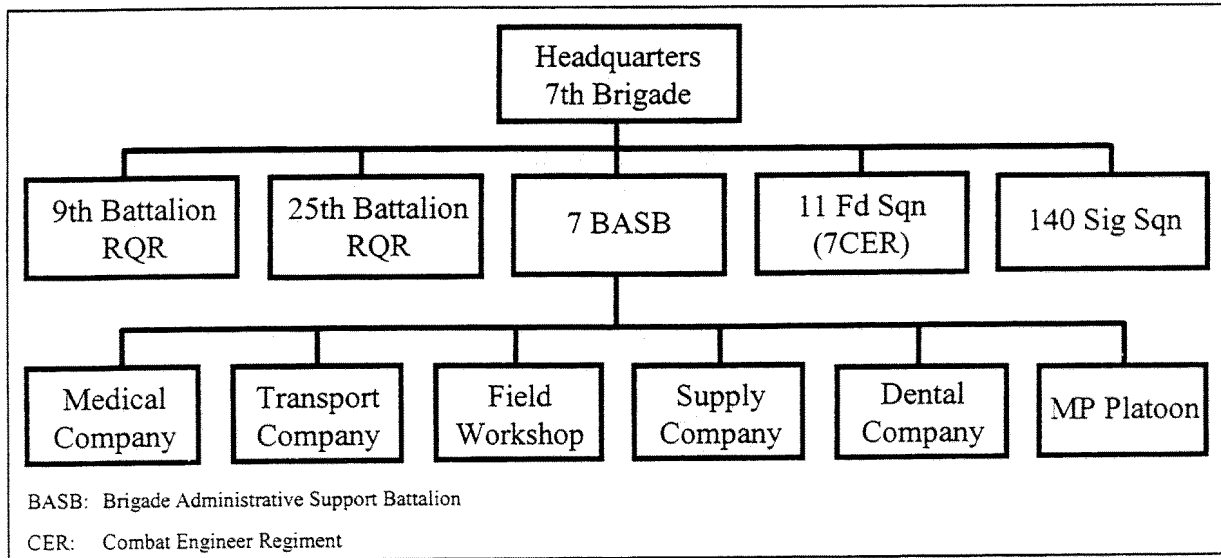
- transfer to the Regular Army;
- transfer to the General Reserve, and retain Ready Reserve conditions (50 days service per year and Ready Reserve benefits);
- transfer to the General Reserve, and convert to General Reserve employment conditions (26 days service per year and General Reserve benefits);
- transfer to the Army Individual Emergency Reserve or Inactive Army Reserve; or
- discharge.

2.22 Reservists have been approached individually on the available options and most have now indicated their choice. Every effort is being made to retain as many of the well trained Ready Reserve personnel as possible and many will transfer to the General Reserve while retaining Ready Reserve conditions and employment. The Brigade expects that most of these will serve in their home state in General Reserve units, where they will significantly enhance the capability of these regional units. The challenge for the Army is to tap into the strengths of the Ready Reserve Scheme (for example, the overall quality of recruits and their ability to assimilate modern technology) as a means of enhancing the capability and flexibility of the General Reserve.

7th Brigade

2.23 Units of the 7th Brigade are based in south east Queensland as a General Reserve manoeuvre formation of 1 Division. The role of the Brigade is to develop and maintain the capability to deploy on dispersed short warning conflict operations in northern Australia. In addition to the direct command units shown in Figure 4, there are two support units allocated to the Brigade, which are B Squadron 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment and 11th Field Regiment.

Figure 4: Organisation of the 7th Brigade

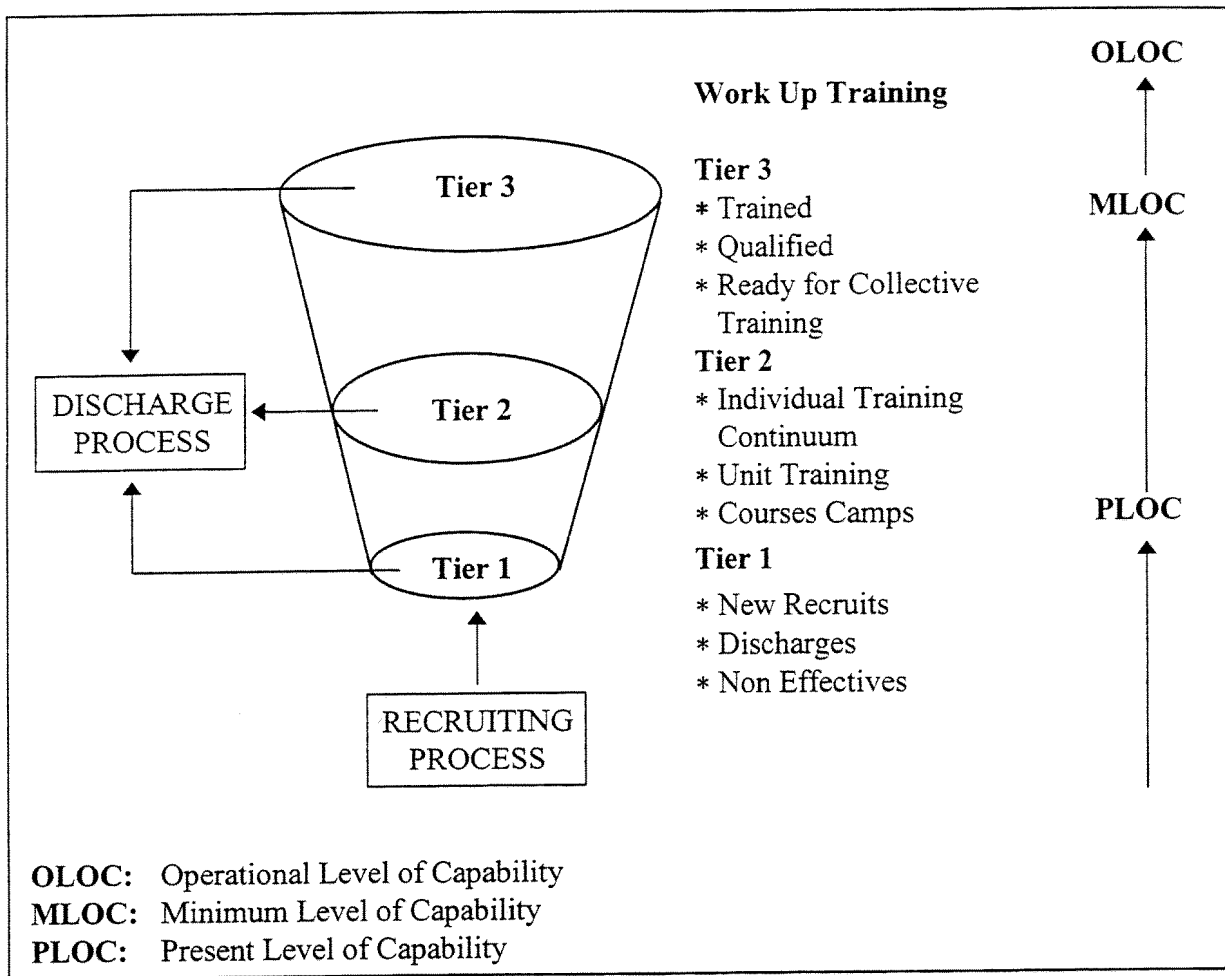


Training Priorities

2.24 The Brigade's training priority is geared towards achieving Minimum Level of Capability (MLOC) and to reach Operational Level of Capability (OLOC) within readiness notice. Its Tiered Training System (TTS) focuses on providing training activities which enable the Brigade to achieve individual and collective training standards to ensure OLOC is reached within 180 days readiness notice. The Operational Study Area for the Brigade is a large area which includes Broome, Derby and RAAF Curtin in the western Kimberley district. Although training exercises are conducted in south east Queensland and Shoalwater Bay, they are essentially based on terrain and other conditions applying in the assigned study area.

