

Hastie, Andrew, CAPT. SASR Rotation IXX and MRTF2.

Searching for historical reference point for looking at Afghanistan. Vietnam was helpful to me because I realised that in the absence of a strategy your metric becomes attritional and kill count. And then some of the bizarre paradoxes at the heart of SOTG having two regiments in competition with each other for assets four days on and then four days off and then parcelling out helicopters. It was just madness. It sounded like - my view is there is no such thing as a war of choice - right. War should be a last resort. If you are going to war it is because there is no other option. Your aim should be to win it and even at a tactical level we had a whole bunch of constraints on us.

My grandfather was awarded the DFC during world war two. He was awarded the DFC for courage under fire. A wireless air gunner on a Catalina on 31 March 1945 two Australian airmen were downed and his aircraft was detailed to rescue them. He came in under fire and he sustained a heavy gunshot wound. He held on and just made it back. That loomed very large in my life as a young kid. And I had always been intrigued by military service as a rite of passage and then I went to university. I was hoping to be a journalist and September 11 came around. I just remember feeling I should be involved somehow and thought about the Army.

Of course everyone remembers the SAS being deployed in 01/02 and that was very much on my mind and became a goal. Then seven years after going to ADFA I did selection in 2010, which incidentally was after the action at Tizak.

I always saw the SAS as the peak of soldiering and while I am in the Army I want to be doing the very best I can do and leading Australia's most proficient soldiers.

Op Lund Safar. (surprised at detail I had forgotten) - very factual faithful rendering - OK I am glad it is out there. I would rather people know). The link to standing for parliament.

With that incident I had such a frustrating and traumatic experience. I got back in July and I joined the Liberal Party in July. I felt - there was a group of MPs who travelled across who were over there and I tried to engage with them and I could not get through. They seemed to be happy and just there for the photos and I know that is not their fault necessarily. But there just seemed to be such a disconnect between policy makers and guys on the ground trying to make things work and I thought if I can make this experience count I will and the best place to do it is potentially in the parliament.

Wakunish - this was a really frustrating part for me. The Wakunish did 4 or 5 ops maybe and [redacted] said we could not work with them. The Wakunish were disciplined. They were tactically proficient. They were sensitive to the populace from what I could gather and they seemed like a responsible partner force. And so to lose them and back to the PRC who were wild and reckless and difficult to control I just felt like some POLAD in Kabul had made a decision about the NDS. I think it was [redacted] something to do with the [redacted] I thought it was very short sighted and better the devil you know and yeah.

FEDERAL COURT OF AUSTRALIA

NSD 1485, 1486, 1487 of 2018 Date: 29 March 2022
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MFI No: _____

Assoc: Flynn Wells

And we heard stories of other coalition SOF who had worked up their partner force for 5, 6, 7 years and they were working seamlessly with them and here we are at ground zero again.

ALP/VSO. Re the CIVCAS, I felt we went out there to buck up their morale. They felt deserted and surrounded. The wisdom of that strategy I had concerns with. I remember on one job flying out we were all cammed up it was a dry hole at Shahidi-e Hasas and talking to the Talibs who were there. I had my interpreter with me and was sitting up the front and I said 'you guys are self-governing. I get it. I respect the fact that when we fly out it will go back to life as it is and they all laughed. There was this moment of mutual recognition. I started the conversation by saying we are here representing the Karzai government and they chuckled as there was absolutely no evidence of any Federal Govt in Afghanistan, no roads, now power lines, no telecommunications, all those things which we associate with our Commonwealth Govt. And that was the light bulb moment for me. I started understanding again. So in the context of the ALP being in a little outpost they were bricked up in those little fortresses and they had no intimacy with the populace which is the whole point of western democracy that there is intimacy between the people and those who govern.

ALP/VSO

meeting
Talibs
end

Anzac Day. I didn't drink. Stone cold sober. I just remember people being up late and noisy and everyone being rowdy and me looking after a few stragglers the next day.

Anzac
Day

Strippers Bar. Bg. Ultimately I felt like that is where there was a loosening to begin with, with the regiment and leaders were taking the more popular course rather than the principled course. And I thought we spend so much time away from our wives and families it is completely wrong to be boozing up with these women who aren't in a privileged position because they are stripping. Let's be honest. While our wives and girlfriends were holding the fort people were taking the time to get on the piss and watch strip shows. It was completely at odds with what I believe was the right thing. I had to take a stand and it cost me, I'll be honest with you. It cost me and that is when I started to realise OK, it's the NCOs who have a lot of influence on this place. And I felt a couple of times bawled out by senior leadership.

Stripper
incidents

I don't want to paint myself as a saint. The issues, I did drink overseas, I told [redacted] this. There were so many bigger battles to fight and quite frankly I needed a drink once in a while to get to sleep.

drinking

MRTF - I had drinking issues with some of my diggers on MRTF2. Guys who got on the cans. I had a good old WO who managed it for us. Not that he condoned it when the incidents popped up - it was managed without throwing the book at people. I think because so many senior officers had been through the Fat Lady's Arms and drunk with the soldiers themselves no one had any authority to switch it off so it was just kind of tolerated.

