

# The Stand-up Table

## Commentary, Opinion and Rebuttal

On “Competency-Based Management at DND”...

*Major Roy Thomas (Ret'd) writes...*

A recent *Maple Leaf* piece on competency-based management<sup>1</sup> sparked concern about a topic which I think should be aired in the pages of the Stand-up Table and give cause for debate in the Army.

“Combat can’t be taught-ya gotta learn it for yourself” is how John P. Irwin concludes his personal story of being a teenage tank gunner in combat as the Allies closed in on Germany.<sup>2</sup> The big arrows on the small maps of our military histories may obscure the truth of those final days of March and April 1945. Combat was intense where Irwin fought. Many of his buddies died, more in his own battalion in those last few months than I suspect that the US Army lost in the most recent combat phase of the Second Gulf War. (I’m not talking about the so-called peace support operational phase currently underway.) I should add that Mr. Irwin, or rather “Dr” Irwin, shed the trauma of his wartime experiences and went on to become a professor of philosophy at an American college in Pennsylvania.

Irwin’s anecdotal evidence made me think of the veterans that I knew when I was first commissioned. Among these were Lieutenant-Colonel Milbraith, of the Strathconas, a trooper in 1939, recipient of a battlefield commission in 1943; Major Burger, with the South Alberta Regiment during D-Day but with the Straths when I met him; Major Nick Nicolay, D-Day troop leader, Fort Garry Horse; Major Stu Corsan, Second World War infantry and then member of the Royal Canadian Dragoons; and others. I wondered what they would say about the success of competency-based management (CBM) at DND.

The *Maple Leaf* article noted how “DND has made significant strides through initiatives like Competency-Based Management to ensure that its workforce has the necessary competencies to achieve DND’s current and future business objectives.” It made me wonder what were

the business objectives of Dr Irwin as he struggled to survive combat, which he said never seemed to end.

How do you measure the competency of people to endure fatigue and even more fatigue to fight effectively, as both the retreating Germans and the advancing Americans seemed to do? Will CBM workshops inspire such performances under fire? Indeed, any competent judge of the situation in 1945 would have gauged that further resistance by the Germans was futile by any business standards or indeed any military appreciation. Somehow that message didn’t get through to some of the people actually pulling the triggers.

Obviously, business objectives and CBM have their role if they result in bringing bigger battalions and better guns to bear on the opponent in whatever spectrum of war Canadians find themselves. CBM workshops, if they contribute to our tank gunners or soldiers winning in combat, are indeed welcome. Otherwise to me, as a simple retired soldier, there seems to be a disconnect between the conclusions drawn by John Irwin and the self-congratulatory piece on Competency-Based Management that appeared in the *Maple Leaf*.

*What do you think?...*



### ENDNOTES

1. “Competency-Based Management at DND,” *Maple Leaf*, Vol.6, No.23 (18 June 2003), p. 15.
2. John P. Irwin, *Another River, Another Town: A Tank Gunner Comes of Age in Combat—1945* (New York and Toronto: Random House, 2002), p.176.

**Commentary on “A Self-Evident Truth: Special Operations Forces, Intelligence and Asymmetric Warfare” by Lieutenant-Colonel Bernd Horn, *The Army Doctrine and Training Bulletin*, Volume 5, No. 4 (Winter 2002-2003).**

*Major Rohan Maxwell, currently serving with the OSCE Mission in Sarajevo, writes...*

As Lieutenant-Colonel Horn ably demonstrates, special Operations forces (SOF) are very effective under the right circumstances. For this very reason, they should not be frittered away on tasks that conventional troops could execute equally well. While SOF can certainly undertake

all of the missions described in this article, I believe that their use should not be considered unless it has been clearly established that conventional forces cannot do the job. This may seem yet another “self-evident truth,” but there are sometimes non-rational forces at work. For example, politicians may choose SOF over conventional forces because they see SOF as “sexier”; within the military, SOF may lobby for missions to justify their budgets or their continued existence or simply to keep their highly trained troops from getting bored. No matter how large a country’s armed forces, SOF are not numerous, and they are not cheap-not on a cost-per-trained-soldier basis. For

this reason, conventional forces should be used wherever possible, and SOF hoarded for the tasks that only they can undertake with a reasonable expectation of success. Any discussion of specific tasks would of course depend on the situation, but I offer the following as food for thought.

- ◆ **Training of Foreign (Conventional) Troops.** If secrecy is not an issue, why use scarce SOF to train foreign troops? Well-trained conventional troops could do the same job. This is particularly true of overt, long-term security assistance programmes.
- ◆ **Civil Affairs.** Many civilian international organizations react unfavourably to the use of SOF in a civil affairs capacity. Some of

this dissension is undoubtedly rooted in the oft-cited “culture clash” between military personnel and civilians, but some of it is legitimately based on the fact that SOF use of unconventional attire, and civilian pattern vehicles can blur the line between soldier and civilian, particularly if someone is looking for a pretext to justify the shooting of civilian humanitarian workers.

