

CAPABILITY

IS PARACHUTE CAPABILITY STILL RELEVANT TO MODERN EXPEDITIONARY OPERATIONS?¹

MAJOR PAUL SCANLAN

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the role a conventional parachute capability can have in modern expeditionary operations. It will argue that a conventional parachute capability is still viable and relevant in the Australian Defence Force, either as a single capability or in support of the amphibious capability, particularly in regard to the force required to undertake modern expeditionary operations.

In addition, this article will query the viability of the development of the Australian Defence Force amphibious capability in this economic climate. While the Australian perspectives for debate are limited, the arguments presented are designed to stimulate discussion and debate rather than provide an in-depth solution. Finally it will suggest that the Defence White Paper 2013 reconsider the decision to remove the conventional parachute capability.

*Where is the prince who can afford so to cover his country with troops for its defense, as that ten thousand men descending from the clouds, might not, in many places, do an infinite deal of mischief before a force could be brought to repel them?*²

Benjamin Franklin, 1781

The introduction of a viable aerial platform from which to deploy fulfilled Benjamin Franklin's prescient forecast of the potential application of parachuting from the sky. Since 1948, thirty of the thirty-seven combat operations involving conventionally employed parachute forces were successful in accomplishing their mission, with six unsuccessful and one partially attaining its objective.³ In October 2001, elements of the 75th Ranger Regiment parachuted into the Helmand Desert of Afghanistan, their objective to secure Forward Operating Base Rhino. In March 2003, the 173rd Airborne Brigade parachuted into Northern Iraq to seize an airfield and support US Special Operations Forces. In January 2012, members of the US Naval Special Warfare Development Group, using Military Free Fall, parachuted into Somalia to recover two hostages.⁴ This contemporary employment of parachute capability across the spectrum of conflict illustrates its continued relevance to modern expeditionary operations.

As a more dynamic and contested, less secure world emerges, there is a continued relevance for the vertical dimension of modern expeditionary operations.⁵ Parachuting currently offers a capability that cannot be replicated or superseded. While the large scale airborne assaults of the Arnhem model of the Second World War are unlikely in the future, a parachute capability still provides the ability to insert force or materiel in denied, austere or remote areas.⁶ As the examples highlighted demonstrate, it remains particularly relevant, especially when there is a requirement to improvise an expeditionary operation at short notice in difficult terrain with poor infrastructure, and still maintain an element of surprise.⁷ A parachute capability confers flexibility, adaptability and strategic reach. Significantly, in this economic climate, it provides a cost effective capability. Furthermore, when supporting or in conjunction with an amphibious capability, parachute capability exponentially increases the adversary's uncertainty.⁸

This article argues that a conventional parachute capability is still relevant to modern expeditionary operations. As the Defence White Paper 2009 identified, 'our expansive strategic geography requires an *expeditionary orientation on the part of the Australian Defence Force at the operational level, underpinned by requisite force projection capabilities*.'⁹ It uses Geoffrey Till's criteria to outline the nature

of modern expeditionary operations and Thierry Gongora's baseline and robust expeditionary capability models to demonstrate what a parachute capability can bring to operational plans. Contemporary case studies will illustrate the relevancy of the parachute capability. Key to this argument is the importance of preparedness and mobility in expeditionary operations, for as one senior US Army official has remarked, 'you are not relevant unless you can get to the fight'.¹⁰

MODERN EXPEDITIONARY OPERATIONS AND PARACHUTE CAPABILITY

Modern expeditionary operations are those set in the post-Cold War period, after the end of the bipolar world, which saw the emergence of differing strategic and security paradigms.¹¹ The defining characteristic of expeditionary operations is the projection of force into a foreign setting, often with limited aims and of short duration.¹² They comprise the spectrum of military operations, from humanitarian assistance/disaster recovery, non-combatant evacuations, counterinsurgency and forcible entry in a unified land operation. The USMC defines them as 'a military operation conducted by an armed force to accomplish a specific objective in a foreign country'.¹³ The roles of the expeditionary force include seizure and control of key physical objectives such as Air Ports of Disembarkation (APOD), Sea Ports of Disembarkation (SPOD), resource areas and political centres, to establish and maintain order in an area beset by chaos and disorder and to provide physical relief and assistance in the event of a disaster.¹⁴ Expeditionary forces are often described by a collection of adjectives: rapidly deployable, light, flexible, joint and agile—all of which are perfectly applicable to parachute capabilities.¹⁵

The defining characteristic of expeditionary operations is the projection of force into a foreign setting, often with limited aims and of short duration.

