

ON MENTORING: Personal stories and lessons for future mentors



Exercise WANTOK WARRIOR 2018

The context

Exercise WANTOK WARRIOR 2018 (Ex WW18), a component exercise of Exercise OLGETTA WARRIOR which is a longstanding activity on the calendar. There have been various iterations, with and at differing levels of engagement with the Papua New Guinean Defence Force (PNGDF). Typically, units from the 3rd Brigade have existing relationships with counterpart units in the PNGDF. It is a natural fit then, that 1RAR as the sister battalion (whilst not yet a formalised relationship) of the 1st Battalion Royal Pacific Islands Regiment (1st RPIR) is undertaking mentoring in this latest evolution. The Ex WW18 Mentoring Training Team (MTT) is based on 1RAR and joined by the 1st Military Police Battalion MTT Contingent from A Company and supporting staff from the 10th Force Support Battalion's Catering Company and the 2nd Combat Health Company.

The host unit



1st RPIR is an infantry battalion, similarly structured to those in the ADF - four Rifle Companies, Support Company and Admin Company - both have similar and unique challenges, opportunities and risks. The Commanding Officer stated from the outset – Papuan soldiers are more culturally reserved, not as extroverted as Australian soldiers, but give them time, get to know them and they'll be dropping F-Bombs as well! Here in lies **lesson one – understanding and compassion.** PNGDF officially uses English, but what the official language is and what individuals communicate in, is something different. **Lesson two – communication.**



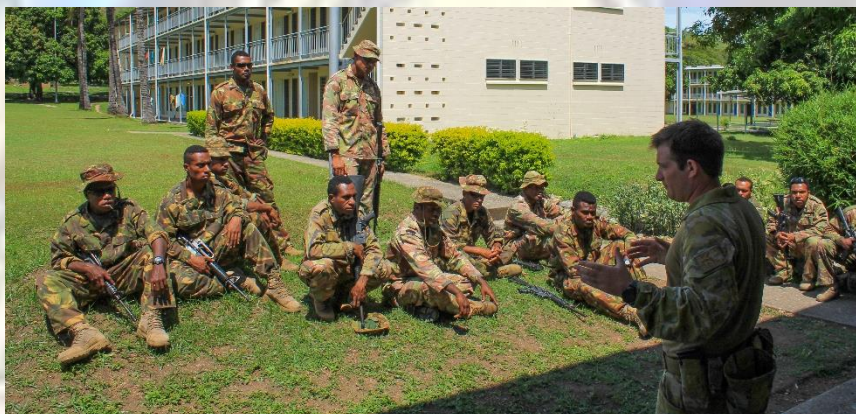
1st RPIR has a real drive and passion. This was evident from day one. The Commanding Officer, 1st RPIR, is a charismatic, imperious man, with a palpable command presence. He invited the Contingent on to his parade. The symbology alone cemented mutual respect, teamwork and



togetherness that set the tone for the activity ahead. **Lesson three – mutual respect.** This bought the small Contingent into the Battalion and ensured that one team was moving forward into the subsequent two months activities.

The training

Ex WW18 was a *mentoring* exercise – 1st RPIR developed the training program, objectives and outcomes. Ex WW18 was to *support* and *mentor* the execution, not to do, lecture or impose. 1st RPIR had, and continues to have, a real mandate to the country's peace, stability and security, and to the people of PNG. The purpose of the MTT was to support 1st RPIR achieving *their* mission. **Lesson four – know your role and understanding the mission.** The way that 1st RPIR operates, their tactics, techniques and procedures are not for any Contingent to reinvent, dismiss, nor to be so disrespectful as to disregard and teach 'the ADF way'. **Lesson five – flexible, adaptable, and responsive.**



The lessons

The soldiers and officers of Ex WW18 MTT herein provide their perspectives. The soldiers and officers were not prompted nor coached; these are their perspectives and real lessons as they see it and what they learned from *doing*. **Lesson six – the right people. Lesson seven – mutual learning.**