2.25 The Sub-Committee discussed with the Brigade Commander the aims and advantages of TTS over the standard three year training cycle, and the expected impact such an approach will have on retention/wastage rates. The main advantages of TTS are recognition of the training needs of the General Reserve and achievement of a cumulative training program which provides realistic and challenging training to General Reserve soldiers at all levels (Figure 5, below).

Figure 5: The Tiered Training System (General Reserve)



Army Aviation Issues

2.26 A short brief on army aviation issues was provided by the Staff Officer Grade 1 (Aviation), Lieutenant Colonel Mark Wheatley who briefed the Sub-Committee on the Division's two operational aviation units, the 1st and 5th Aviation Regiments. The combat roles of these units are the provision of aerial fire support, and combat support air mobility, tactical aerial reconnaissance and command/control. In addition, the service support roles of the Regiments include tasks such as medical evacuation, movement of freight and personnel, and search and rescue.

2.27 The briefing included a number of major issues such as the re-introduction of upgraded Chinook helicopters, the operations of leased fixed-wing aircraft pending resolution of the Army's future requirements, and the steps being taken to ensure coordinated support for the Army's aviation training and operations.

2.28 The Sub-Committee was interested to learn that there has been a significant improvement in the serviceability of the Black Hawk helicopters during 1996, as demonstrated in *Exercise Thunder Bay* in May this year. An initial reduction in aircraft

availability following the recent accident in north Queensland has been overcome, and the Regiment's operational effectiveness has returned to pre-accident levels, due mainly to the establishment of effective coordination through HQ Aviation Support located at Oakey and the efforts of 5th Aviation Regiment personnel. The four upgraded Chinook helicopters proved the aircraft's operational lift capability in *Thunder Bay*, and this capability was further tested during *Exercise Swift Eagle* in September this year.

Motorisation Demonstration, Watsons Oval (6th Brigade)

2.29 The 49th Battalion RQR provided a demonstration of the strategic and tactical mobility available to a motorised infantry unit. The vehicles used were the newly introduced (non-armoured) Perentie Land Rover 4X4 and 6X6 variants, including the ambulance version, and armoured personnel carriers (APCs). Project Bushranger will ultimately provide vehicles with greater protection and terrain flexibility for the infantry.

Static Display of Modern Communications Equipment

2.30 The Commanding Officer, 1 Signal Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Rob Moffatt welcomed the Sub-Committee to a demonstration by his unit of the conventional and satellite capabilities of the latest PARAKEET and Combat Net Radio (Project Raven) communications equipment.

Informal Discussions at HQ 1 Division

2.31 At the conclusion of the briefings and demonstrations, a working lunch was hosted by Major General Ford and attended by the Chief of Staff, the Chief of Staff (Reserves), the Staff Officer (Operations) and the Staff Officer (Administration), during which the Sub-Committee took the opportunity to discuss a number of issues, including:

- the Army's role in a joint military environment and the continual process of review which determines that role and the strategic and tactical capabilities required over time;
- the *Army of the 21st Century* review (Army 21), which has now been presented to the Minister for Defence. Given the fundamental nature of the review of the Army's long-term future and the opportunity for the Sub-Committee to make an input to the plan, it was agreed that the Sub-Committee would seek a full briefing by the Minister on Army 21 at the earliest opportunity;
- impacts on Army personnel of periods of overseas service; and
- cultivation of defence links at a professional level with regional armed services personnel of other countries, particularly Asia.

2.32 At the conclusion of the discussions, the Chairman on behalf of the Sub-Committee thanked Major General Ford and his staff for the morning's briefings and demonstrations and for the frankness with which issues raised by the Sub-Committee had been addressed.

Bulimba Barracks

2.33 While in Brisbane, the Sub-Committee also visited Bulimba Barracks, where the South Queensland Logistic Group is co-located with the Navy Support Office. The Sub-Committee was met on arrival by the Commanding Officer, South Queensland Logistic Group, Colonel Bruce Whiting and the Commanding Officer, Navy Support Office, South Queensland, Commander Iain Whitehouse, RAN.

South Queensland Logistic Group

2.34 The mission of the South Queensland Group is to deliver innovative, responsive and quality logistic services in support of the Land Force in South Queensland to its directed level of operational preparedness. Colonel Whiting's brief outlined the Group's organisation, goals, geographic dispersion (Bulimba, Meeandah, Banyo, Enoggera and Greenbank), its customer units and operations.

2.35 One of the principal issues raised in discussion was the impact of the Commercial Support Program (CSP) on the operations of the Group, for example the development of meaningful performance indicators in a commercial and continually changing environment and the scope of logistic and base support activities. With the increasing likelihood of successful competitive tenders from commercial contractors, one of the issues to be resolved is how such a system is to be managed under 'threat' conditions. Other important issues raised were:

- potential of CSP to provide efficiencies and cost savings and the overall scope of the Program in terms of logistic and base support services;
- changed work practices and union consultation;
- determination of core and non-core tasks through the current review of functions;
- the customer survey in January 1996 and customer service level agreements;
- reductions in layers of senior command and streamlining of services; and
- scope for further development in the direction of one arm of the Services providing logistic support services for all three.

2.36 Following the briefing and discussions, the Sub-Committee was given a tour of South Queensland Logistic Group facilities, including the maintenance and repair facilities for vehicles and weapons. Many of the buildings clearly dated from World War 2, even though extensive refurbishment had been undertaken to modernise them.

Navy Support Office, South Queensland

2.37 Commander Whitehouse and Executive Officer, Lieutenant Commander Darren Nembach briefed the Sub-Committee on the organisational structure, history, functions, key clients and future role of the Navy Support Office (NSO). The Bulimba site was chosen following the decommissioning of HMAS Moreton in May 1994 in light of its close proximity to visiting ships berths, office space and storage facilities. The Personnel Services Office (PSO) is located at Victoria Barracks in Brisbane, which provides convenient access to public transport for the many families of Navy personnel who reside in Brisbane.

2.38 The functions of the NSO/PSO are to provide administrative and logistic support to key customers of the Permanent Naval Force (PNF) and the Australian Naval Reserve (ANR) in southern Queensland, which include the Firefighting School at Amberley, the Army Aviation Centre at Oakey, the Defence Force Recruiting Centre in Brisbane, Gallipoli Barracks (Enoggera), and various lodger units such as Diving Team 8, the Naval Controller of Shipping and the Queensland Naval Band. One of the NSO's major priorities is to support the Reserve: the Reserve Administrative Cell supports 320 billeted, General Reserve and Ready Reserve personnel, of whom over 200 are regularly involved in fleet support. NSO South Queensland has been developing its reputation for supplying well trained and qualified reserve personnel in support of RAN ships and establishments throughout Australia.