Before examining the details of the utility of the parachute capability, it is important to firstly understand the meaning of 'capability'. This is 'the ability and capacity to perform a set of tasks designed to produce an effect'.¹⁶ The nature of the force that produces this effect is dependent on the conditions and standards that are applied to them. The benchmarks of this force are speed, agility, precision, ability to concentrate, mass coordinated joint fires and ability to disperse. Arguably, capability has no relevance unless it has the ability and capacity to perform its mission or task. Therefore the mission and perceived tasks require continual review to ensure capabilities are validated and increase the likelihood of success.¹⁷

A parachute capability facilitates the insertion of personnel or materiel (munitions, equipment, food and water) via aircraft using deceleration systems.¹⁸ This can range from small teams of specialists, such as Special Forces to larger, more conventional forces or materiel, in the form of logistical resupply or equipment. Furthermore, a conventional parachute capability often implies preparedness, as many militaries hold parachute capable elements as strategic assets. This is of particular utility to expeditionary operation with their emphasis on short notice deployments, where responsiveness is a significant consideration. In an environment of uncertainty and unpredictability, a parachute capability, more so conventional and with mass drop static-line and heavy drop equipment, provides options that other capabilities do not have.

EXPEDITIONARY OPERATIONS AND THE UTILITY OF A PARACHUTE CAPABILITY

The best contemporary definition of an expeditionary operation is provided by Geoffrey Till, a Professor of Maritime Studies in the Defence Studies Department of King's College London. His list of interconnected characteristics includes:¹⁹

- operational
- distant
- self-contained
- limited in aim
- of short duration
- against varied opponents
- demanding and specialised
- fought in urbanised littorals, and
- highly politicised.

Because so many mixtures of these criteria may apply to particular cases, definitions may remain imprecise. Nevertheless, the above characteristics will be used to systematically assess the relevance of the parachute capability.

OPERATIONAL

Till uses expeditionary in this criteria specifically in relation to the operational level of war. In today's environment it is more likely that such forces will be used to secure an APOD or SPOD, rather than as part of unified land operations. In the contemporary operating military environment the seizure of an APOD or SPOD can be especially challenging give the widespread use of surface-to-air missiles by both conventional and unconventional forces. However, this does not present a barrier that eliminates the use of a parachute capability. Surface-to-air missile threats can be neutralised by suppression of air defences, allowing parachute forces

to deploy almost anywhere, *en mass*, to achieve their mission. This is especially significant given the accessibility issues when considering the use of amphibious or rotary-wing capabilities.

In addition, the lack of a suitable airfield preventing a fixed-wing air-land option may necessitate delivery by parachute of troops in an airborne assault or an equipment airdrop. The parachuting into Northern Iraq by the 173rd Airborne Brigade to seize an airfield specifically demonstrates the conventional pursuit of such operational objectives. Alternatively, clandestine parachute forces, such as Special Forces, can achieve tactical through to strategic objectives through precision capabilities.²⁰ Moreover, the use of a parachute capability in tandem with air-landing, rotary or amphibious forces provides support to more complex schemes of joint expeditionary manoeuvre through the tactical concept of simultaneity—confronting the enemy commander with a dilemma to complicate his or her defence.²¹

A parachute capability is the insertion of personnel or materiel (munitions, equipment, food and water) via aircraft using deceleration systems.

DISTANT

‘Distant’ refers to the operational ability to move between engagements²² with an emphasis on the ability to deploy quickly to trouble spots in a region.²³ A parachute capability, assisted by aerial refuelling, can deploy over significant distances, manoeuvring to bypass obstacles and terrain to insert and achieve strategic and operational objectives. While a tilt-rotor²⁴ or even a rotary-wing capability can also partially achieve this, availability, range, carrying capacity and force protection of platforms can inhibit their use. The US Army maintains a brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division at 18 hours notice to move, for intervention anywhere in the world for this purpose.²⁵ Once at their destination, parachute insertion provides a more efficient means of getting ‘an airborne division on the ground in 10 minutes’ rather than ‘a brigade air-landed in a day and a half’.²⁶ This is due to the air-land option taking much longer due to the requirement to land individual aircraft, disembarkation time and tarmac management of aircraft on what may be a rudimentary airfield. This strategic mobility, together with an ability to deploy from secure locations, makes it difficult for an adversary to determine likely targets. This flexibility to project almost anywhere, together with aerial delivery platforms capable of inserting personnel or materiel in large numbers, is a worthwhile investment and very much relevant in the modern economic climate.²⁷

SELF-CONTAINED

An expeditionary force must be self-deployable and (hopefully) decisive. In regards to parachute capability this is crucial as ‘no force can truly be expeditionary if it cannot fight its way in or sustain itself in an austere environment’.²⁸ Logistically, parachute capability continues to advance in this regard. The introduction of C17 into the RAAF combined with the proven capabilities of the C130 in delivery of heavy drop platforms has increased the operational viability period of conventional parachute forces in the Australian context. The recognised efficacy of simultaneous personnel and heavy drop insertion from C130 aircraft and the large increase in capability afforded by the C17 (particularly in the delivery of large engineer plant to open a damaged airfield) was demonstrated by the 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (3 RAR) Airborne Combat Team in 2010.²⁹

