

## Letters

### General Laycock

SIR, Professor Donat Gallagher is, of course, perfectly entitled to his passionately held opinions of the last fifteen years, but what I object to most are his quotations out of context, his exaggerations and his shameless distortions of what I wrote at the time (*RUSI Journal*, February 2008).

He does not mention that I paid full tribute to Laycock's personal courage and his 'considerable qualities of leadership'. I also wrote: 'There is no question of cowardice in the behaviour of Laycock and Waugh. Both men amply demonstrated their fearlessness during the retreat.' I also acknowledged that the whole situation was 'complicated and muddy' and I never accused Laycock of a 'crime'. What I wrote was: 'No criticism can be levelled against Laycock, Graham and Waugh. All three behaved bravely. The episode of questionable conduct took place in the very last stage of evacuation by warship.'

I really do not have time to go back over all the other points and re-read my papers from seventeen years ago which are in the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, but I will outline a few of Gallagher's distortions to give an idea. I never described Laycock as 'self-centred'. What I in fact wrote about the anger felt by many officers and men, that no officer above the rank of Lieutenant Colonel stayed to share the fate of the 5,000 left behind on Crete, was the following:

*There was clearly little point in giving the enemy the satisfaction of capturing senior officers; and the British Army's equivalent of a ship's captain is the commanding officer of a battalion or regiment, not a formation commander. But the moral question still hangs unanswered, especially since the self-centred actions of some were thrown into contrast by the selflessness of those regimental*

*officers or soldiers who volunteered to stay behind in the place of others.*

He misquotes me most seriously when he claims in his central point that I 'asserted that Laycock took "over 200" men away from covering the withdrawal of other "fighting forces" and "swept them" to the beach around 10.00pm (Crete 220)'. I never wrote anything of the sort on that page.

I quoted the Layforce war diary entry for 22.00 hours:

*On finding that entire staff of Creforce had embarked, in view of the fact that all fighting forces were now in position for embarkation and that there was no enemy contact, Col. Laycock on own authority, issued orders to Lieutenant Colonel Young to lead troops to Sphakion by route avoiding the crowded main approach to town and to use his own personality to obtain priority laid down in Div. Orders.*

I then pointed out the flagrant inaccuracies in this statement, such as the obvious fact that all fighting forces were manifestly not in position for embarkation, as Gallagher's own version confirms. I never said, as Gallagher claims in the most astonishing way, that Laycock sent the message out at 22.00 hours. I, in fact, wrote: 'Laycock did not send the message to Young until about 11pm, by which time he was waiting on the beach with brigade headquarters staff for a landing craft to take them out to one of the warships.' There was no mention of 'over 200 men' there either, and to say as he does, that I 'placed the Commandos on the beach four hours before they arrived there', is simply not true.

Laycock called for volunteers to take the message to Colonel Young at around 11pm, as I said, and Ralph Tanner, Waugh's batman, (who later became a professor of criminology) was

designated. I interviewed Tanner in detail and he was just about the most reliable witness I have ever encountered because of his forensic approach. It took him a long time in the dark to find Young's headquarters in a cave. Young, a most admirable man, said he would try to send on his men, but realised that he would not have time to bring back those in forward defensive positions, and told Tanner to return to Laycock, which he did. Tanner ran back and was so exhausted that he had to be dragged aboard the last landing craft to leave. How 130 of Young's men, according to Gallagher, managed to outrun him, and get evacuated in front of him, is hard to explain. And it does not explain the anger shown in several accounts of officers and men from other units who found members of Layforce ensconced on the ship by the time they boarded. Not all of the commandos were out with Young, and these may have been the ones who got away before other 'fighting forces'. In any case, neither Gallagher nor I can identify them with any certainty.

The point of all this is that I never said that Laycock 'took "over 200" men away from covering the withdrawal of other "fighting forces" and "swept them" to the beach around 10.00pm.' What I said was that Laycock and Waugh 'swept Graham and any other Layforce personnel they could find down to the beach at Sphakia to join the queue for landing craft out to the destroyer.' So Gallagher's statement, which he repeats several times as a key argument, is false.

Gallagher also tries to make out that the whole of the Australian 2/7th Battalion never reached the beach, yet the official Australian history quotes the battalion second-in-command's description of their feelings when waiting on the beach: 'Then came the greatest disappointment of all, the sound of anchor chains through the hawse.'