Mentoring and training with conventional foreign military at the Combat Team level

Captain Jake Smith-Wright

- 2IC Support Company, 1RAR
- Deployed as the Contingent 2IC and delivered orders and stability operations mentorship

The undertaking of a MTT exercise such as Ex WW18 is both a professionally and personally rewarding experience. The importance of this particular exercise can be highlighted by its linkages to Defence's second Strategic Objective; support the security of maritime South East Asia and support the governments of Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and of Pacific Island Countries to build and strengthen their security. In meeting this significant task, I outline some personal observations and advice as they relate to mentoring and training.

- **Professional relationships/Rapport building.** Introduce yourself in a clear manner with a focus on both your personal experiences and military experience. This will encourage mentees to do the same and give you initial credibility as to why your opinion should be valued. Building rapport and mutual respect are the foundations for establishing trust and open lines of communication.
- **Understand your purpose.** Know why it is you are there and how your lesson and/or training team fits into the bigger picture. More importantly, continually reinforce this to those you are there to assist. Articulate the importance of learning from the host nation. There should be a two-way street and exchange of ideas occurring.
- **Manage expectations of mentors and mentees.** Clearly establish and articulate to both stakeholders the areas of responsibility for resourcing, planning and delivery of lessons. Avoid 'shared-hatting' lessons with two instructors. Know where gaps in understanding exist. Treat those gaps with anecdotes and doctrinal knowledge.



- **Time appreciation (quality vs quantity).** What is the best use of your time, effort and expertise? What will have a lasting impact? To use the analogy of teaching someone to cook in the bush; don't simply make them a fire. Teach them how to make the fire and instil principles of self-reliance and independence.
- **Empower the mentee chain of command.** You will come and go, but the NCOs and Officers of the host-nation will remain holding the fruits of the labour. Where appropriate, ensure they are the face of all content delivered at platoon level and below.
- **Understand the culture and associated values.** Understand what is valued by the individuals receiving the instruction. Is it warrior/tribal culture? Strength and physical courage? Utilise the strengths within the MTT to demonstrate your appreciation of this and integrate wherever possible (PT/sports, formal and informal gatherings, messes). When in doubt, simply ask for clarification.



- **Lesson preparation.** Less is more. In the age of blended learning and unique instructional approaches, nothing beats a clear and simple visual aid. The saying that 'a picture paints a thousand words' is never more applicable than when there exists minor language barriers and differences in social norms when communicating.

Whilst I'm sure much more can be observed and articulated, I found that the areas outlined above are at the core of successful and mutually beneficial mentoring and training with a conventional foreign military at the Combat Team level.

What I have learnt from mentoring

Corporal Jess Flanagan

- Mortar Platoon, 1 RAR
- Deployed as the OIC Quick Reaction Force Mentoring Team

Before deploying as a member of the MTT, I had very little idea of the challenges and experiences I would face as a mentor to a foreign military. Up to this point I had only ever instructed Australian soldiers on two basic support courses and had the privilege of instructing the next generation of IETs from the School of Infantry on Enhance Combat Shooting. These prior experiences had given me a good understanding of instruction to a varied array of trainees, both experienced and inexperienced.



One of the first things I realised as a mentor is that is an absolute necessity to **have a solid plan with multiple avenues available to achieve the training outcome**. What works in the battalion or in 'the school' won't necessarily work or be as well received in a foreign military, either because of language barriers or cultural differences.

During the first period of instruction, I had found it quite hard to get the training audience to participate, if at all. Needless to say, I found this quite disheartening. I took the time during the break to think back over my presentation and try and work out how I could improve my delivery.



I began speaking to a Corporal I had attended SIO-S with. He proceeded to tell me that his men where in fact very keen to learn and absorb the information. He explained his men didn't want to ask questions out of fear of being embarrassed in front of me and my team.