Since 2004, the use of GPS guided parachutes to conduct precision resupply provides a rapid, accurate and low cost sustainment option that does not rely on ground transport or extended exposure of fixed-wing or rotary-wing aircraft to dangerous landing zones. There is also potential for resupply of forces in contact that may be cut off or unable to be resupplied due to the nature of the terrain.³⁰ The stand-off parachute capability enables the delivery of personnel and materiel outside an environment characterised by adversarial tactical air defence. This is of increasing relevance to modern expeditionary operations as it allows the development of a capability that is not just an emergency logistics resupply capability, but a method of insertion into multiple drop zones from a single platform.³¹ Furthermore, this method has a minimal personnel footprint and limited requirement for logistic support. This characteristic allows parachute capability to be sustained in an austere environment without host nation support.

An expeditionary force must be self-deployable and (hopefully) decisive.

LIMITED IN AIM AND OF SHORT DURATION

In this context, parachute capabilities are increasingly appropriate; in most cases they seek neither conquest nor occupation and are often designed for no more than 72 hours of independent operations. Given its targeted aim, a forced entry operation may not be critical to the overall success of an expeditionary operation. Usually it assumes reliance on follow-on forces. Nevertheless, the surprise and shock of a parachute deployment is very effective. Forces can assault multiple operational objectives, target key infrastructure or secure SPODs and APODs for follow-on forces. This is increasingly relevant in the modern environment where asymmetric forces can target ports and large airfields to deny access.³² This access

is critical, as expeditionary operations are often followed by long-term stabilisation operations. This is the role of a traditional conventional parachute capability, securing an SPOD or APOD so follow-on forces can then be used for the post expeditionary operational environment.

AGAINST VARIED OPPONENTS AND FOUGHT IN URBANISED LITTORALS

Expeditionary forces need to be prepared to operate in complex and challenging environments, where the adversary changes and avoids the strengths of any concentration of force by an opponent while seeking to exploit their vulnerabilities. In an expeditionary context, these forces can include terrorists, insurgents, paramilitary groups and near peer combat forces. Furthermore, modern expeditionary operations will focus less on the decisive battle and more on key operational level actions to separate adversaries from their sources of support, and neutralising those that contest the expedition.³³

... modern expeditionary operations will focus less on the decisive battle and more on key operational level actions to separate adversaries from their sources of support ...

These varied opponents could also be capable of sabotaging an airfield or preventing a primary air-land option. In an expeditionary operation where failure is not an option, a force incapable of conducting parachute insertion would compromise mission success. A parachute capability is therefore extremely useful and appropriate in an urbanised littoral environment where a parachute force may provide options that amphibious forces do not possess. In regard to inland areas former US Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney remarked, 'the remote inland location of the many areas of vital-national interest and the requirement for rapid strategic deployability can only be accomplished by aerial delivery'.³⁴

These criteria introduce limitations into parachute capability that requires consideration of risk. Modern capability often lacks organic transport, has limited organic fire support and requires a semi-permissive environment or air superiority to mitigate.³⁵ Nevertheless, a multi-mission capable parachute capability would allow the expeditionary operation to meet changes in the situation. Included in this capability could be specialists, such as Special Forces, engineers, medical and logistical personnel, and larger, more conventional parachute forces.

DEMANDING AND SPECIALISED

Parachute capability is extremely relevant as it involves low or high level mass and/or precision insertions during periods of darkness to improve survivability, into

difficult terrain, and potentially against superior numbers. While this is mitigated by surprise, there are significant technological requirements to support a parachute capability ranging from insertion of personnel to equipment. These continue to be refined. For example, with the introduction of the T11 parachute, the percentile injury rate is expected to be less than 1 per cent.³⁶ Alternatively, these demands also present the single greatest limitation of the parachute capability, their susceptibility to adverse meteorological conditions that can significantly influence mission success. This was demonstrated in Operation URGENT FURY, the US invasion of Grenada in 1983, when four members of the Naval Special Warfare Development Group died during a parachute insertion in extreme conditions off the coast of Grenada.³⁷

HIGHLY POLITICISED

Modern expeditionary operations require an ability to shape the political and strategic environment in the 'pre-crisis' phase of any impending conflict.³⁸ This results in them being highly politicised, not only for the nation considering action, but also by the adversary in employing political and economic actions to disrupt strategic deployment options.³⁹ Modern expeditionary operations also have 'an executive, legislative and public expectation of success'.⁴⁰ By virtue of their speed, mobility and sustained readiness, a parachute capability is extremely relevant. Implied within this, though, is the appropriate military and political will or agility of command to support the Ground Force Commander. Consequently, if there are requests for assistance, a parachute capability is the quickest means and, more importantly, 'it's getting there with the right sufficient capability to be able to be decisive quickly'.⁴¹