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(throwing cans) All that behaviour is incredibly embarrassing. After working your arse off to get into the regiment and pushing so hard. To finally get there and see that in a way it had been white anted by that culture. It was disheartening.

PC
melter

██████████ I spoke to him at breakfast, not sure whether it was the morning he died. I spoke to him between the previous day's operation and the operation he was killed on. He was attached to my troop for two weeks as we went after

Handwritten:
Brawley

██████████ I had his section. I remember him and the 2IC who got shot in the femur. (██████████) Against my tribe I made the point of bringing them into our orders group and integrating them into our FE because I can ask these guys to fly out into harms way if they are not fully briefed up. Able to establish trust with ██████████, not to overstate our relationship, but there was an element of trust. And the meal that I saw him I said how did you go. Waste of time. Flying in and hoping for a fight or words to that effect. Me saying right-oh, catch and the next thing you know the RSM is walking in to the Op Centre saying ██████████ KIA. I couldn't believe it.

Hands. I remember we got inserted high above where ██████████'s patrol was and we had the CO of TF Brawler piloting the BH, he was the lead pilot. I remember coming up there was a very steep hill and we were going to go out the left side of the helo with the dog first and we looked down and it was a 20m drop and so the helicopter hovered to the right hugging the terrain and we still had to drop 3 or 4 metres and remember with body armour rifle. I remember hitting the deck and a BH wheel knocking me in the back. It was v chaotic. Sensory overload. And I remember us running down the mtn re entrant and the side of the mtn steep, loose gravel. I love skiing and it was almost like we were parallel skiing down the mtn.

Handwritten:
Hands

Asking for updates. Action already happened. 10-15 minutes before we got down there and meanwhile helicopters telling me we are low on fuel, there is fading light. This is your cut off. If you don't make it you are done and will have to stay the night and I thought priority is top get to the helos rather than prolong the extraction to the next day.

So we are running down there. I get down there. I see the bodies and I see hands off and I say woh, woh woh, what's going on? My brain had never computed this might be a possibility. I wasn't part of the training session so I did not know what they had been taught. I thought, did the dog do something? Was a shot fired at his arm. It just didn't make sense. In the heat of the moment, 'hey this is a biometric procedure, this is what we have been taught'. I just went OK. I took it at face value. But something inside me said this does not feel right.

Handwritten:
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My patrol was the first to extract. So we started running and I mean running at altitude with body armour it must have been another k and a half or so. We finally get on to the helicopters and I am sitting on the helicopter going what is this. I cannot make sense of it. I get on the ground and I call over the engineer ██████████ who I have got a lot of time for, and I said talk me through this. I am trying to understand. I said the same thing to ██████████. They said this is a TTP. I said right ██████████ I want you to go and check with your engineering chain of command that this is legit. And that was before I entered the building. Before the debrief.

Handwritten:
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The next 36 hrs is a blur for me. I went up to Chora. We did not sleep that following night and this whole thing just blew up. My memory is kind of hazy but questions were asked earlier than your narrative suggests. It caught everyone off guard.

My view of it is the guy giving instructions conflated site exploitation of a suicide bomber with that of biometric testing. You got body parts all over a suicide bombing so you take body parts. They were mixing the two together. That is how I understood it.

use

V Frustrating. The day of the op itself I was sitting in chapel over at MTF when my buzzer went off and I got paged back to the SOCC for a mission. My day was meant to be a relaxed Sunday. You know I hadn't been to chapel the whole time and to finish the day like that it was just bizarre. One of those bizarre moment.

start of mission

Mesher. Nothing noteworthy. Job up north with PRC to a Seal base and did a night op. I don't remember sleeping and flying back the next day and being subsumed by the biometric incident.

There was a lot of confusion. It was so hurried. I don't want to second-guess anyone. It was incredibly difficult time. The strategic pressure was immense. The thing I learned was people had been at war too long and I think the junior guys like me who were coming in were starting to realise that. Far be it from me to second-guess someone with 20/20 hindsight.

NPT. [redacted] allegedly killed by a [redacted] IED. I was invested in seeing justice done. But at the same time in war there were shades of justice. I think we created national priority targets because there was not much strategy.