2.39 A major role of the NSO is to provide logistic support to visiting Australian and foreign warships, including nuclear powered vessels, south of the Tropic of Capricorn. As the local Navy authority, the NSO also provides support for the Naval Reserve Cadet Headquarters and 17 training units. Of the training units, only four have staff at full strength and there are none with cadets at full strength.

2.40 Issues covered in discussion following the briefing included:

- the naval reserve cadet scheme as a focus of community support and a source of recruitment for the Navy, and ways to ensure the scheme is adequately supported;
- increasing use of information technology to improve efficiency and productivity; and
- the resource implications of an increase in visits by RAN and foreign vessels, and increased demand for ANR support to RAN ships and establishments throughout Australia.

SECTION 3

TOWNSVILLE

3rd Brigade

3.1 The Sub-Committee visited the Headquarters of the 3rd Brigade at Lavarack Barracks, where the core elements of the Brigade are based. On arrival, the Sub-Committee was met by Brigadier Mike Smith AM, Commander 3rd Brigade, Major Mick Slater and Major Michael Schlatter. The Base Administrative Support Centre (North Queensland) (BASCNQ), which is responsible for operating all training areas and Army facilities in north Queensland as well as providing base support to 3rd Brigade and 11th Brigade, is also located in Lavarack Barracks.

3.2 Major development works have occurred within the Barracks over the last few years. Stage 1 of the redevelopment was completed in 1995 at a cost of over \$24 million. Stage 2 of Lavarack Barracks redevelopment, valued at over \$88 million, will commence in 1997/98 and will provide improved accommodation, working conditions and landscaping.

Ready Deployment Force

3.3 A briefing by Brigadier Smith described the organisation and structure of the Brigade. It is the Army formation held at the highest degree of readiness for operations and it is the major combat component of the ADF's Ready Deployment Force. Operational training requires the Brigade to be proficient in both air and amphibious operations and its tactical flexibility is enhanced by air portability and training in air and ground manoeuvre operations.

3.4 3rd Brigade consists of a Headquarters and a range of combat, combat support and combat service support units. The combat units consist of two infantry battalions (1RAR and 2RAR), which are classified as light infantry battalions. The combat support units provide additional firepower, battlefield mobility and tactical information to the combat units. The levels of weapons and equipment able to be marshalled by 3rd Brigade include an armoured personnel carrier squadron of M113 APCs. The capability of the Brigade is significantly enhanced by several Townsville-based allocated units, which are 5th Aviation Regiment, 2nd Field Logistic Battalion, No 35 Squadron RAAF and Operational Support Group RAAF.

3.5 The Sub-Committee was told of the considerable administrative effort and training levels required to maintain Brigade troops on very short degrees of notice for operations in a wide range of environments. Joint training with the RAN and RAAF occupies a large portion of the Brigade's exercise training schedule. Combined exercises with United States and Indonesian forces have been conducted recently and have demonstrated their value in not only gaining new skills and ideas but also in developing team work and understanding between the defence forces of neighbouring countries and Australia's allies.

3.6 The Brigade depends heavily on the use of aircraft for tactical mobility once deployed. For example, the Black Hawks' range, speed and lift capability enable the Brigade

to react swiftly and provide manoeuvrability. On the ground, the Brigade makes good use of the APCs of B Squadron 3/4 Cavalry Regiment. These vehicles provide very good cross-country mobility as well as firepower and protection for infantry. Because of its rapid mobility requirement, 3rd Brigade has less emphasis on heavy equipment than a typical infantry brigade.

3.7 Following the briefing the Sub-Committee was particularly interested to discuss issues such as:

- personnel characteristics of the Brigade, including gender mix, retention strategies and the features of 'short warning' training;
- the role of army community services in minimising the negative impacts of overseas service (Somalia, Rwanda) on service personnel and families;
- recruiting efforts and standard of entrants;
- the need for greater integration of regulars and reservists to overcome 'hollowness';
- training strategies to meet a variety of threat scenarios, including Australian defensive operations offshore and overseas peace-keeping roles;
- lessons learned in the Somalia and Rwanda campaigns, in terms of troop deployments and desired outcomes;
- modernisation of ground transport fleets to meet the threat situations envisaged in the foreseeable future;
- relations with the wider community in provincial centres such as Townsville and the problems created by urban encroachment on the outskirts of defence establishments; and
- the impact of the transfer program on the wider Townsville community.

Demonstration by Units of 3rd Brigade

3.8 A demonstration of Brigade capability in terms of personnel and equipment was provided by several units of 3rd Brigade: a Rifle Section, a Reconnaissance Platoon, a Direct Fire Support Weapons Platoon, an Assault Pioneer Section, a Signals Platoon, a Mortar Platoon and a Sniper Group as well as static displays by support corps.

3.9 At the conclusion of the demonstration, the Sub-Committee had the opportunity to speak with individual service personnel about unit operations and equipment, and were able to ask also about standard issue uniforms and boots, and items such as gloves which surprisingly were not issued as standard items.

Mount Stuart Training Area

3.10 The Sub-Committee travelled to the Mt Stuart Training Area close to Lavarack Barracks. It includes a number of small arms ranges and some close training areas. The Members witnessed the conclusion of live-firing exercises by Support Company 1RAR at the marksmanship training range. Lieutenant Colonel Brian Dawson, Commanding Officer, Base Area Support Centre North Queensland (BASC-NQ) greeted the Members and presented a short briefing on the role of BASC-NQ and the training facilities available in the Townsville area, including the Townsville Field Training Area (known locally as High Range) and the Shoalwater Bay Training Area located about 750 kilometres to the south east. Shoalwater Bay is the largest military range in eastern Australia and is ideal for major field firing and manoeuvres.

3.11 The Sub-Committee heard that the growth of Townsville had long-term implications for the Mt Stuart Training Area, having already spread to the perimeters of the Area in some directions. Environmental considerations were highlighted in the brief, for example the sensible management of fragile tropical terrain in consultation with relevant environmental agencies.

3.12 Lieutenant Colonel Mark Kelly, Commanding Officer 1RAR briefed the Sub-Committee on the facilities at the firing range, at the conclusion of which Members participated in a practice shoot using Steyr rifles.

3.13 A short tour of 2 Field Logistic Battalion Ammunition Storage Depot was conducted by Warrant Officer Shane Turner. 2 Field Logistic Battalion is one of the units allocated to 3rd Brigade to complement its fighting capabilities.

RAAF Base Townsville

3.14 The Sub-Committee visited RAAF Base Townsville, where Members were met by Wing Commander Graham O'Brien, Officer Commanding Operational Support Group, Wing Commander Geoff Lydeamore, Officer Commanding 323 Air Base Wing and the Officer Commanding 84 Wing, Wing Commander Chris Richards. RAAF Townsville accommodates the Headquarters of Operational Support Group, No 84 Wing, 5th Aviation Regiment, the Combat Survival Training School and 323 Air Base Wing. RAAF Townsville is a well established base with an 8,000 ft runway and access to weapons firing ranges. Its proximity to the city of Townsville does, however, give rise to noise complaints.