Furthermore, in terms of politically sensitive, discrete expeditionary operations, personnel can conduct clandestine Military Free Fall outside detection and threat ranges in order to allow low signature insertion.⁴² This was most recently demonstrated during the recovery of the hostages in Somalia by the Naval Special Warfare Development Group described earlier. This requires the maintenance of a high state of readiness that allows a rapid reaction to a developing situation. Parachute capability is often maintained on this and a sustainable expeditionary force generation basis. An example is Operation JUST CAUSE, conducted prior to the US invasion of Panama. Due to their standing readiness, the 75th Ranger Regiment was able to conduct a rehearsal for the actual airborne assault.⁴³ Today, this is their 'national mission', with each Ranger battalion conducting annual rehearsals with all participants.⁴⁴

By virtue of their speed, mobility and sustained readiness, a parachute capability is extremely relevant.

An important addition to Till's criteria is that a parachute capability provides a deterrent that can be used as an element of national power.⁴⁵ At the strategic level, credible threats to use parachute capable forces can coerce a regime to accept certain political terms and potentially avoid large scale expeditionary operations.⁴⁶ As a strategic reserve, they provide a situational dilemma for an adversary. This was demonstrated by the United States when they threatened the military regime of General Raoul Cedras with an airborne invasion if he did not stand down and allow Haiti to return to democratic rule.⁴⁷ At the operational level, the very threat of a parachute force being employed can shape enemy dispositions in such a manner that it would enable the successful lodgement of an amphibious force.⁴⁸ However, if the deterrent was to fail, the ability to deploy a parachute capability to a region quickly may be enough to secure the political and strategic goals and the operational objective.⁴⁹

GONGORA'S EXPEDITIONARY MODELS

The other conceptual foundation to support defining expeditionary operations is offered by Dr Thierry Gongora, a defence scientist attached to the air staff at Canadian National Defence Headquarters. He suggests two models are used to assess the requirements for expeditionary models, the baseline and the robust. In deciding which of the two to pursue, nations should first establish their requirement for expeditionary forces and then, based on their needs, choose between the two. Their decision should also consider resolution of broader issues relating to defence and foreign policy.⁵⁰ The difference between the two models is that while the baseline is rigid in its assessment, the robust is slightly less so and discretion can be applied amongst the capability requirements. Whatever the decision, additional capability improves the opportunities for access to an area of operations, despite opposition and/or the absence of host nation support.⁵¹ Therefore, in evaluating the relevance of a parachute capability in modern expeditionary operations, all of the baseline criteria will be applied. In terms of the robust, the capability of forced entry will be applied, noting multi-mission capable and sustainment in an austere environment without host nation support has already been validated.⁵²

... additional capability improves the opportunities for access to an area of operations, despite opposition and/or the absence of host nation support.

The baseline expeditionary model refers to the ability to respond quickly to foreign crisis through the 'deployment (often over strategic distances) of a task

tailored force for an operation limited in time.⁵³ Reflecting a considerable degree of overlap with Till's criteria, elements of the baseline expeditionary model include:

- high readiness
 - sustainable expeditionary force generation
 - strategic mobility
 - lean in-theatre support, and
 - modular force packages
- which are all present in a parachute capability.

Those not assessed earlier from the baseline model include deployable command and control, and interoperability with main coalition partners.⁵⁴ A parachute capability fulfils command and control requirements at all levels. Due to the strategic and political demands of expeditionary operations, parachute capable forces maintain strategic communication capabilities. Conventional battalions and small Special Forces teams are all optimised for command and control in theatre to ensure political and military strategic objectives are achieved.⁵⁵ Interoperability with main coalition partners is also strongly represented in the parachute capability, with routine doctrine and equipment exchanges occurring. This was recently demonstrated by the regular 'wings exchange' jumps conducted by 3 RAR and US Army airborne units during the TALISMAN SABRE exercise series. It was also demonstrated in Exercise EAGLES VOL when British and French parachute forces, tasked to develop a combined joint expeditionary force for contingency operations, conducted parachute insertions using each other's aircraft and parachutes.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the French maintain an airborne capability of 9000 personnel and conduct a minimum of six descents annually.⁵⁷