Gallagher's own contradictions are the most revealing. He tries to argue

away the phrase in the War Diary 'Col. Laycock on own authority' and why Laycock was justified in ignoring the very clear orders: 'No withdrawal before order from HQ. LAYFORCE to embark after other fighting forces but before stragglers.' This surely demonstrates straight from the horse's mouth that Laycock had *not* received permission at any time to embark his men before 'other fighting forces'. Yet Gallagher completely fails to explain why, if there had been a subsequent change to this order, it was never recorded in the war diary, since that would have completely exonerated Laycock from any suspicion of questionable behaviour. One could go on and on, and while I naturally accept that Gallagher has every right to defend his thesis that 'the circumstances of the night' justified Laycock in acting as he did, he should do so without misquoting me in such an outrageous way. ■

**Antony Beevor**

### **Our Armed Forces – Broke in all but Name?**

The UK spends over £30 billion per year on defence, the second largest amount in the world. But as Gwyn Prins and Lord Salisbury argued in the last issue ('Risk, Threat and Security in the United Kingdom'), the armed forces suffer from overstretch and under-manning. Is it the Northern Rock of government funding – broke in all but name? The death of a Scottish reservist, to which I shall return later, provides a tragic vignette of the funding crisis gripping the armed forces.

The crisis is traceable back to the 1998 Strategic Defence Review (SDR). It set out the future composition of the armed forces in the face of expected threats and challenges. The budget funds two key elements of the UK armed forces, personnel and equipment, both vital to the composition of the armed forces and ultimately the security of the UK. Large equipment procurement projects, and defence inflation put the defence budget under pressure. There are a host of equipment projects (either recently completed or due for completion soon), each of which has cost or is due to cost many millions if not billions of pounds. These projects

claim a substantial part of the defence budget, but the impact of their initial cost is exacerbated by an escalation in costs of around 10 per cent a year. Defence inflation is inescapable; equipment is expensive and doubles in price every seven and a quarter years, according to defence economist Keith Hartley. The military's finest asset is its personnel, but a volunteer army is not cheap. If suitable terms are not offered, recruits will not join and trained personnel will leave. This is happening today. Recruitment and retention requires appropriate funding. Yet government spends less on defence than in 1998, in real terms. As defence inflation afflicts high-profile equipment projects, government resorts to penny-pinching on the humdrum but essential items such as accommodation, basic kit, training and rehabilitation facilities for the gravely wounded.

In order to alleviate the pressure on the defence budget caused by equipment inflation and overrun, the personnel budget is compromised. Thus, personnel bear the brunt, committed to operational duties with too few individuals; a shortage of units, causing disaffection, low morale and ultimately retention problems. The adverse effect on recruitment and retention is clear when, in April last year, the Army was short by 2,520 persons, the Navy by 1,860, and the RAF by 1,460 (figures given by Liam Fox in the House of Commons). The MoD's own study, carried out in 2005, revealed that a quarter of the armed forces wished to leave at the earliest opportunity. The TA is in no better position. The MP for Aldershot, Gerald Howarth, said in the House of Commons in March 2006 that the number of TA personnel stood at 31,680, a shortfall in its establishment of around 6,500. He went on to argue 'that only a third of the TA is ready for operations' and that 13,500 men and women have left the TA since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, with 500 leaving a month in 2006. The TA's manning levels are now at some of the lowest in history, yet deployments are the highest in recent memory.

Howarth's comments about TA shortfall highlight the relatively

unpublicised death of a young soldier deployed to Iraq in 2003. Armed forces under-funding impacted upon Private Jason Smith, who had served with the TA since 1992. He reported for duty on 30 May 2003 to be deployed to Iraq with C Company, 52nd Lowland Regiment. He had ten days of acclimatisation in Kuwait, rather than the recommended fourteen. By the early part of August 2003, he was struggling in the searing heat. During the daytime, temperatures reached 50°C and, at night, dropped to between 30-35°C. On 13 August 2003, he died of heat stroke in his base at Al-Amarah Stadium. The army board of inquiry into his death noted that 'the level of manpower within C Company was inadequate for the task in hand and prevented the soldiers from getting effective rest'. The board of inquiry notes that at the time of Smith's death, C Company was working at a high tempo, patrolling and guarding a power station and in the days preceding his death, it had come under mortar attack and been involved in a riot. Witnesses state that there was insufficient manpower for the tasks they were asked to undertake.

The high tempo of operations was compounded by C Company's inadequate accommodation. They were living in a concrete office block: without windows, doors, breeze or air conditioning, there was no respite from the scorching temperatures. The manner in which Smith lost his life is a tragic snapshot of the crisis. He was a reservist serving in an under-manned company in an under-manned Territorial Army. He was four days short of the recommended time he should have been allowed to acclimatise before being deployed. When in theatre, supply problems meant that the day-to-day soldiering difficulties were compounded by the lack of air conditioning at their base. It is sadly too late for Private Smith, but the men and women of the armed forces deserve better. They are being let down. The operational commitments which they are asked to perform show no sign of receding.