I decided that a new direction was needed in order to engage my audience. I extended the break and encouraged my team to socialise with the platoons and find common ground to “break the ice”. This was easily achieved, what more common ground is there than that that exists between riflemen regardless of the military to which they belong? They all share similar experiences and

stories, everything from experiences through training all the way to the pride one has knowing that they can do it harder than most and flourish even in the most arduous of circumstance. Not to mention the humour inherent in reminiscing about the most miserable experience you had in the job. A few cigarettes and jokes later we recommenced the training package.

Before the lesson though, **I encouraged our new friends to ask questions at any time.** Success!!! The platoons immediately seemed to be more involved and even brought their own experiences to the table to help reinforce the points being discussed. Some even assisting by reiterating key points in their native tongue to avoid anything being lost in translation.

This brings me to my next point, language. I believe it to be very arrogant and disrespectful to expect to gain a foreign unit’s attention and respect, without at least trying to learn their language. Even **a few greetings and key phrases can show the audience that you respect them and that you want to learn from them as much as they want to learn from you.** A mere “Good morning. How are you?” in the native tongue can set the day off on the right foot and reinforces the mutual respect.



What have I learned as a mentor? Quite simply I have learned that when it comes to assisting a foreign military it is crucial to find that mutual ground. Once a rapport has been established, strive to break down or manoeuvre around any cultural barriers. Having done this, you will find that the level of trainee engagement will improve. All this will have a direct correlation to the enthusiasm exuded by your audience.

Soldier-led mentoring

Private Issac Wardle

- Anti-Armour Platoon, 1RAR
- Deployed as Vehicle Check Point and Urban Close Quarter Combat Team Mentor

On a personal note, the opportunity to participate on such an exercise has been extremely rewarding. Skills I have developed over the last few years at 1RAR and recently while on operation in the Philippines have been enhanced and put into practice in a mentoring role.

Instructing Urban Close Quarter Combat and Combat Shooting have been my primary role. Liaising with other MTT leads to create the best possible training package has improved my skills as a planner and team member. Different Companies have different TTPs and training outcomes, requiring **individual programs**.



At the commencement of each new package I aimed to establish an adult learning environment and relaxed atmosphere. Adults are internally motivated, goal orientated and practical. With this in mind I aimed to create a problem-based and collaborative rather than doctrinal teaching style. This approach **develops equality** between the teacher and learner, enhancing the outcomes of training.



Developing soldiers as individuals was also a key aspect of my mentoring. By developing soldiers as individuals we develop their confidence, cognitive abilities, personal strengths, and crucially a rounded ability to perform as a part of a team. **From a team perspective this translates to a unit which is empowered** by a mindset that can act autonomously.

Communication with the leaders of each company during training was crucial to allow this approach to work. By the completion of each package the successful outcomes highlighted how this type of instruction can be useful when teaching mature soldiers.



Overall, this exercise has been a rewarding experience and the lessons learnt as a mentor trainer will remain with me throughout my career. The PNGDF are accommodating hosts and extremely motivated to **enhance their capability**. I believe they will continue to be successful and hope the relationship with 1RAR remains mutually beneficial.



“Change is not made without inconvenience, even from worse better.”

- Richard Hooker

Sergeant Jon Davey

- Signals Platoon Sergeant, 1RAR
- Deployed as Vital Asset Protection Mentoring Team Leader

In military parlance, one who mentors is seen predominantly as one who is a trusted advisor. In its' simple intrinsic definition this role strikes deep to the fundamental core of that which the 1 RAR centre of gravity is built upon; **trust**.



The journey of attainment of trust begins with a mere introduction. To me, **it was important to establish my credibility as to why I should be listened to in an advisory capacity**. In this instance, during the introduction of myself and my team, I specifically focused on why I was qualified to be teaching the material I was (including operational experience) and then supported that with why I personally wanted 1 RPIR to achieve mission success. In this initial act, I wanted to impress upon my audience my belief that not only were we **equals working together in partnership to achieve a common goal**, but that every soldier involved in this process had a level of ownership.