The robust model builds on the baseline by 'adding a series of expanded requirements that can be defined as the ability to respond quickly to crisis abroad through the deployment... of a military force *with a broad range of capabilities and despite opposition...*'⁵⁸ Forced entry is the most important parachute capability of relevance to modern expeditionary operations. In order to avoid adversarial anti-access and denial efforts, there is a requirement to maintain a forcible parachute entry capability. Parachute capability may be deployed for the purposes of:

limited objective strikes and raids; limited attacks to seize key terrain and destroy enemy anti-access capabilities such as air and missile defences and anti-satellite and anti-ship missiles; achieving a coup de main; seizure of existing ports and airfields, or the establishment of expeditionary facilities that enable follow-on operations.⁵⁹

If forced entry is required as part of an expeditionary operation, parachute capability may be required to insert reconnaissance elements and/or forces to secure an initial lodgement, particularly if the condition of the APOD or SPOD cannot be determined. This pre-emptive action can also set up the 'follow-on' force

for success, as the deployment of a medium weight force would require more time and infrastructure to insert, whether it is by air or sea.⁶⁰

The parachute capability is increasingly relevant to modern expeditionary operations. Joint enablers are critical to supporting a successful parachute insertion, namely air superiority en route to and over the objective area. While parachute capability achieves tactically significant effects, it also highlights the limitations of the capability. Air superiority requires a significant contribution by tactical aircraft to provide protection and suppress adversarial air defences. Furthermore, if the objective was heavily defended, tactical aircraft would also be required to conduct suppression of enemy air defences before an insertion was to take place. Nevertheless, a parachute capability can significantly shape and set the conditions for a follow-on force action,⁶¹ when a lack of organic air superiority for amphibious forces limits the type and location of possible operations. Battalions of the 75th Ranger Regiment demonstrated this during Operations URGENT FURY and JUST CAUSE when they conducted parachute assaults to seize the airfields of Torrijos/Tocumen and Point Salines to support the introduction of follow on forces.⁶² The forced entry robust criterion assists the baseline criteria such as the sustainable expedition for generation and lean in-theatre support.

Forced entry is the most
important parachute capability
of relevance to modern
expeditionary operations.

THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

The transfer of responsibility for securing APODs and SPODs from Forces Command to Special Operations Command (SOCOMD) is not a transfer of a parachute capability in the sense of expeditionary operations. The term ‘transfer of capability’ is misleading. SOCOMD offers a projection of power across the ocean by ‘rapid deployment forces’. However, while this is an accurate description of an important element of the expeditionary framework, it can imply that deploying forces to the area of operations is the whole mission.⁶³ But the ability to achieve an effect and return home (or reconstitute while forward deployed) is fundamental, as has been demonstrated by Till’s criteria. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between expeditionary operations and power projection—by itself power projection is not sufficient to warrant an expeditionary operation.⁶⁴ Each expeditionary operation will comprise a unique mix of these characteristics and in some cases not all will be in evidence. Consequently, to emphasise the relevance of a parachute capability, Gongora’s expeditionary model demonstrates its utility in modern expeditionary operations.

The subsequent effects of the decision to remove a conventional parachute capability were recently highlighted during wargaming at the Australian Command and Staff College. In a scenario that involved a services protected evacuation prior to conventional conflict, the only force element available to fulfil the responsibilities of a strategic reserve was the 2nd Commando Regiment. Considering extant operational commitments to Operation SLIPPER and Defence Aid to the Civil Power, planners were left with an option to either have a strategic reserve that was parachute capable and no force available to conduct forced entry seizure of an APOD or SPOD, or vice versa. Similar significant limitations were encountered during the 2012 Exercise POZIERES PROSPECT command post exercise, where the requirement to simultaneously seize an APOD and SPOD demonstrated concurrency limitations with tasking SOCOMD capability with conventional and unconventional tasks. This required an airmobile supplementation with the Ready Battalion Group which, in reality, would not be available in the primary operating environment due to distance, but can be achieved in the 2013 Exercise TALISMAN SABRE scenario as Northern Legais abuts the Australian mainland. Furthermore rotary-wing capability has limited range, endurance, asset complement and utility in achieving a rapid decisive effect need to secure an APOD or SPOD in an expeditionary context,⁶⁵ and exacerbated when considering the limited Australian rotary-wing fleet. An airborne combat team or parachute battalion group fulfils this role more appropriately than any SOCOMD force, more so when you consider their primary role, and that of their enablers—artillery, engineers and medical—is to secure and *hold* (supported by a heavy drop of engineer stores and combat service support) a point of entry. Furthermore, they have the mass and the experience to do so, as opposed to what would essentially be an *ad hoc* composite force. During the period 2009–10, 3 RAR regenerated the conventional parachute capability and was ‘operationally capable with theatre communications, medical, engineer and offensive support assets commensurate with its size and likely tasks.’⁶⁶ In this environment, ‘we can do it in extremis’ is not a valid capability. As has been described earlier when referring to simultaneity, in our primary operating environment, that being South East Asia and the South West Pacific, if we cannot secure the APOD and SPOD simultaneously, we cannot conduct entry operations in an environment characterised more by threat than permissive.