323 Air Base Wing and No 84 Wing

3.15 Briefings on 323 Air Base Wing and No 84 Wing were presented by Wing Commander Lydeamore and Wing Commander Richards. Staffed by some 390 service personnel and 33 civilian personnel, the Flights of which 323 Air Base Wing are composed are: Executive Services, Operations Services, Personnel Services, Logistic Services, Facilities Services and No 27 Squadron Reserves (North Queensland Air Training Corps).

3.16 No 84 Wing's mission is to provide safe and effective short range fixed wing transport support to meet the requirements of the ADF. Its role is to enable quick, effective force deployment to the edge of battle and complements air mobile operations, for example

operating into airstrips too soft or short for C130 Hercules air transport aircraft. Although one squadron (35 Squadron) is based in Townsville, 84 Wing has squadrons and detachments located at East Sale (32 Squadron), Amberley (38 Squadron), Pearce, Richmond and Darwin.

3.17 The Sub-Committee was given an update on Project Air 5190, which is looking at the eventual replacement for the Caribou aircraft. Parameters set down for the replacement aircraft are:

- light tactical air transport capability; and
- load requirements (platoon plus 363L pallet and light vehicle).

There are several contenders for selection: Alenia G 222, CN 235 and C27J.

Operational Support Group (OSG)

3.18 Wing Commander O'Brien briefed the Sub-Committee on the role, organisation, equipment locations and mobilisation process of the OSG, a fixed wing RAAF formation tasked with providing specialist airfield operations and airspace control in an area of operations. From the Command Headquarters at RAAF Base Townsville, the Commander is responsible for:

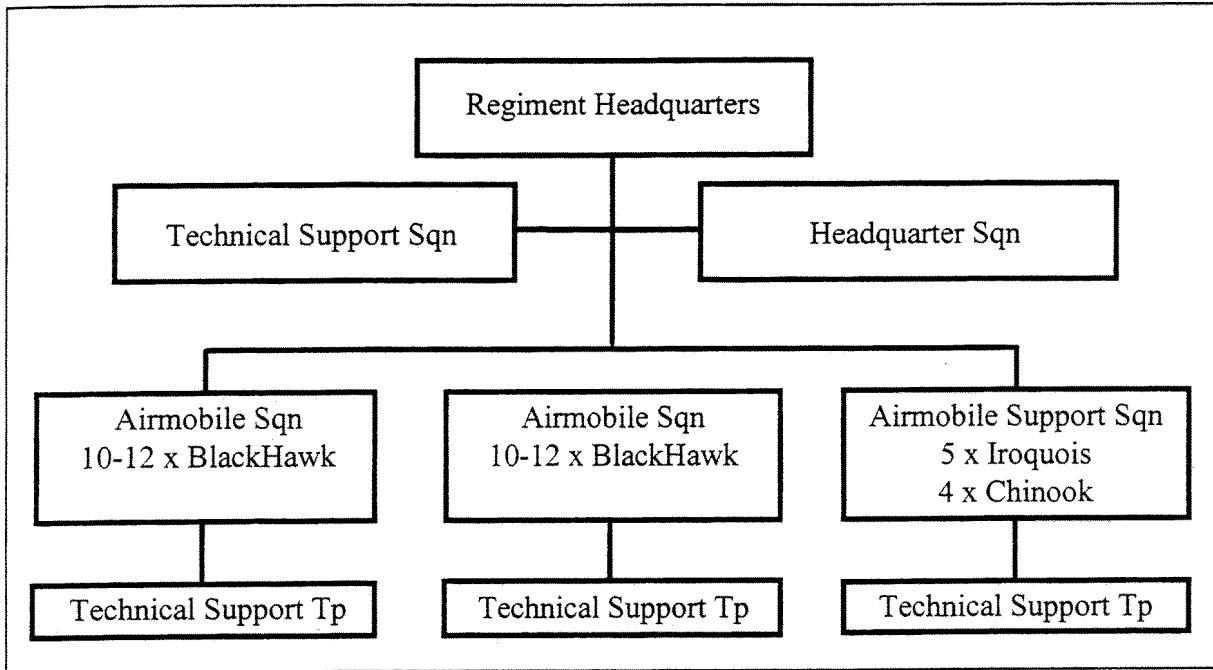
- activating Forward Operating Bases;
- mobilising and deploying contingency Air Base Wings;
- providing airfield ground defence; and
- providing communications.

5th Aviation Regiment

3.19 While at the RAAF Base, the Sub-Committee visited 5th Aviation Regiment (5Avn), which is a lodger unit supporting the ADF's Ready Deployment Force. Lieutenant Colonel Tony Fraser, Commanding Officer 5th Aviation Regiment briefed the Sub-Committee on the formation's history, organisation, structure, personnel and aircraft capabilities. The brief also covered an update on the accident at High Range which involved two Black Hawk helicopters engaged on a Special Air Service Regiment (SAS) training exercise.

3.20 5th Aviation Regiment was established as an Army unit in 1987 and now operates more aircraft than any other operational ADF unit. The Regiment's mission is to provide air mobility and battlefield support to 3rd Brigade, and it works closely on training exercises with the SAS. It also provides assistance to the civilian community in search and rescue and flood relief operations. The Regiment's task is to provide a company group lift capability, that is the lift of an infantry company of 100 personnel and the company's supporting arms such as mortars and field artillery. 5th Aviation Regiment is also required to support counter-terrorist operations. The structure of the Regiment is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Structure of 5th Aviation Regiment



3.21 5th Aviation Regiment operates three types of helicopters: 20 to 24 Black Hawks as battlefield/utility aircraft, five Iroquois as aerial gunships and four Chinooks as medium lift transports. The Regiment occupies around half the area of the Base. Each air mobile squadron is capable of lifting an Infantry Rifle Company, and the 3,620 kg cargo hook can carry 3rd Brigade's artillery equipment. Although an old system, the Iroquois gunship still provides flexible firepower. A night firing capability is being developed, including the use of laser sighting.

3.22 With an establishment of 539 personnel (officers and other ranks), the actual manning level is currently around 482. Vacancies and decreasing experience levels are the main limitations on the Regiment's effectiveness, and increased supervision has been needed. As well, efforts have been made to use civilian relief personnel to help with critical vacancies, for example in numbers of skilled mechanics. As stated in the brief, the School of Army Aviation would be unable to train sufficient pilots/loadmasters without using 5th Aviation Regiment's assets. While pilot training difficulties are persistent, shortages of technical support personnel represent a more difficult problem, due mainly to the high wastage rates which are around 13 per cent.

3.23 In his update on the Black Hawk accident, Lieutenant Colonel Fraser spoke of the significant shock factor, the scale of the tragedy in terms of loss of life and serious injury, the immediate actions taken to counsel and support the service personnel and their families, and the accident investigations which are being conducted. There had been a number of commendations for bravery in the wake of the disaster and the Board of Inquiry set up following the accident arrived in Townsville on the day before the Sub-Committee's visit.