- ◆ **Coalition Support.** As with the training of foreign troops, this is not necessarily an SOF task. Conventional troops could train coalition partners in tactics and techniques and provide communications. This is the case even if the “partners” are somewhat unconventional

themselves—for example, it didn’t necessarily have to be SOF with the Kurds in Northern Iraq.

- ◆ **Humanitarian De-mining Activities.** SOF can certainly teach the techniques of mine / Unexploded ordnance location and disposal; however, so can conventional troops. Neither group is particularly well suited to implementing large-scale humanitarian de-mining programmes, but they can certainly teach the core skills.



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Reply to Dr. Sean Maloney’s commentary in *The Army Doctrine and Training Bulletin*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Summer 2003.

The reviewer Mark Gaillard writes:

In his commentary on my review of his book “*Canada and UN Peacekeeping—Cold War by Other Means, 1945—1970*,” the author, Dr Maloney takes issue with my contention that Lester B. Pearson, not Major General E.L.M. Burns, was the decisive actor in the creation of the United Nations Emergency Force. His view as stated in his book, is that “...the credit for the creation of UNEF was somewhat misplaced.” The word “misplace” is defined in the *Oxford English Reference Dictionary* as “to put in the wrong place” and “to bestow (affections, confidence, etc.) on an inappropriate object.”

In his commentary, Dr Maloney goes further than he did in his book, stating categorically that “Mike Pearson did not invent UN peacekeeping” and that “Mike Pearson did not invent UNEF.”

I do not have the benefit of an extensive library of reference material on this subject, so to learn more about this, I re-read the relevant portion of the “official history” of UN peace-keeping: *The Blue Helmets—A Review of United Nations Peace-keeping*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.<sup>1</sup> Here I read that:

*In October 1956, the United Nations faced a major crisis... The Organization reacted to the crisis with speed and firmness and, to overcome it, conceived a new form of peacekeeping and set up its first peace-keeping force. This historic development was made possible mainly through the vision, resourcefulness and determination of Secretary Dag Hammarskjold and Mr. Lester Pearson, who was at the time Secretary for External Affairs of Canada...*

*The Israeli forces crossed the border on the morning of 29 October, advancing in three columns towards El Arish, Ismailia and the Mitla Pass. In the early hours of 30 October, the Chief of Staff of UNTSO, Major-General E.L.M. Burns (Canada) called for a cease-fire and requested Israel to pull its forces back to its side of the border... On 31 October, France and the United Kingdom launched an air attack against targets in Egypt, which was followed shortly by a landing of their troops near Port Said at the northern end of the [Suez] Canal...*

*The first emergency session of the General Assembly... was convened on 1 November 1956. In the early hours of the next day, the General Assembly adopted, on the proposal of the United States, resolution 997(ES-I), calling for an immediate cease-fire, the withdrawal of all forces behind the armistice lines and re-opening of the Canal. The Secretary-General was requested to observe and report promptly on compliance to the Security Council and to the General Assembly, for such further action as those bodies might deem appropriate in accordance with the United Nations Charter.*

*The resolution was adopted by 64 votes to 5, with 6 abstentions. The dissenters were Australia and New Zealand, in addition to France, Israel and the United Kingdom. In explaining Canada’s abstention, Lester Pearson stated that the resolution did not provide for, along with the cease-fire and withdrawal of troops, any steps to be taken by the United Nations for a peace settlement, without which a cease-fire would only be of a temporary nature at best.*

*Before the session, Mr. Pearson had had extensive discussions with the Secretary-General and he felt that it might be necessary to establish some sort of United Nations police force to help resolve the crisis. Mr. Pearson submitted to the General Assembly, when it*

*convened the next morning, a draft resolution on the establishment of an emergency international United Nations force.*

*The Canadian proposal was adopted by the General Assembly on the same morning and became resolution 998 (ES-I) of 4 November 1956, by which the Assembly:*

*Requests, as a matter of priority, the Secretary-General to submit to it within forty-eight hours a plan for setting up, with the consent of the nations concerned, of an emergency international United Nations Force to secure and supervise the cessation of hostilities...*

*The voting was 57 to none, with 19 abstentions. Egypt, France, Israel, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union and Eastern European States were among the abstainers.*

*Immediately after the Assembly authorized the Force, the Chief of Command, General Burns, who was in Jerusalem at the time, selected a group of UNTSO observers who began planning of the new Force. The Secretary-General approached the Governments of the potential participating countries to obtain the required military personnel.*

From this recitation of the events of early November 1956, the editors of *The Blue Helmets* concluded that:

