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A VISION OF THE FUTURE TA INFANTRY

ISSUE

1. The TA Infantry is currently established for a purpose different to the one being asked of it¹. It has been, and continues to be, heavily committed to supporting operations in Afghanistan. The TA infantry is about 17% of the TA's strength but currently provides about 33% of the troops deployed on operations. Sustaining that output, and increasing the levels of training to meet the ever growing demands of that operation, have demonstrated that reform is urgently required. There are severe strains on the organisation which needs to have its structures, roles and resources looked at afresh to make it fit for the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The size of the TA sub unit must increase. 120-150 would appear to be the likely optimum size.
3. The offer for the TA officer and NCO must improve and in particular this must include the possibility (not certainty) of them deploying in a command role on operations.
4. The overall size of the TA must reflect the output required. If the output being asked to support OP HERRICK is used as a guide, then the TA Infantry has to increase in size to sustain this output.
5. The span of unit command must remain manageable by a TA CO. This suggests units of around 4 sub units (may be less if geographical spread is too great) but comprising sub units that are larger than currently established. If sub units are increased to 120-150, units will be 480-600 plus a battalion headquarters and headquarter company.
6. To achieve larger sub units, relocation will be required in some cases to enable large population centres to be targeted.
7. Capbadge identity is an important recruitment, retention and operational volunteering force multiplier. Every effort should be made to keep TA Infantry structures that give TA battalions an identity that broadly resembles their regular counterparts and role that links them to their regular cap badged counterparts.

INTRODUCTION

8. This paper looks at the existing problems identified with the TA Infantry before looking at the issues that need to be considered in designing a future force, concluding with recommendations for that force structure.

¹ TA Infantry established for Large Scale Direct Intervention operations not supporting enduring operations. Size and structure dictated by the need for a post cold war peace dividend and the desire to maintain a national footprint.

EXISTING PROBLEMS THAT HAVE TO BE ADDRESSED

Sub unit Structures

9. The strength of the typical sub-unit is too small and not fit for purpose. It is below the critical mass that allows for effective training as the company cannot put enough trained soldiers on an exercise to allow the officers to do their jobs. This of course is exacerbated when even a small cohort is mobilised.
10. This has a significant impact on retention and an increase in the strength of each sub unit is urgently needed. The cadre of permanent staff found at each company is able to resource larger sub units (and did so before the last round of reductions in the size of the TA infantry) and therefore there is scope for an expansion without making significant increases to the permanent staff wage bill. Ideally, a TA infantry company needs 3 rifle platoons of trained soldiers (necessary to ensure even 2 platoons on any one exercise) plus a recruit training platoon and an headquarters element. Accordingly there is scope for increasing the ratio between permanent staff and TA soldiers making more efficient use of the permanent staff investment.
11. The current small size of an infantry company also means that there are too few junior officer posts (2) from which to grow a pool of talent to generate a future company commander. The effect can be seen in a dwindling pool of high calibre officers competing for these appointments.
12. It is clear that to be able to provide effective training (critical mass), provide a broad base of junior officers from which to select future company commanders and to make efficient use of permanent staff a company requires 3 trained soldier platoons plus a recruit training platoon. This suggests a sub unit establishment of 120-150.
13. Increasing the size of a TA company may however require relocation by some companies which are for historic or footprint reasons located in areas where they cannot even meet their current liability.
- 14. Conclusion: the size of a TA sub unit must increase. The current arrangement is simply not sustainable.**

Output

15. The TA infantry is being asked to mobilise more than it can sustain given current structures and resources. To reflect the demands of current operations, the length of the training pipeline for each soldier has been increased but without any allowance to reflect the fact that the longer the training pipeline, the greater the numbers that have to be fed into the start of it to maintain the same output at the end. Unavoidably, a longer training pipeline requires a larger TA if the output is to remain constant.
16. The TA Infantry is therefore too small to sustain the output required to support the current enduring operation. As supporting an enduring operation is seen as the future role for the TA the experience of supporting OP HERRICK demonstrates that the future force structure must have a larger TA infantry. The output required must also be seen in the context of a

fully manned regular army. There is currently no scope to increase the output in the event of under manning of the regular force occurring.

- 17. Conclusion: the TA Infantry must increase in size or the output be significantly reduced for the future.**

Unit Structures

18. The structure of a TA battalion means that no training above sub-unit level (and even sub-unit training is only possible by cannibalising the whole battalion) can be conducted. The consequence is that when a territorial joins a regular battalion post mobilisation, the TA soldier or officer, has no experience of how a battalion might operate. This imposes yet another limitation which is particularly significant for the officer or senior NCO who is frequently tasked to work in a sub unit or battle group headquarters. The effect of this will increase as the pre 1998 (SDR) generation who experienced service in a quasi-regular-establishment-TA is lost to the TA.