3.24 The Sub-Committee was very impressed with the sensitivity and thoroughness of the efforts made by the senior commanders and their staff to assist the service personnel and their families and the extent to which the morale and effectiveness of the Regiment had largely been re-established. In particular, the Sub-Committee noted the work of Army Community Services in performing its welfare task, including the coordination of legal and other assistance to families. The extent of the sense of personal loss which had affected all Regiment personnel was evident to the Sub-Committee and the Members commended the efforts made to assist families through the Open Day and dedication of a special plaque.

3.25 In discussing the capabilities of the various aircraft, the Sub-Committee was particularly interested to learn about the levels of Black Hawk serviceability after the major maintenance problems experienced in 1995. The briefing was followed by an inspection of all three aircraft types operated by the Regiment.

11th Brigade

3.26 The Sub-Committee visited Jezzine Barracks, Headquarters of 11th Brigade, where briefings had been arranged by the Commander, Brigadier Neil Weekes.

3.27 11th Brigade is the only Reserve formation in an area which stretches from Thursday Island and within 3 kilometres of the Papua-New Guinea border, west to the Queensland border and south to a line joining Mount Isa and Ingham. Townsville does not lie within 11th Brigade's tactical area of operations (TAOR). As part of 1 Division, 11th Brigade is an independent brigade group trained for protective operations. Its regional surveillance task is to examine and monitor civil infrastructure capabilities which would support military operations protecting vital assets. These vital assets include the port of Weipa and RAAF Scherger, Thursday Island, Horn Island, Mount Isa, Cairns, the port of Kurumba, the Prince of Wales Channel, Endeavour Passage, and the Carpentaria Mineral Province.

3.28 11th Brigade has three Army Reserve Battalions and support formations:

- 31 Battalion, Royal Queensland Regiment (RQR), headquartered in Townsville;
- 42 Battalion, RQR, based in Rockhampton;
- 51 Battalion, Far North Queensland Regiment, headquartered in Cairns;
- 141 Signals Squadron, based in Townsville;
- 35 Field Squadron, based in Mount Isa;
- 13 Field Battery, Brisbane; and
- 11th Brigade Administrative Support Battalion, also based in Townsville.

3.29 Proximity to its TAOR is one of the Brigade's major strengths, enabling it to be fully acclimatised and trained for operational conditions. Another benefit of proximity is the ability to draw upon local knowledge, for example, some Brigade soldiers work for the Queensland Department of Main Roads. Although the Brigade has a very diverse recruiting base, problems do arise in the cities and as a result of the low population densities in the regions of the north.

3.30 The vastness and remoteness of the TAOR and the diverse terrain encountered continue to present challenges to the Brigade. The geography and size of the region have

hindered the development of civil infrastructure. The wet season affects Brigade operations for five months of the year. For example, key roads can be damaged by floods, there are many low-level bridges, and the only ports linked by rail are Cairns and Townsville. Although Weipa has a major wharf development, there are no ship repair facilities there. Many regional airfields are C130 capable but have no support facilities, making sustained operations impossible. RAAF Scherger is still under construction and may be completed in 1997.

3.31 Brigade training for operational readiness involves a range of activities:

- Brigade and training group courses;
- individual training to achieve the MLOC Army Individual Readiness Notice, which relates to standards of weapons proficiency, trade qualifications, rank qualifications, health and dental standards;
- Brigade command post exercises;
- Section level operations; and
- Brigade tactical exercises without troops (TEWT).

3.32 Discussions at the conclusion of the briefings covered a range of topics including strategies for encouraging the development of junior leaders, recruitment from regional centres other than Townsville, the limitations imposed by inadequate civil infrastructure and the task of motorising a General Reserve brigade.

SECTION 4

DARWIN

Northern Command (NORCOM)

4.1 The Sub-Committee visited NORCOM Headquarters, where the Commanding Officer, Commodore John Lord, RAN had arranged briefings. Colonel Rob Shoebridge ADC, Chief of Staff/Deputy Commander and Ms Judy Costello, Director Regional Support attended the briefings.

4.2 NORCOM was established in 1988 and is now an operational level joint ADF Headquarters. Lack of infrastructure in the northern sector makes integration of all three services essential to defence planning and strategies. NORCOM's mission was described as being to plan for, and conduct, the defence of northern Australia within the area of responsibility (AR) and to give emphasis to responding to short warning contingencies. The present AR is essentially all of the Northern Territory and the Kimberley District of Western Australia.

4.3 Commodore Lord explained NORCOM's existence in the following terms:

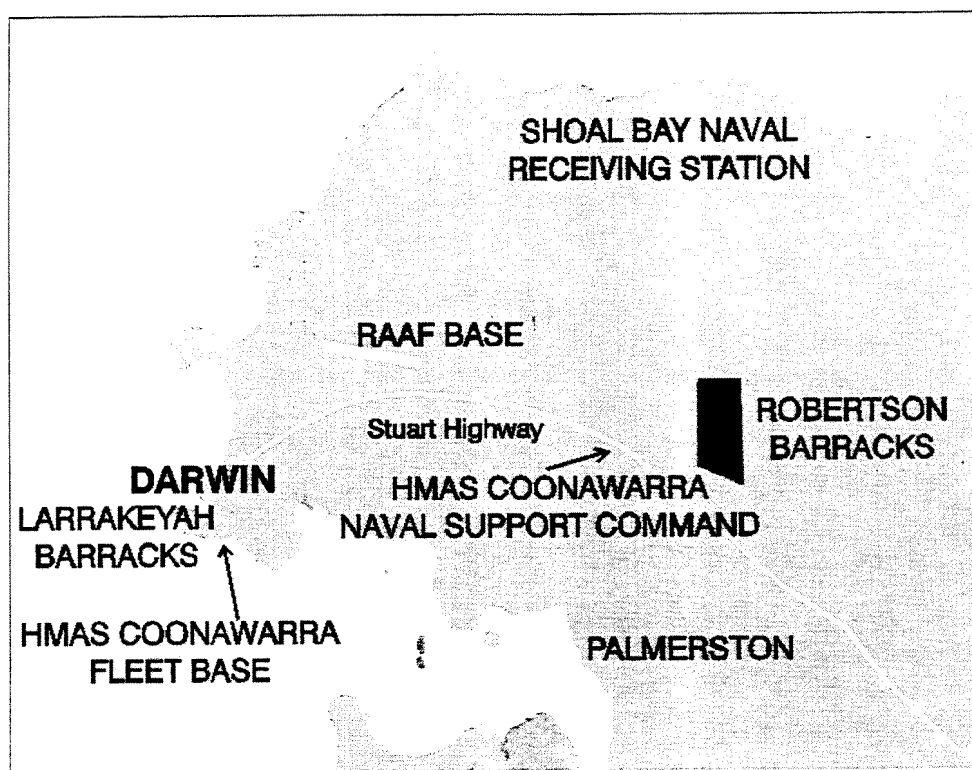
- Forces based in northern Australia support the concept of 'Defence in Depth';
- The joint HQ integrates the sea/air gap with coastal and land surveillance as well as coordinating with civilian inputs;
- The HQ specialises in joint operations in the short warning conflict environment;
- NORCOM develops relationships with regional commands, particularly in Indonesia.