*During the first emergency special session, the General Assembly had adopted a total of seven resolutions. By these resolutions, the Assembly gave the Secretary-General the authority to bring about the cessation of hostilities in Egypt and the withdrawal of foreign troops from Egyptian territory with the assistance of a new type of peace-keeping machinery, the United Nations peace-keeping force. The idea of such a force,*

*which was to have such an impact on the work of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security, came initially from Mr. Lester Pearson. Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold made it a practical reality...*

From this account, it seems clear that Lester B. Pearson came up with or at least brought the idea of an emergency international force to New York; he abstained in the cease-fire resolution vote in order to secure authority for the UNEF; he convinced the Secretary-General and other nations to support this idea; he drafted the text of the UNEF resolution; he introduced it as the Canadian proposal to the General Assembly; and then he worked to ensure that the resolution was adopted by the General Assembly with the widest possible support. If any one person can be said to have conceived of or “invented” the “new form of peace-keeping,” the UNEF, it was Lester B. Pearson.

The credit for the creation of the UNEF has been rightly assigned. As historian J.L. Granatstein put it:

*Before 1956, UN and other peacekeeping operations were modest efforts, of limited success, and carried out by relatively modest groups of observers; after 1956, peacekeeping was often a large-scale operation, regrettably also of limited success, and carried out by infantry, armoured reconnaissance and service troops, as well as air force personnel, sometimes in combat roles. The difference is marked, and much of the change had occurred because of Pearson's initiative, diplomatic skill and assessment of the need at Suez.<sup>2</sup>*

Why is it necessary then to “seriously reassess the relative importance of Lester B. Pearson in the development of UN peace-keeping?” It is true that General Burns and the other senior military personnel who were involved should be given due recognition for conceptualizing and implementing Canadian peace-keeping operations in Suez and elsewhere. But in recognising their contribution, does it follow that Pearson’s accomplishment and the recognition of his contribution has to be diminished or denied?

As I noted in my review, Dr Maloney’s book is timely. It convincingly sets the historical record straight as to the actual political, strategic and military reasons for Canadian participation in UN peacekeeping operations. I recommend Dr. Maloney’s book to everyone who is interested in the history and the practice of Canadian foreign policy and UN peace-keeping. His insight has certainly helped me in my work as a Canadian foreign service officer. A minor difference of opinion over Lester B. Pearson’s place in that history in no way diminishes the importance and worth of this book.

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## ENDNOTES

1. United Nations, *The Blue Helmets—A Review of United Nations Peace-keeping*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1996), pp.35-40.
2. J.L. Granatstein, *Peacekeeping: Did Canada Make A Difference? And What Difference Did Peacekeeping Make To Canada?* in J. English and N. Hillmer, eds., *Making a Difference? Canada's Foreign Policy in a Changing World Order* (Toronto: Lester Publishing Limited, 1996), p. 222.

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**On Colonel Mike Cessford on Lieutenant-Colonel Chuck Oliviero (Ret'd) on the Canadian Army in WWII.**

*Bill McAndrew writes...*

It is nice to see the two Colonels sniping away on what? Is it the fighting abilities of Canadian soldiers? Who or what won WWII? Tactical doctrine? Apples or oranges?

It is especially gratifying that they use the Staff College's battlefield studies as their platform.

Cessford seems to have missed Oliviero's point: the nature and role of doctrine. Cessford recalls John Dougan's brilliant leadership at San Lorenzo. On that same study, I recall Dougan saying how disappointed and frustrated he was when his company's successes at San Lorenzo and earlier at Monte Luro had not been exploited. The Germans were there for the taking, he told us, but he waited in vain for a senior officer to come up front to see and seize the opportunity. The consequence of inaction was that the Germans gained time to regroup and the Canadians spent the next

several months fifty kilometres up the road in the swamps of the Po River.

There is no doubting the fighting abilities of those Canadian soldiers, some of whom were being recycled prematurely from convalescent depots. But was their guiding doctrine as good as they were? Oliviero raises some pertinent questions that may account for John Dougan's dismay. Why didn't a senior officer appear, look and act? Was he looking at the report line for the next tactical bound for the next limited objective conforming to the plan? Were commanders and staffs trained flexibly to exploit opportunities or to pause and regroup after each tactical success? If so, was that a doctrinal limitation?

The compilers of a 1944 army training manual thought so: "Our own tactical methods are thorough and methodical but slow and cumbersome," it

concluded. "In consequence our troops fight well in defence and our set-piece attacks are usually successful, but it is not unfair to say that through lack of enterprise in exploitation we seldom reap the full benefits of them."

These and similar universal questions of men in combat formed the core of discussions during the old Staff College battlefield studies. It's a pity that the Army cashed out of that professional investment.