For mission success in mentoring, I personally believe that emotional intelligence is paramount, for it is emotional intelligence that allows you to understand the perspective of those you are mentoring, remain vigilant for any pre or misconceptions you may have which could adversely affect outcomes and it is crucial to ensure that enthusiasm on your behalf does not become over investment because - after all -

a well-resourced, researched and implemented plan often deteriorates rapidly when exposed to the complexities of the military environment.

Where possible, during the delivery of any practical skills, **I sought to first train the JNCOs then have them deliver the training to their own soldiers**. I saw this as crucial to my

mission success. The JNCOs typically had a broader depth of knowledge but were able to better translate the true 'theme' of what we were delivering in English to the various dialects of Pidgin spoken by the soldiers so that nothing was 'lost in translation'.

Second, the soldiers look to their own leaders as the custodians of the skillsets we were imparting, thus enhancing the chain of command and finally to ensure our own redundancy in that the JNCOs would be able to run the training in the future without any external assistance.

By taking the time to sit and talk with the soldiers during down time, I was able to learn the value of oral history and the telling of stories of past experiences as enhancements to teaching points over mere writing dictation of doctrinal information. This allowed me to educate while entertain and once the personal stories start to be exchanged, cultural barriers tend to fall by the wayside and the audience can actually enjoy the educational experience without even realising what is transpiring!



In all, Ex WW18 has indeed been **mutually beneficial** and a true representation of what can be achieved despite international barriers when guided by the principals of Courage, Initiative, Respect and Teamwork.

Military Police Mentoring Training Team

Lieutenant Joshua Jelly (Team Leader)

Sergeant Jocelyn Woolcock,

Privates Daniel Clarke-Hannaford and Paul Faure

- A Company, 1st Military Police Battalion
- Deployed as Military Police MTT

The MP MTT have been fortunate enough to conduct integrated mentoring with 1st RPIR. Our MTT has experienced a broad array of challenges and rewards:

- working alongside 1RAR and 1st RPIR in the integrated mentoring of PNGDF soldiers,
- exchanging knowledge and experience in person and vehicle searches,
- experiencing PNGDF culture - attendance at a Rugby League pre-season match between the Brisbane Broncos and PNG Hunters, and
- opportunity to visit sacred sites such as the Bomana War Cemetery and the Kokoda Trail.



We have had the privilege to become accustomed to the lifestyle, structure and everyday challenges faced within the 1st RPIR. **Previous experiences and relationships can have significant flow on effects in the future.** An example of is the connections and friendships built during my time at the Royal Military College, paying dividends, reconnecting with the now junior officers of the PNGDF.



Because of these past relations not only has my time in PNG been thoroughly enhanced on a personal level, but on a professional level as well; my ability to liaise and coordinate training enhanced due to the 'who you know'.



Similarly, the PNGDF culture is much more receptive to a soft touch approach with respect to mentoring and coordination of lessons. Our team found that through the arrangement of an informal ‘meet and greet’ the members of 1st RPIR, specifically the Military Police, have been much more willing to share their own views, opinions and past learning.

“During my mentoring experience I have learnt **the importance of being able to adapt**. An example of this can be seen in our MP MTT use of language. A reoccurring theme within our team involves consistent reminders by one another to reinforce deliberate and slowed speech; which is done to better communicate and mentor the members of 1st

RPIR. If our MTT had not identified this minor issue in the early phases of mentoring, it could have been detrimental to the value of the lessons shared. “

“During my time within 1st RPIR I have learnt **the importance of rehearsals and the advantages of structured instructing**. This issue was identified and rectified during one of our MP MTT’s initial lessons; the mentoring itself covered off on all the correct techniques and teaching points, however it was delivered in such a way that created confusion and inconsistency come the practical aspect of the teaching. To address this issue, our MTT learnt to conduct lessons in a more deliberate and systematic manner which avoided rehashing specific points and jumping between lessons. As a result, the 1st RPIR members were able to effectively assimilate the information being passed on.”