4.4 The challenges facing NORCOM relate to the vast size of its AR and the nature and diversity of the terrain, and consequential demands on communications and mobility in a region with limited communications infrastructure. The diversity of the terrain ranges from mudflats, wetlands, flat plains and plateaus. The vegetation varies between semi-arid desert, mangrove swamps, tropical jungle, open woodland and savanna. The monsoonal climate causes major problems as a result of approximately 2,500 mm rainfall in the northern sectors. For example, six months notice of fuel requirements for exercises is required in order to overcome the problems of fuel distribution during the Wet. Added to these considerations are factors such as the extreme tidal ranges in coastal areas, which create problems for wharfage and troop landing by sea.

4.5 Other challenges facing NORCOM are the sparse population distribution in the region, lack of key rail links to facilities such as RAAF Base Tindal, differing jurisdictions (State and Territory Governments, two police forces and different legal systems, and the Commonwealth Government), and the difficulties of detecting the presence of enemy forces in such a region under short warning conflict scenarios.

4.6 Planning for future defence of northern Australia has to take account of all the above factors and may involve a restructuring of NORCOM to assume an expanded area of operations with new command control arrangements. It will report to the Commander Australian Theatre and will exercise operational responsibility for the entire Joint Forces Area of Operations in peace and conflict. The likely future area of operations for NORCOM might double the present AR, which at 1.8 million square kilometres is already equal to the size of Western Europe. The future area of operations might comprise Queensland and the Northern Territory above 19° south, and the Kimberley and Pilbara regions of Western Australia. The concept of 'layered surveillance' was explained to the Sub-Committee.

Figure 7: Darwin Area Bases



4.7 By the year 2001 the Army will have approximately 2,500 soldiers in Darwin, or just under 10 per cent of total strength. The Navy will base two new hydrographic vessels in Darwin from 1998/99, bringing an additional 120 service personnel plus dependants. If Malaysia and Australia decide to buy the Australian designed Joint Patrol Vessel (or Offshore Patrol Vessel) to replace the Fremantle Class patrol boats, all of the Australian vessels will probably be based in Darwin from 1999, resulting in an additional 420 sailors. These projections have many implications for population growth and age/status profiles in Darwin, as well as the effect on the Northern Territory economy. At present there are 2,700 Defence personnel, 270 Defence civilians and 3,400 dependants based in Darwin. By the year 2001, these numbers will have grown to 4,000 Defence personnel, 350 Defence civilians and 7,750 dependants. Direct and indirect Defence expenditure for salaries, operating costs and capital expenditure in the local area during 1995/96 totalled around \$260 million, representing some

10 per cent of the gross (Northern Territory) product. Expenditure distribution is estimated to be in the order of \$1.6 million per week in the construction sector and \$2 to \$2.5 million in the consumer/business sector. These levels of expenditure are expected to be maintained up to the year 2005 and the progressive military buildup in the north will also have significant impacts on the employment market in the Darwin and Katherine areas principally.¹

4.8 Future developments covered in the brief included the Army Presence in the North (APIN Project), the continued development of RAAF Base Tindal and construction of RAAF Base Scherger. In discussions, the Sub-Committee raised a number of further issues, including:

- coordination of surveillance effort across the whole of northern Australia, and the role of Coastwatch and Defence patrol boat operations;
- increased incidence of illegal fishing in Australian waters;
- the resource implications of combating illegal traffic and the capabilities of the Fremantle class patrol boats;
- environmental issues affecting northern defence planning and the conduct of exercises such as *Kangaroo 95*; and
- lessons learned from major ADF combined and joint exercises such as *Kangaroo 95*, including the concept of a single command and control structure for northern Australia.

Army Presence in the North

4.9 Lieutenant Colonel Peter Tweedie, Commanding Officer Darwin Logistic Battalion briefed the Sub-Committee on the Army Presence in the North (APIN) Project. APIN had its beginnings in 1987 with the tabling by the Minister for Defence of a policy information paper entitled *The Defence of Australia*, outlining the Government's long-term policy as the basis for defence planning. The paper announced the relocation of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment from Holsworthy near Sydney to a new site on the eastern outskirts of Darwin (now known as Robertson Barracks) as the first stage of what has become a major program to concentrate Army resources in the north of Australia. Essentially, the policy paper outlined the development of mobile Army ground forces able to defeat enemy incursions in remote regions of Australia and to sustain operations away from logistic support centres. In 1991 the Defence Force Structure Review was announced, which called for an even larger Army presence in the Darwin region. Under the Review process, an Armoured Regiment, logistic support elements and an aviation squadron would move to Darwin by 1995, followed by a mechanised infantry battalion by 1998 and combat and logistic support units.

4.10 When completed, APIN will see the relocation of some 2,300 soldiers and 2,600 family members to Darwin by 2001. For the construction industry, this represents a significant challenge to develop practical, lasting solutions to housing a major influx of

1 *APIN: Army Presence in the North*, Department of Defence, 1994, pp. 5, 10, 13.

personnel and equipment into some of the harshest conditions in Australia. The ADF is now the third largest contributor to the Northern Territory economy, spending around \$5 million per week, excluding salaries, on goods and services such as fuel, electricity and food as part of the increased Army presence in the north.² The demand for all types of infrastructure and services such as transportation and housing has placed strains on skills and experience in the construction industry. In 1995/96 expenditure on APIN Stage 1 exceeded \$140 million, providing new or additional facilities for:

- HQ 1st Brigade;
- 1st Armoured Regiment;
- 104th Signal Squadron;
- 161st Reconnaissance Squadron (Australian Army Aviation Corps);
- HQ Army Support Unit, Darwin;
- 7th Training Corps; and
- 2nd Cavalry Regiment.

4.11 Stage 2 is estimated to cost around \$240 million, providing facilities for 1st Brigade Administrative Support Battalion, 1st Combat Engineer Regiment, 103rd Medium Battery, 5th/7th Battalion RAR (Mechanised) and logistic support elements. Expenditure by the Defence Housing Authority in Darwin is additional to spending on the APIN Project.

4.12 The Sub-Committee learned that Darwin is a high cost centre for military operations, costing more to station soldiers there than in similar bases in the south. It was stated that additional costs in Darwin were approximately \$15,000 to \$16,000 per soldier per year. For example, conditions of service provide for remote locality leave and district allowances, and there are increased costs associated with location of major maintenance facilities at bases in the south.

4.13 The social impacts of the APIN Project have been recognised in the planning process, due in part to lessons learned from the Townsville experience, including wide consultation with Federal, State and local governments and a phased approach to the transfer program. The transfer of Army personnel will increase the number of males in the age 18 to 20 years group, adding to the existing age and gender imbalance in the Darwin district. The impacts on education, spouse employment and health services have been studied. Health and medical problems have been minimised by providing advice to transferees on acclimatisation to heat and humidity and methods of coping with isolation and remoteness.

4.14 Only single accommodation is provided at Robertson Barracks, and the decision to disperse Defence housing for married personnel throughout Darwin was taken as a deliberate move to integrate defence personnel into the wider Darwin community. Environmental safeguards were built into all stages of the APIN Project and extended to the development of regional training areas such as the Mt Bunday Training Area, which borders on the Kakadu National Park. Use of private land for training purposes, including land owned by Aboriginal communities, has been subject to access and lease conditions negotiated with owners. Sacred sites on Larrakeyah Barracks have been carefully preserved.