- 19. Conclusion: if the TA infantry is to have appropriately experienced TA officers of the right calibre, units need to have a structure more typical of a regular battalion enabling unit level training to be conducted.**

The Officer Offer

20. Whilst the TA infantry has been attracting some good young officers, we have struggled to retain them or attract them in sufficient numbers. Currently we have a shortage of around 10% in the officer ranks and even this statistic hides an ageing population which will cause there to be a growing shortfall (unless addressed via LE commissions) as they retire. The recruitment and retention of the TA officer is not assisted by them not being able to deploy in a command role on operations. The scope for them to do so, where the operational environment permits, needs to be addressed.

21. The small size of a TA infantry company, amplified by the effects of constraints on the training budget (not least the Graduated Commitment Mechanism), has resulted in a junior officer seeing that a company commander does not have a company that can deploy even on exercise. This is retention negative. In the vast majority of cases the company commander has a recruit platoon, a rifle platoon and a support platoon. He has become a manager and not a leader and this is evident to the young platoon commander so reducing the attractiveness of a longer term "career". Finally, with a typical sub unit of only 2 subalterns, it is harder to attract potential officers with so few peers already serving.

22. The role on operations now envisaged for the TA officer is in non-kinetic posts, frequently working in an headquarters. However the TA infantry no longer has an establishment or equipment that enables battalions to run a unit level command post. Officers are not therefore able to experience and practice routine operational staff work at even unit level. They are faced with volunteering for a role on operations that they have never been taught or practiced. This is not reasonable or sustainable.

23. Officers remain ambitious to deploy in command roles. Whilst in some theatres the tempo or complexity of the operating environment may make this unrealistic, there will be scenarios where it is feasible and it is important that this is recognised and that officers are

aware of the potential to deploy in role.

- 24. Conclusion; the officer offer is broken. We must provide the structures and training environment that is attractive to the right calibre of individual and which prepares him for the roles he will fulfil on operations as well as encouraging him to recruit, train and retain soldiers for mobilised service.**

Equipment

25. The scale of the equipment available to the TA soldier has been gradually eroded. It has been seen as an appropriate area in which to make economies. The result however is a training burden post mobilisation that is too daunting. The soldiers are faced with structures, radios, weapons, vehicles and tactics that were previously unknown to them.
26. Given the very tight training window post mobilisation, more needs to be available to the TA units for routine (pre mobilisation) training so as to help ease soldiers through the “shock of contact” they currently experience post mobilisation. This does not need to be the expensive items of equipment such as vehicles. Some form of body armour being available for routine field training for instance would both help familiarise soldiers with the impact this has on all field soldiering skills as well assisting in raising fitness levels. The availability of BOWMAN radios would significantly assist an officer facing deployment into an operational headquarters be it at sub-unit or formation level.
- 27. Conclusion; current equipment scales are not adequate to enable units to properly prepare soldiers for operations.**

The Importance of the Regimental system

28. The current structure of the TA infantry owes more to history than it does to current requirements. The imbalance between the regular battalions and the reserves does not provide for the TA battalions to support their regular parent capbadge battalions. The TA soldier responds better to a call to reinforce a regular unit of the same capbadge than it does to provide general support. It immediately helps the mobilised individual to blend in and this offers reassurance. The current structure of the TA infantry does not enable this relationship to work and a rebalancing is required.
29. A previous attempt to group disparate capbadges together to create multi capbadge battalions was not successful and the evidence was clear that TA soldiers want to serve in a single capbadge battalion that is broadly organised to reflect its regular counter parts. This will be particularly important when the TA is not supporting operations (which is currently what is driving recruitment). A bland and unidentifiable training regiment will struggle to recruit and retain in an environment where operations are not an immediate prospect. TA soldiers must have a unit identity that they can relate to and be proud of.
- 30. Conclusion: the regimental system is seen as vital ground for the regular infantry. It is no less vital for the TA infantry and must be a central part of the Future Reserves Structure.**

THE FUTURE

31. To arrive at a plan for the future it is necessary, as well as addressing the above concerns, to consider four key questions:

- a. What roles should the TA infantry have?
- b. What capabilities should it provide?
- c. What size should it be? And
- d. What structures should it have?

32. These questions are addressed below.

The Role of the TA Infantry

33. When considering the roles of the TA, it is important to look at both what is required to meet the needs of the nation but also what is required to enable the TA to recruit and retain. With this in mind, I suggest that the roles that the TA Infantry should fill are as follows:

34. To reinforce the regular battalions, as required, for operations.

- This will enable regular battalions to be brought up to the deployable strength that is required allowing for:
 - (i) Undermanning (history suggests that full manning of the regular army is the exception not the rule and accordingly it would be unwise to assume otherwise);
 - (ii) Personnel Unable to Deploy (sick, injured etc);
 - (iii) Soldiers Employed on Other Tasks; whilst there is ongoing work to drive these numbers down, there will continue to be people tasked to undertake roles for which there is no establishment, resulting in gaps in the unit establishment;
 - (iv) Posts that are not established in peacetime but which are required on operations or on some operations.

35. To provide capabilities that the regular battalions cannot sustain routinely but which may be required for some, but not all, operations.