“During my time working alongside 1st RPIR, I found it important to not only impart my knowledge but to **share each other’s knowledge**. It’s important when mentoring that you understand that we each have ‘a’ way and our way is not ‘the’ way. To learn from each other builds better TTPs and then builds on our relationship with the PNGDF.”



The advice to follow on mentors is to consider a soft touch approach when coordinating training with allied forces; **investing time and building genuine rapport will pay dividends**.

Eating humble pie: How going to the wrong objective tells a story about mentoring

Major Barbie Keller,

- Officer Commanding Support Company, 1RAR
- Deployed as Contingent Commander, Exercise WANTOK WARRIOR 2018

Writing a piece about what I've learned about mentoring from the comforts of a tent in 36 degree Papua New Guinea weather is an interesting proposition. I am confident it is higher than 36 degrees but the WBGT is a handheld and doesn't work inside the tent and the mercury thermometer

tapped out at 42 yesterday. I questioned whether or not to discuss the fact apparent that my soldiers got as much out of the experience as those they were mentoring; not only professionally, but life experience as well. "I never used to like art", quipped one of my soldiers, clutching an arm full of various 'traditional' 'art' pieces, all on canvas, by a local artist he has befriended, not yet knowing his purchases have paid for the artist's son, to attend school, Year 9, for the entire year, and, in new school shoes. But that is evident.

I also questioned whether or not to discuss my lessons learned or rather what I think works. I chose somewhere in the middle, sitting on the fence and offer my observations. The Contingent will write a series of documents to highlight we learned anything, something, lots. A blog though is personal, and personally, I've made some observations.

My top 5:

1. **Lessons observed** – Lessons are only observed or identified until they are learned. So, find them and turn them into learned. I've read and listened to my Team's lessons and observations and, for the most, they resonate with other mentoring team titbits, notably those from the Philippines Mentoring Team. The common tips identified by successive mentoring teams suggest these observations are not unique to the theatre or the partner nation or organisation, so the lesson? Prepare. Learn.
2. **Don't sell what you can't deliver** – you're not going to be able to get nor deliver the world. Be realistic in what you can achieve. Be creative and *sustainable* – if it takes reclaiming timber and nails from a disused house, holding it all together with spray painted electrical tape, the end result being an urban hide, and it works, then do it.
3. **Take the best people** – not everyone is cut out for assimilating into local customs and traditions and doing so for weeks on end with little reprieve (not only from the heat, mozzies and 'doxy dreams'). The best people are the right people; they may not be your best marksmen, logistic planners or gun runners, but they will be the ones that



can build relationships and respect custom and culture, turn up for a patrol order march at 0400 amongst chanting and singing soldiers and embrace it.

4. **Commit** – it doesn't take effort to mentor, it takes commitment. Understand what you're doing, why and why *you* 've been asked to help, and commit wholeheartedly to ensuring someone else achieves greatness.
5. **Be humble** – It amused me one day, to sit in a meeting with all the Company Commanders and the gripe was that transport dropped a platoon off at the wrong objective! That happens to Australian Army units all the time! If you believe, feel or think that you, your team, your country or your organisation is somehow superior, or you have such a lack of respect to those you are mentoring to suggest they are inferior, first, you're in the wrong job. Second, consider that somewhere back home, there are officers lamenting because the ration plan failed or transport went to the wrong location!

Ultimately, I don't know what I'd do 'better' next time, I don't know what will work in a different theatre or in a different time. I would certainly try a few things differently but I don't know if that would change the outcome and I don't know if it matters – if something isn't working then I wouldn't wait until the end or until 'next time' to try something different. I would follow the same principles – being a good human – and make sure I take the best possible team, but being adaptive and flexible is part of the journey. It's the personal relationships that allowed us to be *responsive*. It was being humble and respectful that ensured my Team earned equal respect. It allowed us to support our regional partner, crouched down side by side, and helped in achieving their missions and their goals, and share their successes.



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