... it is important to distinguish between expeditionary operations and power projection—by itself power projection is not sufficient to warrant an expeditionary operation.

In light of our recent budget cuts, it is important to highlight the cost of the jointness⁶⁷ and resources required to develop an amphibious capability. We are studying the Marines, with sixty-five years of experience in amphibious warfare. Maintaining two Landing Helicopter Docks will require \$320 million per year.⁶⁸ These costs do not incorporate the additional cost of the RAAF and RAN assets required for air superiority and sea control in delivering this force, nor the additional Army costs to project a force that will be capable of forced entry. The Chief of the Royal Australian Air Force recently commented that the 5th Generation fighter can achieve air superiority and suppression of enemy air defences in a future conflict, and to do so for an amphibious force would require in excess of one hundred Joint Strike Fighters.⁶⁹ If the JSF was only required to provide air superiority for the insertion of a parachute capability, using C130s and C17s, how many JSFs would be required then? If the force inserted has organic ground based air defence, and could secure an APOD or SPOD for follow-on forces, would this not be a more cost effective expeditionary capability, as opposed to the expensive and time intensive plan that sees the development of an amphibious force that cannot guarantee a point of entry in our littoral primary operating environment? The ability to insert a combined arms sub-unit or battle group by parachute, and/or followed on by a brigade where necessary can only be an advantage in our strategic capability.⁷⁰

In light of our recent budget cuts, it is important to highlight the cost of the jointness and resources required to develop an amphibious capability.

Perhaps Army could consider this; a non-aligned parachute capability under command of Joint Deployable Force as a viable alternative to the development of the 2nd Battalion as a dedicated Amphibious Battalion Group. Plan BEERSHEBA is not suitable for the raising of a credible Entry from the Air and Sea Brigade force based on an amphibious capability and inclusive or otherwise of a parachute capability. The Defence White Paper 2009 called for the Army to provide a brigade for operations while simultaneously providing another battle group. Strategic policy would be met if the three multi-role brigades provide the former and the parachute battalion the latter.⁷¹

CONCLUSION

The modern expeditionary force will continue to contend with a diverse operating environment. This will include political, economic, social and technological elements that will support an adversary's will and ability to fight. A parachute capability is

relevant to modern expeditionary operations and complements an amphibious capability, but as with all expeditionary operations, the capability is required to be firmly linked to anticipated missions, tasks and associated threats. Specialising a capability for modern expeditionary operations for only one environment restricts the 'ability and capacity to perform a set of tasks designed to produce an effect'⁷² and the ensuing influence that can be expected from developing courses of action to achieve political and military strategic objectives.

Using the strategy of Till's interconnected criteria and Gongora's baseline and robust models this article has examined the relevance of a conventional parachute capability and argues that it is extremely relevant. A conventional parachute capability's dual strengths of both a strategic mobility and forced entry capability in rapidly deteriorating situations will continue to ensure its relevance to modern expeditionary operations. As has been demonstrated in the case studies, this relevance to modern expeditionary operations is not the solution alone, as success is often determined by maintaining a balanced force that is able to contend with most, if not all, contingencies.⁷³

In the contemporary Australian context, focusing on the development of an expensive amphibious expeditionary capability and confining a parachute capability to SOCOMD does not provide this. The Defence White Paper 2013 needs to ensure decisions are not made on parochial grounds. It should reconsider what capabilities are cost effective and prioritise them, within the current budget restrictions, to achieve our strategic and operational objectives more efficiently.

Until technology enables individual or collective vertical envelopment through alternative means, the most cost effective way to deliver personnel and materiel over long distances in an inland or littoral environment, including SPOD or APOD seizure, is with a parachute capability. In an environment of uncertainty and economic restraint, we need to maximise capabilities that are useful and cost effective and, above all well proven. The conventional parachute capability was; the proposed amphibious capability is not.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The author would like to acknowledge the helpful comments, information and advice from Dr Andrew Davies, Dr Peter Dean, Dr Michael Evans, Dr Russell Parkin, Lieutenant Colonels Ben Pronk and Matt Stevens, and Major Giles Cornelia.
- 2 'A Brief History of the Parachute', 2011 <<http://thejager.tumblr.com/post/3836806493/a-brief-history-of-the-parachute>> accessed 4 August 2012.
- 3 J Rickard, 'The Employment of Airborne (Parachute) Forces in Modern Asymmetrical Warfare', *Canadian Army Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2004, p. 114.