Irony of course is not just the operators who need to shoulder responsibility inevitably the bad stuff comes out the operators will wear it. This is important and why I was drawn to politics its really important to understand there is a broader policy context and when you incentivise behaviour with the policy settings. Yes the operator must take responsibility for what they do, but also the policy maker must too. Because they set up the system and so this is why I started seeing this as very Orwellian. If you are listening in one people' [redacted] and on that basis determining whether they are reconcilable or irreconcilable and determining their level of derogatory language about the govt and determining they are a green light JPEL target which means you can drop on them with impunity. Why would you expect an operator chasing them to on the ground to not look at a general and say well he can drop on them, why can't I just shoot this guy? Particularly if I capture him and three days later he is released. Because the very [redacted] we use to launch a mission and by the way to risk 30 Australian lives and 4 BHs and 2 Apaches isn't enough to put this guy behind bars under the Afghan judicial system. The paradoxes are so profound and mind jarring. So you get a couple of bad eggs in that group potentially and you incentivise bad behaviour.

politics

There are a few missions I hold on to that directly correlate to protecting the base. One we had on intel a target who was planning on driving a truck bomb on to the base. And everyone had to remain in hard cover. They had to wear their body armour and helmet outside. Generals flying in had to wear their full body armour and helmets and everyone was frustrated and tense around the base. We flew out and killed this guy. The mission, from landing on the ground wheels up it was 22 minutes. It was the SOTG machine at its most efficient. And precise. No one else was injured or hurt and for me it was one of those missions we got back

insert post

1002 *later*

and the order was given everyone can take off your body armour and helmets. There was a sigh of release.

date 2

One of my all time favourite ones. Two, both capture missions, very precise using reconnaissance elements, an array of intel platforms. No blood was shed and both people went to gaol for a very long time - apparently. The first one was objective [redacted]. First job after CIVCAS, early March? Really important we did it right and cleanly. Everyone knew where I stood on this issue. I was a young troop commander and I had heard the chatter about people like R-S and I brought my PCs in with my TP SGT and said there will be no misconduct of any time. We did not come here to do x, y or z. There was never an incident where my guys took matters into their own hands. There might have been circumstances where under pressure there were incidents with darkness, adrenaline, fear etc. You could question them but that is what combat is, a bit dodgy. But deliberate acts of malice didn't happen on my watch. And that is the one we took [redacted] on. We watched these guys taking a dump in the middle of the night and watching the heat dissipate from his business. And just watching and tracking them. We drove out in BMs, might have been 2am. We went at first light in accordance with the rules we surrounded the compound. The Wakunish did things very precisely. [redacted] was watching it all. We got this objective got all the intel had enough to put him away. Brought him back and handed him over to the Afghans. It was great. He was an important character.

was

The second one, can't remember the name, he was a suicide bomber. Again a night op. Lots of recon. We drove out in BMs, 5 ks, first job after Mesher. Took an Afghan magistrate. We woke this guy up with a barrel against the head. We found a vest, rockets a whole bunch of intel. The PRC and the magistrate came up to me Commander there is no room left in the gaols you should just shoot him here and be done with it. So I reported this up the chain straight away as I did with all these incidents. There were QAs done because I wanted it on record we played a straight bat. So we took that guy back and he went to gaol as well.

of the Mesher

But it just shows the attitude. For the operator. Fake. Go with the magistrate to tick the box for the Afghan judicial system and he is the one saying you should just finish this guy off, no room in the gaol. Somewhere May 14 or 15. Long wait between jobs.

of the name

When I got whacked for the strippers stuff [redacted] reached out to me and said we have got a bit in common and that is how our friendship started. I got removed from a course and got awarded my beret eight months after I should have which is a crushing blow for a young officer.

[redacted]

When I arrived I felt it was broken. Guys had been desensitised over time. They had been on too many trips. There was a callousness about their view of the enemy. I don't judge them for that. Maybe I am more of a sensitive soul I don't know. Many of them had lost friends and had their friends wounded. There were a few levels of brokenness. There was a policy brokenness, which was making ops contradictory and difficult to execute - compromising military principle, for instance telling is to have a 50% Afghan force meant that we were planning who we take out on the ground before we actually planned the mission. You should ultimately be very pragmatic with military planning. But instead we were

stark

hidebound by a doctrine of policy. Then there was a human brokenness of sending guys away to war for ten years and incentivising bad behaviour. Everyone looked at R-S as a hero. When guys like that are honoured so publicly it is damaging to the way people think.

Person 19 blessed to be kicked out when he was. R-S and I don't get on. I never drank the cool aid. Most bizarre part did not understand his character. I used to consult Person 7 who says he is an atheist and ask if there is no god how can you condemn R-S. I am convinced if people live their lives a certain way they will ultimately unravel. Don't you worry time will take care of himself.

There were days were I felt it was a closed universe where you could make up your own morality on the grounds you wanted to and it was a dark and haunting and incredibly unnatural feeling. That is why I am a small govt guy. It felt in a way like we were big govt on steroids over there.

I have dreams where R-S has been in my dreams. We have killed one of our own guys and we have covered it up and it is this deep truth that I carry and I wake up fearful and my whole day is ruined. There have been times when I have had to take sleeping pills to get to sleep. It is not what I have seen but what I have heard and the moral trauma calling to account that will ultimately come to some people. And because I am part of that institution I share in it. What you are doing is important work.