

## AFTER ACTION REPORT

17 February 2015

Subject: Marine Corps Force Innovation Office (MCFIO) Visit to the Australian Army

### Summary of Findings:

On 11 April 2011, the Australian Defense Minister announced that the Australian Defense Force (ADF) would lift the remaining gender restrictions on combat roles from which women were previously excluded. The development and implementation of Physical Employment Standards (PES) as the basis for accessions, qualification, and continuation within ground combat arms Corps are the central elements of the Australian Army's approach to lifting the ground combat arms exclusion. PES have proven valuable both as scientifically-rigorous, occupation-specific physical requirements and as drivers for improvements in the entry-level training continuum, physical conditioning programs, and combat equipment procurement. The ADF opened transfer opportunities into ground combat arms Corps for career female soldiers beginning in January 2013. The ADF will open non-prior service recruiting to women beginning in January 2016. The Australian Army's principal challenges include PES implementation for the career force, post-implementation PES validation, and structural recruiting difficulties exacerbated by acute shifts in demographics.

Australia (8-14 Feb): The Australian Army talks included briefings, discussions with combat arms leaders and researchers, and site visits to the Australian Army Headquarters, Force Command, the Army Recruit Training Center, and the School of Infantry. The following major themes summarize the lessons learned from these sessions:

- Law, Policy, and Demographics:
  - The ADF efforts to eliminate the gender restrictions on ground combat arms service is a direct consequence of Australian political leaders' vision of full compliance with the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the resulting Sex Discrimination Act of 1984. Opening ground combat arms Corps to female officers and soldiers is part of a broad set of programs to increase the aggregate numbers and proportion of women in the ADF, make a career in the Service more hospitable and attractive to female

Service members, and increase the number of female general officers and senior enlisted leaders. Australian uniformed and civilian action officers struggled to draw empirical connections between increasing female participation and retention rates and improvements in combat effectiveness and efficiency.

- o The ADF is subject to Australia's Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1987. While the act prohibits all forms of gender-based discrimination, it does allow an employer to establish bona fide occupational physical standards. Assessments of an employee's ability to meet these standards must be directly related to occupational task performance. This requirement drove the ADF's PES and associated PES Assessment (PESA) development away from correlating physical task performance to events within general fitness tests such as the Australian Army's Basic Fitness Assessment (BFA which includes pull-ups, push-ups, abdominal crunches, and a 2.4km run) towards assessments involving physical movement and performance that most closely approximated occupational tasks.
- Physical Standards: The ADF developed PES as a gender-neutral screening approach to determine whether a soldier qualified for and could continue in a combat arms Corps. The ADF Defense Science and Technology Activity (DSTO) has primary responsibility for the PES-development process. The PES development process involved aligning the maximum number of ground combat arms physically demanding task with a discrete set of repeatable assessment activities. PES are task-based. DSTO conducted observation, assessment, and research using the incumbent - all male - population to develop the standards and assessments.
  - o Australian Army General Purpose Forces (GPF) PESA are divided into three general categories: (1) all-Corps PESA for non-ground combat arms soldiers; (2) combat arms PESA for non-infantry ground combat arms Corps; and (3) infantry PESA.
  - o Each PESA includes four events: Weight Loaded March (WLM), Fire and Movement (FM), Load Carry (LC - carrying two 22 kg water jugs over a defined distance), and Box Lift and Place (BLP - lifting a weighted box from the ground to a 1.5m platform). The difficulty in terms of weight, distance, and time increases at each category

level (e.g. WLM standards are: 20-23kg, 5km, in 50-55 min for all-Corps; 35-40kg, 10km, in 100-110min for combat arms; and 40-45kgm 15km, in 150-165min). Additionally, the combat arms and infantry PESAs include an 18m Leopard Crawl (low crawl) that is performed immediately following the FM event. Finally, certain specialties have additional requirements and events within their PESA. For example, the Artillery Corps PESA includes an artillery Lift and Carry assessment that simulates movement of 155mm projectiles. The Infantry Corps PESA includes a 1000m "movement" (run) prior to commencing the FM event and a 10m casualty drag as a final event. PESA are performed while carrying the service rifle and wearing a helmet, body armor, load carrying equipment, and pack (for the WLM only).

- o Because each PESA event simulates multiple physically-demanding tasks, soldiers must perform the movements associated with the event as prescribed in the PESA instruction. Variations (e.g. walking too fast in the LC will compromise the grip endurance aspect of the evaluation).
- o Australian Special Operations Force (SOF), the Royal Australian Navy, and the Royal Australian Air Force are still developing their PES.
- o A mandatory, six-week physical preparation program precedes a graded PESA evaluation. The preparation program focuses on combat fitness and has resulted in significant combat conditioning improvements among participants. In many ways, the increased combat effectiveness and improved unit cohesion that result from the program is more valuable than the PESAs themselves.
- o Reserves: Australian Army Reserves drill for only 15 days per year. As a result, they cannot complete the six-week preparation program and, therefore, are not required to conduct an annual PESA. Reserve officers and soldiers called temporarily to active duty also are not required to complete a PESA. However, a Reserve member or unit must complete a PESA prior to being certified as ready to deploy.
- o Female soldier propensity and pass rates: since the opening of inter-Corps transfer opportunities, 27 female soldiers have expressed an interest in this opportunity.