- 4 J Gettleman, E Schmitt and T Shanker, 'US Swoops in to Free 2 from Pirates in Somali Raid', *New York Times*, 25 January 2012, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/26/world/africa/us-raid-frees-2-hostages-from-somali-pirates.html>> accessed 4 August 2012.
- 5 D Glantz, *A History of Soviet Airborne Forces*, Frank Cass, Essex, 1994, p. 393.
- 6 E Jordaan, 'An Airborne Capability for South Africa from a Special Operations Forces Perspective', *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 2012, p. 55.
- 7 T Ripley, 'British Army plans to reactivate airborne task force, EUROPE', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 2011, <<http://articles.janes.com/articles/Janes-Defence-Weekly-2011/British-Army-plans-to-reactivate-airborne-task-force.html>> accessed 1 August 2012.
- 8 ADDP 3.2 – *Amphibious Operations*, Australian Defence Warfare Centre, Williamstown, 2009, p. 1-2.
- 9 *Defending Australia in the Asia-Pacific Century: Force 2030*, Department of Defence, 2009, p. 51.
- 10 M Arnold, 'The Seductive Effect of an Expeditionary Mindset', School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and General Staff College, 2006, p. 20.
- 11 P Dean, 'Introduction to Expeditionary Operations', Lecture at the Australian Command and Staff College, 2012.
- 12 Ibid. The ADF defines it as the 'projection of power over extended lines of communications into a distant operational area to accomplish a specific mission.' Note the RAAF have a similar mission statement, although it differs in that they accomplish a specific objective.
- 13 MCDP 1-0 – *Marine Corps Operations*, Department of the Navy, Washington, 2001, p. 26.
- 14 MCDP 3-0 – *Expeditionary Operations*, Department of the Navy, Washington, 1983, pp. 37–38.
- 15 G Hodermarsky, *The Characteristics of Expeditionary Forces*, Science Applications International Corporation, Suffolk, 2007, p. 3.
- 16 Ibid, p. 69.
- 17 Ibid, p. A-16.
- 18 'Capabilities: A Systems Approach to an Optimum Solution', Airborne Systems, 2012 <<http://www.airborne-sys.com/pages/view/capabilities>> accessed 5 August 2012.
- 19 G Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, Second Edition, Routledge, London, 2009, p. 223.
- 20 D DeLancey, 'The 82nd Airborne Division in Transformation: Is it Possible to Significantly Increase the Combat Power in the Division Ready Brigade and Reduce Deployment Sorties Using Current, Fielded Technology?', monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and General Staff College, 2001, p. 21.

- 21 LWD3-0 – *Developing Doctrine*, Land Warfare Development Centre, Puckapunyal, 2008, p. 29.
- 22 Hodermarsky, *The Characteristics of Expeditionary Forces*, p. 3.
- 23 *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, US Department of Defence, 2006, p. v.
- 24 SV-22 Osprey (platform used by 75th Ranger Regiment in an airfield seizure operations).
- 25 ‘82nd Airborne Division – “All American” / “America’s Guard of Honor”’, [Globalsecurity.org](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/army/82abn.htm), 2012 <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/army/82abn.htm>> accessed 4 August 2012.
- 26 T Donnelly, *Operation Just Cause*, Lexington Books, New York, 1991, p. 89.
- 27 G Cornelia, ‘ADF Joint Entry Operations: why conventional airborne forces are fundamental’, *Australian Defence Force Journal*, No. 183, 2010, p. 38.
- 28 T Gongora, ‘Expeditionary Operations: Definition and Requirements’, *Military Technology*, Vol. 28, No. 6, 2004, p. 107.
- 29 As articulated by Cornelia: ‘The capacity for a sizeable contingency force element to be launched from strategic distances and landed by parachute on or near an objective (possibly an airfield denied by some expedient means) with its support weapons and immediate logistics delivered by aerial delivery platforms in the space of a few minutes is what makes conventional airborne forces a worthy investment. The option of employing both C-17 and C-130 type aircraft in a paratrooping role gives great flexibility and reach to an ADF conventional airborne force.’ Cornelia, ‘ADF Joint Entry Operations: why conventional airborne forces are fundamental’, pp. 38–39.
- 30 M Matheson, ‘The Rebirth of Aerial Delivery’, *Canadian Military Journal*, Spring, 2001, p. 44.
- 31 D Beatty, ‘The Future of Parachute Operations’, *The Army Doctrine and Training Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2002, p. 52.
- 32 Interview with General Erik K Shinseki, *Frontline*, 1999, <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/future/interviews/shinseki.html>> accessed 4 August 2012.
- 33 Hodermarsky, *The Characteristics of Expeditionary Forces*, p. ES-1.
- 34 M Kazmierski, ‘US Army Power Projection in the 21st Century: The Conventional Airborne Forces must be Modernized to meet the Army’s Strategic Force requirements and the Nation’s future threats’, Master of Military Art and Science, US Army Command and General Staff College. 1990, p. 120.
- 35 Cornelia, ‘ADF Joint Entry Operations: why conventional airborne forces are fundamental’, p. 38.
- 36 M Stevens, ‘Airfield Seizure: Rangers Lead the Way’, *Infantry Magazine*, 2012.
- 37 D Chalker, *One Perfect Op: Navy SEAL Special Warfare Teams*, Avon Books, New York, 2002, p. 134.
- 38 *Ibid*, p. 42.
- 39 Hodermarsky, *The Characteristics of Expeditionary Forces*, p. 42.