2 *Weekend Australian*, 10 August 1996, p 5.

4.15 Following the discussions, the Sub-Committee inspected the impressive new NORCOM Command Centre at Larrakeyah Barracks, the first integrated command centre in Australia. From its beginnings in 1988, HQ NORCOM has developed into an effective joint force headquarters, with appointments of Commanding Officer rotated between the three Services.

North West Mobile Force

4.16 The Sub-Committee visited the Regional Headquarters of the North West Mobile Force (NORFORCE) at Larrakeyah Barracks, where Major Mark Elliott, Operations Officer NORFORCE briefed the Members on the role, unique characteristics and future directions of the regiment and screened a recruitment video which illustrated the links with Aboriginal communities and local regions in which the formation operates. NORFORCE is a high readiness formation that is maintained, manned, equipped and trained to conduct successful surveillance operations under the command of a joint force headquarters. Its tasks include surveillance and reconnaissance operations, collection and verification of military geographical information, and liaison with other units and with civil authorities. The regiment aims to conduct at least one operational patrol activity per month, per squadron. As at May 1996, NORFORCE had a complement of 540 personnel, including 52 full-time staff, in 34 locations covering an area of operations covering 1.8 million square kilometres.

4.17 The major strengths of NORFORCE were stated as its levels of manning and equipment, its strong links with Aboriginal and other remote communities, the levels of local knowledge obtained and the localised nature of its operations. NORFORCE is not intended to be a deployment force: it recruits, trains and operates in local areas. Recruitment in larger regional centres such as Kununurra and Pilbara has been more difficult because of the constraints imposed by the regional employment market, for example the shift requirements of the mining companies. Challenges presented by the nature of the regiment's operations include cultural awareness training, raising the literacy and numeracy skills of Aboriginal recruits, maintaining links with scattered employers and family/community support mechanisms, and health problems of young Aboriginal soldiers in some locations, for example Bathurst Island.

HMAS COONAWARRA Naval Support Command

4.18 The Sub-Committee visited HMAS Coonawarra Naval Support Command, where the Commanding Officer, Captain Andy Mackinnon ADC provided Members with a briefing followed by a short tour of inspection. The primary roles of Naval Support Command are:

- strategic, operational and tactical communications support to the Fleet;
- maintenance/support for six Fremantle Class patrol boats and one LCH (Landing Craft Heavy);
- logistic support to major exercises, RAN and foreign ship visits;
- maintenance of strategic fuel stocks; and
- administrative support for the Navy in the North.

4.19 The total number of billets stationed at Naval Support Command and the Fleet Base is currently 735, comprising 567 Permanent Naval Force (PNF, 409 shore-based, 158 at

sea), 70 Australian Naval Reserve, and 108 civilian. Of these, the shortfall is approximately 13 per cent, mostly PNF personnel.

4.20 Key Navy issues highlighted by Captain Mackinnon included:

- the impending decision on development of the existing Fleet Base or the option of using the new East Arm port facilities;
- enhanced Fleet support capacity to meet increasing maritime activity in the north, including combined exercises last year which involved vessels from Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and Britain as well as the RAN;
- possible Navy management of Larrakeyah Barracks, if Army units except HQ NORCOM and NORFORCE move to Robertson Barracks;
- problems of supporting large concentrations of Defence shipping with the modest assets and facilities currently available;
- accommodation, housing and furniture requirements and remote locality factors for Navy personnel, including back to back postings options; and
- the relatively small impact of the CSP on port services, cleaning and ground maintenance activities and personnel.

4.21 In terms of future directions for HMAS COONAWARRA, Captain Mackinnon informed the Sub-Committee of the intention to base two new hydrographic ships in Darwin from 1998/99 and the possible replacement program for the Fremantle Class patrol boats.

4.22 Discussion following the briefing centred on the limited port infrastructure and heavy commercial activity in Darwin, the steady improvement of the modest Navy support assets in Darwin, limitations on major warship visits imposed by the availability of only one commercial tug in port and ongoing shortfalls of personnel in key areas. Other matters discussed were the roles and capabilities of patrol vessels in peacetime surveillance work and in times of conflict, the implications of basing larger Navy assets in Darwin as part of the regionalisation concept and the standards of accommodation provided for both married and single sailors on the base.

Fleet Base, HMAS COONAWARRA

4.23 The Sub-Committee travelled to the Fleet Base adjacent to Larrakeyah Barracks, where the Members inspected the maintenance and wharfage facilities and were given a tour of *HMAS Wollongong*, a Fremantle Class patrol boat, by the Executive Officer, Lieutenant Commander Paul Radford. Members were able to observe maintenance work on the vessel while it was dry docked and to gain an appreciation of the patrol boat's capabilities and living conditions for the crew.

APIN Project

4.24 En route to Robertson Barracks, Major Mark Holmes, Officer Commanding Development, Darwin Logistics Battalion, briefed the Sub-Committee on Stages 1 and 2 of the APIN Project. Upon arrival at the Barracks, Major Holmes conducted a 'windscreen tour' of the new and more established facilities and explained the major construction work in progress. The Sub-Committee was met at the Officers' Mess by Lieutenant Colonel Tweedie, who explained the concept of central Messes and recreation facilities for all formations at Robertson Barracks.

4.25 Robertson Barracks is all new construction and caters for the majority of the relocated units under the APIN Project. The use of the same building styles, material and detailed fittings already in place for the relocation of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment has reduced design development costs and construction times as well as optimising environmental practices previously adopted.³ Other cost-saving features of the Barracks are a common parade ground and sports fields doubling as secondary parade grounds. Only single personnel actually live on base.

4.26 The Sub-Committee was very impressed with the standard of construction at the Barracks and the levels of accommodation and amenity provided by the APIN Project. Examples of innovative planning and design were observed by the Sub-Committee, including the use of interlocking pavers instead of expanses of reinforced concrete for vehicle traffic areas. These have proven effective in withstanding weather conditions and heavy vehicle traffic on the base. Duplication of some facilities such as vehicle washdown and fuel supply areas means not only that both can be used in times of surge demand but the smaller or the larger of the facilities can be used for other purposes such as pumping waste water. The new Headquarters of Darwin Logistic Battalion presently under construction was an example of the types of office accommodation developed at the Barracks, featuring open plan design, maximum use of natural light and ergonomic fitout.

4.27 Overall, the Sub-Committee was impressed with the high quality living standards for Services personnel and the functional design features displayed at the Barracks, and projected for Stage II. In the Sub-Committee's view, such amenities are essential to the successful implementation of Australia's modern defence planning for the northern sector. The continued development of the APIN Project represents an enormous investment in Australia's northern defence network.

4.28 The select tender process developed for the APIN Project has meant that significant savings in time and costs have been achieved by avoiding the full tendering process for each contract. Dividing the major projects into smaller packages has benefited the local construction industry by enabling smaller contractors to bid successfully for segments of larger contracts, for example office fitout, fencing and landscaping. In practice, the large contractors have been actively encouraged to subcontract to local firms and the result is a strong surge in the construction industry for the Darwin area.

3 *APIN: Army Presence in the North*, p 14.

