

What the Bloody Halal is Going on in the Army?



The role of the Australian infantry is 'to close with and kill the enemy'.

There are no ambiguities in that mission statement. In order to train for their assigned role infantrymen practice with guns and live bullets to shoot at targets shaped as humans. They lob grenades to practice blowing people apart. They use fixed bayonets on sandbags to hone their killing skills. They practice ambush drills so they can kill as many enemy as possible in one massive shoot-out. They are trained to be tougher, stronger and more courageous than their foe. And they know they must be prepared to die for each other.

At the end of their training day they come home to help their wives with the housework and their kids with their homework. Next day they resume their training in how to kill people.

They are aware that any enemy they are likely to face has a similar purpose. Some even practice blowing themselves up!

Seven years ago an army team was committed to clearing up a compound which housed a suspected insurgent in Afghanistan. It had to be completed in the dark. As they entered the close confines of the compound all hell broke loose. The troops took cover and called on the insurgent to stop firing and surrender. He answered with another hail of bullets. One of the troops got close enough to hurl a grenade through an opening before his mates stormed the room just as they were trained to do. When the smoke and dust had settled six people, including the insurgent and four children were dead.

Canberra was mortified when they learned that the commandos they sent to Afghanistan to kill people actually killed people. An officer who was trained to write reports and had mountains of files worth of experience was appointed to investigate. He recommended they be charged with manslaughter. A female lawyer dressed up as a Brigadier took up the issue and charged the men.

The army judge who heard the case was a young lawyer who I worked with at the 1st Brigade in the early 1980s. He had worked with troops for decades and had a close working knowledge of what they were trained to do, their values and the pride they had in their uniform. He threw the case out. The Brigadier made a few cat-calls but to no avail. The commandos returned to their duties.

Canberra based defencecrats in Fort Fumble were incensed. They enlisted their own coffee-shop commandos and had a conversation - in their space - to deliberate on matters of such import as gender inequality and ethnic diversity in Commando Regiments.

The role of the Infantry was discussed. Was it too brutal? Should it be 'to close with and counsel the enemy'? What if somebody took offence to being labelled as enemy? Should it be 'to close with and have a conversation with those opposite'?

Training regimes at the Australian Defence Force Academy were adjusted. Instructors were forbidden to raise their voices at young cadets to protect their self-esteem. Crusty old drill sergeants were dispatched to re-education camps. Red marker pens were banned as it was deemed to be too aggressive a colour for marking papers. Male and female quarters were to include an 'undecided' section in each barrack block.

The next challenge was to look at the dietary requirements of the troops, troopettes and undecided in the field which is defined as any space beyond the border of the ACT. It was here that all halal broke loose.


Combat rations were examined calorie by calorie. My Kitchen Rules staff were enlisted to join the conversation. Ministers, priests, rabbi's, imans, agnostics and organisers of the gay mardi gras congregated to bless and blaspheme menus. Bully-beef and dog-

biscuits were subject to stringent OH&S checks and promptly banned. It was found that if a supply of bully-beef was ever captured and consumed by the enemy it could cause severe gastronomical upsets and trigger a class action. If our troops and troopettes ran out of bullets and had to throw dog-biscuits as a last resort they could cause significant injuries to their non-friends shooting back at them.

The psychological state of troops and troopettes at the time of consumption had to be considered. How did the past owner of that 20g piece of meat in that packet die? Was it shot? Was its throat cut? Was it a lethal injection or just old age. Was it given last rites? And by whom?

Surveys of troops, troopettes and the undecided to determine their ethnic origins were necessary to determine the proportion of rations required to meet their needs on operations outside the ACT. How many days each year should they spend amongst those on the other side who lived in suburbs like Boganville before returning to the safety of their PC bubble? So much to ponder!

In light of these considerations the recent decision of the Chief of Army to declare that 30 percent of combat ration packs must carry halal certification to cater for the 0.35 per cent of Muslims in his army makes a lot of sense. PC scribes are already drafting up his nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

'Combat ration balance' could well be their next international cause celebre! 

For more topics and to contact Charlie Lynn, please visit www.charlielynn.com.au/blog.