Most of these are officers. Only about half of this population are in the Australian Regular Army and, therefore, subject to taking the PESA (the remainder are Reservists and not subject to the PESA). Thus far, female officers and soldiers have only passed the combat arms PESA. There is currently one student officer attending the School of Infantry Regimental Officers Course (Infantry Officers Course equivalent). While this officer had to pass the combat arms PESA to begin the class, she is her second week of training and has not yet attempted the Infantry PESA.

- Physical Training Instructors (PTIs): PTI is a non-entry-level, primary specialty within the ADF. PTIs are career soldiers (frequently ground combat arms) who execute a lateral move after a tour as a section leader. They undergo six months of specialized physical fitness training and are assigned at the base, school, or regimental level. They are primarily responsible to their commanders for planning and executing combat conditioning and physical development programs. Further, PTIs are required to administer all PESA testing.
- Recruiting and Demographics: As Australia white male population ages and decreases in size, the ADF, as a largely white male force, faces a significant demographic shortfall. This shortfall persists in spite of the Australian Army having relatively few restrictions on the recruitable population (e.g. non-prior service applicants can join well into their fifties). Adding to this challenge is the decision by the ADF several years ago to centralize recruiting for all Services and to assign the responsibility for recruiting to a civilian-led organization. These two factors have led to the ADF repeatedly missing accessions goals and to recruiting quality challenges (e.g. over 16% of Australian Army Recruits fail the Pre-entry Fitness Assessment (PFA) upon reporting to the Army Recruit Training Center). A recurring theme was the frustration with the lack of accountability of the centralized ADF recruiting force to the Australian Army, particularly at the Recruit Training Center.
  - o As a result of the above factors, increasing the number of female soldiers serving in the Australian Army, integrating female soldiers into the combat arms, and improving female soldier retention are a key part of the ADF's strategy to mitigate their accessions shortfall and increase the qualified pool of recruits beyond the

shrinking white male population. Currently, female soldiers form 12% of the Australian Army - an increase from 10% during 2012. The ADF experiences greater retention challenges with female soldiers than with their male counterparts.

- o The ADF is a career force. Therefore, the Australian Army seeks to retain as many of its soldiers as possible. As a result, it is relatively difficult to hold a career soldier accountable for physical non-performance. Few, if any, soldiers are separated for physical assessment failure, failure to maintain height-weight standards, etc.
- Implementation: While the Australian Army has a completed, validated, and implemented PES into its entry-level continuum, challenges remain in applying these standards into the career force.
  - o Several officers and senior enlisted leaders expressed concerns regarding the impact of PESA failure on older, experienced senior combat arms soldiers - especially in the Infantry Corps. These leaders worry that the Australian Army may lose valuable expertise and difficult to replace manpower if career continuation in the ground combat arms became contingent on passing the relevant PESA.
  - o Australian Army leaders expressed frustration at the difficulty of communicating the rationale behind the PES, the fact that PES were a mechanism to ensure that standards would not be lowered, and the necessity of completing the six-week preparation program. Similar communication challenges existed between the Army Recruit Training Center Commander (who was attempting an experimental physical development program) and the School of Infantry Commander (who was concerned that abandoning traditional physical training routines was compromising the mental toughness of his students). Further, PTIs at every level had suggestions for improvements to the PES (that the PTIs thought would improve the quality of the force and reduce injury and failure rates). DSTO scientists were reluctant to implement any changes absent sufficient post-implementation data collection to support scientifically rigorous (and legally defensible) changes.

- o Operating Force commanders expressed concerns that the all-Corps PESA was insufficiently rigorous to ensure that the non-combat arms soldiers in infantry battalions could perform in provisional infantry roles. The proposed implementation solutions included allowing infantry battalion commanders to train and assess their non-combat arms soldiers against combat arms or infantry PESAs. There was a reluctance, however, to hold non-combat arms soldiers accountable to anything other than the all-Corps PESA.
  
- o In general, the Australian Army intends to develop a series of longitudinal studies to determine PESA effectiveness, the PESA performance of a gender-integrated population, and the effect of implementation policy decisions. Several officers expressed concerns that the Australian Army was implementing policy first and conducting research second.

#### Conclusions:

- Based on the visits to Australia, the MCFIO team can speak authoritatively about physical standards and gender integration implementation approaches of the Australian Army.

#### Way Ahead:

- MCFIO plans to re-engage with our British and Australian Army counterparts during March.