4.29 The Sub-Committee was informed of initiatives taken to provide off base Defence-sponsored child care facilities as a further expression of the policy to integrate Service personnel into the civilian community and to enhance the amenities available to Darwin residents.

Defence Housing

4.30 The Defence Housing Authority (DHA) provides Defence personnel and their families with appropriate housing. DHA commenced operations in Darwin in 1988 with a stock of around 800 Defence dwellings built mainly in the wake of Cyclone Tracey. The Authority's initial tasks were to upgrade some of the housing, including improvement of cyclone rating, and to provide replacement housing where the stock was not suitable for upgrading. On base programs are now almost concluded and, with the exception of finalising some upgrades on the RAAF Base, all future housing will be within the community, located as close to Defence bases as possible.

4.31 The APIN Project requires a rapidly expanding stock of housing in and around Darwin, which has created a significant challenge to the Authority to acquire sufficient suitable residential land in convenient locations. An innovative approach was taken in establishing a joint venture between DHA and Delfin Property Group for the development of residential sites at 'Fairway Waters' at Palmerston, on the south eastern outskirts of Darwin. Over the ten year life of the joint venture, DHA is committed to take up 35 per cent of the residential blocks for Defence housing needs, the remainder being sold to private purchasers. The Authority's new policy is to build houses in Darwin to standards appropriate to Defence family needs and then to onsell to private investors with a guarantee that DHA will lease the property for at least nine years. This strategy ensures the Authority has the type of houses it needs and releases the capital funding that DHA requires to expand its stock in Darwin. In eight years of operating in Darwin, the Authority has injected \$27.3 million per annum into the local economy, as a result of which there are over 65 separate Darwin firms under contract to the Authority. In 1995/96 spending on maintenance in Darwin reached \$3.3 million.⁴

Opening of 'Fairway Waters'

4.32 The Sub-Committee was fortunate to be in Darwin for the official opening of 'Fairway Waters' by the Hon Nick Dondas AM, Member for the Northern Territory and the Hon Mike Reed MLA, Acting Chief Minister and Minister for Lands, Planning and the Environment. The Chairman of the DHA, Mr John Graham AM, and Mr Chris Banks AM, Managing Director of Delfin Property Group, also participated in the opening ceremony. After the ceremony, the Sub-Committee inspected a range of Defence houses on the estate and noted the quality of construction and features which reflected community standards for the tropics.

4.33 There are a number of similar joint ventures with private developers throughout Australia, all of which enable the DHA to undertake large scale developments drawing on

4 DHA, Briefing Note: *Defence Housing in Darwin*, 5 August 1996, pp 1-2.

private sector expertise. These major projects facilitate the integration of Defence families into residential communities.

RAAF Base Darwin

The Sub-Committee visited RAAF Base Darwin, where Members were welcomed to the Officers' Mess by Group Captain Brian Kavanagh, Officer Commanding 321 Air Base Wing, who hosted a lunch attended by Captain Mackinnon, Colonel Shoebridge, Ms Costello and the President of the Mess Committee.

Air Operations and Short Warning Conflict

4.34 Group Captain Kavanagh briefed the Sub-Committee on air operations in the north and the response to low level threat at short notice. He explained the importance of control of the air in modern warfare and the development of the 'bare base' concept which enables elements of the RAAF to be forward deployed into remote areas of the north. Forward deployment to our most likely areas of operation requires prepared bases, some infrastructure in place and long lines of logistic supply. A string of air bases have been constructed in strategic areas across the north of Australia, consisting of three manned bases (at Darwin, Tindal and Townsville) and 3 bare bases (RAAF Learmonth [near Exmouth], RAAF Curtin [Derby] and RAAF Scherger, still under construction [Weipa]). These bases will allow for the projection of air power well beyond Australia's boundaries. The established bare bases can be activated, fully manned, resourced and defended in response to short warning conflict, although only Learmonth is considered to be a 'mature' base.

Darwin-Tindal Baseline

4.35 The bases in Darwin and Tindal are both necessary to the defence of Darwin as a strategic target and both are permanently manned, being operated by No 321 and 322 Air Base Wings respectively. While Tindal is an operational base with permanent air assets, Darwin is a support base because it has no permanently assigned air assets and has no passive defence capability. This situation will be rectified when the Base Plan for RAAF Base Darwin is implemented in the near future.

No 321 Air Base Wing

4.36 RAAF Base Darwin is a long-standing Defence establishment, some of its buildings dating from just before World War 2. The Base occupies 1200 hectares of land surrounded by 22 kilometres of fenceline. Its role is to act as an ADF base for the defence of northern Australia and to act as a forward operating base. The Base has 420 personnel, including 40 civilians. It accommodates a civil international airport and full air traffic control services operated by the RAAF.

4.37 As the administrative unit for RAAF Base Darwin, No 321 Air Base Wing provides support for deploying and redeploying units of the RAAF and allied air forces and for five lodger units on the Base. The services provided include air movements, refuelling, ordnance storage and handling, air traffic control, aircraft parking and security, victualling and messing. These services are mainly provided in the course of supporting joint or combined operations and exercises such as *Pitch Black* and *Kangaroo 95*.

4.38 Air defence operations out of Darwin have several constraints, including vulnerability to pre-emptive attack, lack of early warning systems and long lines of communications and supply. The Base Modernisation Program is attempting to remedy outdated or inadequate facilities at the Base, such as replacing the ATC tower, installing new radar systems, constructing a quick reaction facility for up to three aircraft on two minutes alert and an underground operations/technical facility. These and other projects are planned for completion in the next three years at a cost of \$50 million.

4.39 During the briefing the Sub-Committee discussed a number of issues including:

- urban encroachment around the Base by the city of Darwin, and noise complaints;
- the future of RAAF Base Darwin as an integral part of the defence network in the north;
- the impact of the wet season on air defence operations; and
- cooperative arrangements for supporting Singapore Air Force operations out of Darwin.

4.40 A 'windscreen tour' of RAAF Base Darwin concluded the Sub-Committee's familiarisation program of key Defence establishments in Queensland and the Northern Territory.

SECTION 5

CONCLUSIONS

5.1 The Sub-Committee over the years has found that visits to Australian Defence Force units are valuable as Members have the opportunity to meet with ADF personnel, both formally and informally, and are able to familiarise themselves with the establishments and operations of the ADF.

5.2 Defence Force personnel appreciate the visits and the opportunity to meet with Defence Sub-Committee Members. This interaction has great value not only for Members but also for the Parliament as a whole.

5.3 It is the Sub-Committee's intention to visit all or most of the major ADF units during the life of the current Parliament and the Sub-Committee looks forward to the continued cooperation of the Department of Defence in facilitating these visits.

5.4 As noted earlier in this report, the Members of the Sub-Committee were impressed by the positive focus of 5th Aviation Regiment following the Black Hawk accident and their determination to recover and move forward. The Sub-Committee intends to revisit 5 Avn Regiment and to visit the Special Air Service Regiment during the life of the Parliament.

5.5 During the Sub-Committee's tour there were several occasions where the proposed army restructure was raised in briefings or subsequent discussions. This restructure will demonstrably affect force structure, equipment and training and the Sub-Committee looks forward to receiving a full and open briefing on the proposal in the near future.

Ian Sinclair, MP
Chairman