- 40 R Fry, 'Expeditionary Operations in the Modern Era', *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 150, No. 6, 2009, p. 63.
- 41 Interview with General Erik K Shinseki, *Frontline*.
- 42 *Field Manual 3-05.211 Special Forces Military Free-Fall Operations*, Department of the Army, Washington DC, 2005, p 1-1.
- 43 A Zunde, 'Rangers and the Strategic Requirements for Direct Action Forces', thesis, Master of Military Art and Science, US Army Command and General Staff College, 1998, p. 73.
- 44 Stevens, 'Airfield Seizure: Rangers Lead the Way'.
- 45 Kazmierski, 'US Army Power Projection in the 21st Century', p. 120.
- 46 Jordaan, 'An Airborne Capability for South Africa from a Special Operations Forces Perspective', p. 67.
- 47 Ibid, p. 57.
- 48 ADDP 3.9 – *Airborne Operations*, Australian Defence Warfare Centre, Williamstown, 2004, p. 1-1.
- 49 D Davis, 'Airborne Deep Operational Manoeuvre: Employment Options for the use of Airborne Forces in Modern Campaigns', monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and General Staff College, 1989, p. 38.
- 50 Gongora, 'Expeditionary Operations: Definition and Requirements', p. 107.
- 51 Ibid, pp. 6, 107.
- 52 Dean, 'Introduction to Expeditionary Operations'.
- 53 Gongora, 'Expeditionary Operations: Definition and Requirements', p. 107.
- 54 Dean, 'Introduction to Expeditionary Operations'.
- 55 C Robertson, 'Support of US Army Special Forces in Expeditionary Warfare', monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and General Staff College, 2008, p. 23.
- 56 'British and French Troops Parachute Together', Ministry of Defence, 10 July 2012, <<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/TrainingAndAdventure/BritishAndFrenchTroopsParachuteTogether.htm>> accessed 4 August 2012.
- 57 D Benest, 'A British Parachuting Capability', *The Journal of Military Operations*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2012, p. 26.
- 58 Gongora, 'Expeditionary Operations: Definition and Requirements', p. 107. (Author's Emphasis)
- 59 *Gaining and Maintaining Access: An Army-Marine Concept*, US Army Capabilities Integration Center, 2012, p. 8.
- 60 Beatty, 'The Future of Parachute Operations', p. 54.
- 61 *Gaining and Maintaining Access: An Army-Marine Concept*, p. 8.
- 62 Zunde, 'Rangers and the Strategic Requirements for Direct Action Forces', p. 50.
- 63 Hodermarsky, *The Characteristics of Expeditionary Forces*, p. 42.

- 64 MCDP 3-0 *Expeditionary Operations*, Department of the Navy, Washington, 1983, p. 33.
- 65 Stevens, 'Airfield Seizure: Rangers Lead the Way'.
- 66 Cornelia, 'ADF Joint Entry Operations: why conventional airborne forces are fundamental', p. 33.
- 67 'Jointness' is an expression coined by the US Services to describe cross-service cooperation in all stages of the military processes, from research, through procurement and into operations. It is aimed at satisfying the requirements for increasing efficiency and economising the security budget.
- 68 M Thomson and A Davies, '*Strategic Choices: Defending Australia in the 21st Century*', Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Barton, 2008, p. 17.
- 69 G Brown, 'Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) "Dinner with the Chiefs" Chief of Air Force: Air Marshal Geoff Brown AO', 5 June 2012, <http://www.airforce.gov.au/docs/CAF_address_ASPI_Dinner_5_Jun_12.pdf> accessed 13 August 2012.
- 70 Benest, 'A British Parachuting Capability', p. 26.
- 71 *Defending Australia in the Asia-Pacific Century: Force 2030*, Department of Defence, 2009, p. 88.
- 72 Hodermarsky, *The Characteristics of Expeditionary Forces*, p. 69.
- 73 Cornelia, 'ADF Joint Entry Operations: why conventional airborne forces are fundamental', p. 42.

THE AUTHOR

Major Paul Scanlan is currently studying a Masters of Military Studies at the Australian Command and Staff College. These are his personal views.