The legacy of Iraq means that there are currently around 4,500 UK personnel deployed in Basra. The mission in

Afghanistan is set to loom large for a number of years to come, which will require nearly 8,000 British troops by 2009. Added to the intense operational duties in Iraq and Afghanistan, are the security duties the UK armed forces still have to perform at home. They are deployed in large numbers in Germany and have defence and peacekeeping duties in Bosnia, Kosovo, Cyprus, Northern Ireland, Gibraltar, and the Falkland Islands. There are only so many places one can send a finite number of troops without stretching them to breaking point. One defence expert quoted by the BBC estimates that another £10 billion is needed for this year, if the current procurement programmes are to be maintained alongside operational commitments.

It is high time that the government ordered a fresh review of defence policy. It must contemplate the long-term role of the armed forces and take a long, hard look at the relationship between the UK, the US and the burden of NATO commitments. If the UK is to remain a faithful American ally and a senior NATO player, the government will have to spend more to maintain this role. The one statistic which counts most is annual defence spending per capita. The UK spends \$990 per capita, whilst the US (also involved in Iraq and Afghanistan) spends nearly double at \$1,759 (SIPRI figures). The UK lags way behind its major ally in terms of defence spending. In the short term, this year's allocation of £33.4 billion for defence spending is simply not enough. The funding crisis can only be solved by politicians with the strength of character to argue and persuade the British people and Parliament that increasing defence spending is worth it for the safety and security of the nation. The politicians will have to convince the citizens of this country they will have to pay substantially more per capita for their defence and security if they are to have essential and state-of-the-art equipment and one of, if not the best, volunteer armed forces in the world.

Should the UK mission in Afghanistan fail then the prospects are bleak. Afghanistan will return to civil war; the Taliban will re-emerge and once again, a

safe haven and training camp for Al-Qa'ida will exist. It is vital that the political argument is put to the British people and defence spending is drastically increased. Otherwise, the alternative is, as Sir Mike Jackson said, 'to pull the duvet up over our heads and hope the bogeyman goes away'.

Let us hope that the finest asset this country possesses – its armed forces – do not break in the meantime. ■

#### **Azeem Ibrahim**

Chief Executive Officer, ECM Investment Fund and former reservist in the Parachute Regiment

#### **Globalised Insurgency**

SIR, I do not disagree with much of what Ambassador Sir Harold Walker says in his valuable letter (*RUSI Journal*, February 2008) – except that he does not engage the point that I have been striving to make. I am probably to blame, for in the short introduction (*RUSI Journal*, December 2007) he cites my minimalist arguments were underpinned by ideas from previous monographs. I am therefore grateful for this opportunity to restate my case.

Globalised insurgency is certainly a reality for many Western states but possibly not in the terms implied by Sir Harold. Insurgency is not a static or immutable concept. Like the conduct of war, it has evolved. Just as the transformation of societies from pre-modern to post-modern altered their conduct of warfare, it has also altered the nature of insurgency. And just as North Africa and Burma were two completely different campaigns that took place in the same developmental era of warfare, so Afghanistan and Iraq can be regarded as two different campaigns in the same era of insurgency.

Malaya, Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka belong to a different era. Post-modern states have moved from one era of insurgency to another – otherwise, why should the British and Americans revise their doctrines with such determination?

Globalised insurgency reflects the characteristics of our post-modern society. It is, above all, deterritorialised. It involves multiple populations and communities that are spread across the world, which live more and more in networked societies and cannot be easily influenced or regulated by vertically structured bureaucracies. There is an instant connectedness between what happens in the streets of Jalalabad (for example) and British communities in Bradford. Osama bin Laden is not the creator or sole exponent of globalised insurgency, he merely exploits these circumstances. Future global movements will continue to do so in the wake of jihadism.

My concern is to move our thinking on. In Whitehall, insurgency has got stuck in the dripping jungles of Malaya and the sandy jebels of the Oman as something that is carried on only by wild guerrilla figures swathed in bandoliers of machine gun ammunition, and something that certainly does not happen here. Sir Harold is correct to suggest that all sides must come together to address what is happening in the 80 per cent of an insurgency that is subversion and is happening here in our homeland, rather than the 20 per cent which is military and narrowly counter-terrorist. Many of the answers lie in our institutional experience of insurgency and do not have to be re-invented as new approaches to terrorism. ■

#### **Dr John Mackinlay**

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#### **RUSI ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

17:00, 1 May 2008, RUSI, Whitehall, London, SW1A 2ET  
The 177th Annual General Meeting of The Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies will be held in the RUSI Library.

The Agenda for the meeting will be posted at [www.rusi.org/agm](http://www.rusi.org/agm) on or before 17 April 2008.