

WHAT A MESS! THE COMBAT BRIGADE FOSTERING COMBINED ARMS TEAMING

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“We should look for someone to eat and drink with before looking for something to eat and drink.”

Epicurus

Introduction

1. Historically the home of customs and traditions within a unit is its mess. In a few instances this hasn't changed. However, in recent history due to predominantly financial reasons, the combining of the unit messes within Lavarack caused significant angst surrounding loss of unit identity. The amalgamation led to numerous negative perceptions which have, over time, become 'truth'. Patronage was at all-time lows, with *voluntold* attendance for functions being the only way to achieve a quorum.
2. The FORCOMD Directive on messes issued in 2017 provided solid direction for concentration of efforts on maintaining the relevance of our messes through continuation of customs, traditions and professional development.¹
3. With concerted command direction within the brigade, focusing on maximising use of our messes as the venue for programmed social events, professional development opportunities and established environment to display unit identity for all to share, a positive change is being observed. The 3rd Combat Brigade combined messes have truly become important institutions for our combined arms teaming, with considerable untapped potential.
4. The Combat Brigade is comprised of a mix of Corps, assigned assets and flexibility to achieve formidable tasks across the spectrum of operational requirements. Everything the Combat Brigade does, hinges on the creation of combined, joint and inter-agency teams. Mixing the required type of people and equipment with the right skills offers the best chance of mission success.
5. There are many ways of achieving success with teaming, but I offer that in the 3rd Combat Brigade this teaming often starts and is maintained through our messes. In this short article I will address the Tetris of teams, how our mess lends lessons of ethos and traditions, the science of being social and leadership through professional education.

TEAM TETRIS

6. Whilst the concept of combined teams is simple, the art of bringing the brigade's different organisations together to achieve a common goal is often overcomplicated – usually by losing sight on what is important. Our simplest example for teams through the combining of arms commences with the committee that is charged to run the mess financial and social

¹ HQFORCOMD/OUT/2017/X5943376 COMD FORCOMD DIRECTIVE 02/17 FORCOMD OFFR/SNCO *Mess Policy*, 2017, 5.

aspects. From the President of the Mess Committee to the treasurer we have a representative from different corps. This construct, enhanced through annual rotation, diversifies the running of the mess. In turn, the design and execution changes. The mess members, knowingly or not, receive their first lessons in combined arms teaming just by being a mess member through passive and directed team building.

LESSONS LEARNED AT THE DINNER TABLE

7. *“Leaders are a product of their environment. Before leaders can be trained, the individual qualities and behaviours expected from soldiers, NCOs and officers outlined in the Army's statement of ethos and values must be cultivated in them. The ethos of mateship and principle of a 'fair go', together with the values of courage, initiative and teamwork must be instilled in each individual. These values are the cultural glue that bonds the Army and forms the keystone for leadership training and development.”*²

8. Gathering over a meal is one of the oldest examples of community processes. People sharing food build stronger bonds. Nourished bodies and relationships provide better collaboration and higher quality work. However, this is but one function our combined arms mess provides.

9. Social norms are ever changing, the expectation that people have received basic lessons of how to conduct themselves in a public setting cannot be relied upon. The mess serves this function, social and formal interaction provides opportunities for commanders and leaders to demonstrate appropriate social behaviour, manners, patience and the art of conversation.

10. Army, as a people organisation relies on communication and interaction with other people. The mess provides exposure and lessons on deference to seniors, dress and decorum. The combined arms mess provides this across a broader network within the brigade in many ways. Initially it fosters the cohesion of command hierarchy through opportunity to engage in formal and informal interaction. Additionally, and just as importantly, it provides example to the wider audience how the command hierarchy interacts.

11. Moreover, given the ever present tempo within the brigade this combined arms interaction in the mess is often the only example of interaction beyond the digital interface of our comms suite in barracks and out training. Knowing your team, in person, their abilities and nature builds stronger bonds which improve how we work and fight together. The varying level of interaction and bonds create opportunities for success.

SOCIAL SCIENCE

12. The messes provide a suitable environment for professional interaction to occur socially. Mathematical sociology defines the information-carrying connections between people. These connections are commonly grouped into three types, being ‘strong’, ‘weak’ and ‘absent’. A ‘strong’ connection embodies strong networks that assist the flow of information and understanding. Interestingly, a very significant contributor from connections to quantified outcomes is the ‘weak’ connection. A ‘weak’ connection can be defined as an

² Land Warfare Doctrine LWD 0-2, *Leadership*, 2013, 17.10

acquaintance, or someone you have a 'nod' relationship with (like a neighbour you pass in the street for example).

13. Studies by renowned sociologist Granovetter³ interviewed dozens of people to find out how social networks contributed to them getting their jobs. Over 50% of people got their job through a 'weak' connection.

14. From personal experience most would say they have received help, generated training opportunities and learned information just by being in the mess. More often than not through conversation you would be told 'oh you should speak to.....they can help you'. These opportunities are a result of being in an environment where you have access to people from organisations you otherwise may not have had reason to interact with; 'weak' links are created in the place of useless 'absent' links.

PROFESSIONAL PROGRESSION

15. *"The Daly Officers Mess and Chauvel Sergeants Mess are 3rd Brigades' focal points for combined arms and joint professional educational and development, and for the generation of social cohesions."*⁴

16. Multiple opportunities and events have been conducted within our mess. From tactical exercise without troops (TEWT), professional presentation/discussions, historical case studies and webinars. These professional interactions have certainly created a collegiate, team rich environment to enhance our collective profession of arms.

17. The mess environment allows interaction at many levels. Professionally we are exposed to diversity of subject matter expertise, which informs and enables improvement to our combined arms planning and considerations. Additionally, we are provided examples of how the command hierarchy communicates through verbal and non-verbal means, also known as the communication process.⁵

18. Most significantly we now enjoy the ability to access all of these lessons from all levels of defence senior leadership. Webinars and visiting lecturers provide a direct link to people and information we have not previously enjoyed. This inclusive and learning rich environment accelerates and crystallises subordinate understanding of intent.

³ Granovetter, Mark. *The strength of Weak Ties*. 1972.

⁴ HQ 3BDE/OUT//2017/Q8075818 *COMMANDER 3rd BRIGADE DIRECTIVE 003/17 – PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT*, 2017. 4.

⁵ Land Warfare Doctrine LWD 0-2, *Leadership*, 2013, Chap 6

Conclusion

19. The 3rd Combat Brigade messes are as important as ever as institutions for providing the example on how to create teams, and the successes possible with doing so. The mess as an establishment to uphold customs and traditions continues to grow in strength through opportunity to display and convey lessons of our history and how we work together as combined, joint and inter-agency teams.

20. We have an environment in which to break bread and converse, enriching our daily business through the creation and maintenance of professional bonds. The mess environment provides opportunity for leadership, command and team networking not achievable in other facets of daily our work life.

21. The mess provides an inclusive environment to challenge our profession of arms and shorten the learning cycle through example and blending of diverse experience. As our mess continues to grow our professional development and creation of teams will enable success in this combat brigade.