- An example might be anti armour capability. A regular infantry battalion may not in the future be established to have the capability required in the event it is committed to an operation where the enemy has a large amount of armour. In such a case an additional anti armour capability will be required which could be found from the reserve forces.
- Addressing this factor will first require the establishments of regular battalions to be set.

36. To provide formed bodies of sub unit strength to undertake defined tasks where operational tempo permits.

- Some operations may not be suitable for TA sub units to deploy as formed bodies due to the tempo of the operation or the training required to become familiar with the particular equipment and tactics to be employed. Other tasks will be well within the capability of the reserve forces and making use of this capability will be necessary to provide a focus for the officers and senior NCOs who need the opportunity to deploy in command roles.

37. To provide support to the Civilian Authorities within the UK.

- Where the local community is threatened by natural events or hostile forces, the TA and the community itself expect to see the local reserve forces being used. Not to do so would have a damaging impact on both the reputation of the force and on the morale and sense of self worth of the units concerned.
- TA units therefore require a command capability to command such a deployment.

38. To undertake community engagement and footprint activities.

- The reserve forces serve as an important bridge between the regular forces and the civilian communities. Currently the army is held in high esteem by most of society. That will not always be so but the TA will help ensure that the army is seen by the community and better understood by it.

What capabilities should be provided?

39. Units to have capabilities covering:

40. **Riflemen.** This is the basic infantry building block and must remain the core output of the TA infantry whether tasked to provide individual reinforcements of formed bodies of platoon or company strength.

41. **Support platoons comprising MG, Mortar and (possibly) Javelin.** The regular equivalents are no less likely to require reinforcement than are their rifle platoons. Further, the existence of these support platoon capabilities provides the opportunity for broader training within the TA unit (a retention factor) as well as providing more realistic and exciting training so better preparing soldiers for deployment as well as aiding their retention. It is unlikely that TA units will be able to provide more senior specialist staff within these platoons trained to a sufficiently high level to enable them to deploy in role (mortar fire controllers for instance) but these appointments will be necessary enablers and can be trained to a standard to enable safe training of the relevant support platoon to be conducted.

42. **Command.** To be able to provide a unit and sub-unit command structure for deployed operations in an appropriate environment (eg OP TOSCA) and to provide command for MACA in UK.

43. **Enabling component.** To enable the unit to administer itself, and train itself (noting that TA units, unlike their regular counterparts, recruit and train themselves and comprise soldiers under training as well as trained soldiers) including running exercises at unit level.
44. An **overriding requirement** for all capabilities is that when deployed, the TA soldier should in the context of the specific tasks required of him on the operation concerned, be indistinguishable from his regular counterpart.

The Size of the TA Infantry

45. The size of the TA Infantry will be directly related to the size of the regular infantry but should, in addition, take into account the following criteria:
- That regular battalions will have periods of under manning when recruitment is challenging, when an additional burden will be placed onto the reserves.
 - Not all soldiers on the strength of a regular battalion will be able to deploy as there will be Personnel Unable to Deploy, and Soldiers Employed away from the unit on Other Tasks.
 - A battalion on operations requires greater resilience to allow for casualties, leave and to allow for a sustained higher tempo of activities than can be justified away from operations.
 - Not all capabilities can be retained in the full time forces against all eventualities.
 - The numbers available for mobilisation need to allow for:
 - (i) The time required to train TA soldiers to be Fit For Mobilisation and the “wastage” during that training programme.
 - (ii) That soldiers required for an enduring operation may need to be found from volunteers and not through compulsory mobilisation.
 - (iii) The 1 year in 5 mobilisation restriction is unlikely to be reduced except where there is a compelling national need.
 - Training will take 3 years from recruitment to mobilisation. This period has only recently been set but anecdotal evidence suggests that wastage over this period (from enlistment through to mobilisation) will be around 10:1.
 - The Enabling Component and any specialist capability needs to be additional to the core deployable component assessed as being needed for support to enduring operations.

What Structures should the TA Infantry have?

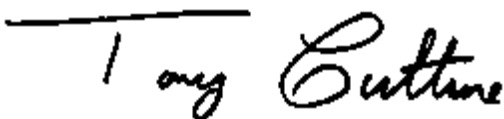
46. Structures must be designed to:
- Create a span of unit command that is within the capability of a TA Commanding Officer. The opportunity for a TA officer (where a suitable officer is available) on TA terms of service to command a battalion must be protected. This suggests (if sub unit sizes are to increase) a structure of around 4 rifle companies together with a battalion headquarters and headquarter company.

- Be recruitment positive, providing an identity that its members can relate to.
- Provide a vehicle for training a soldier both in his “in barracks” activities and on exercise, to prepare the soldier to be familiar with the unit structures that he will work with when deployed.
- Sub units that are large enough to be viable on exercise, even where small numbers have been mobilised and are therefore detached.

CONCLUSIONS

47. It is evident that the planning for the TA infantry in detail cannot be progressed in isolation from the plans for the regular infantry and therefore some flexibility will be required as the detailed size and shape of the regular Future Force evolves. However in the light of the above a number of conclusions can be reached:

- The size of the TA sub unit must increase. 120-150 would appear to be the likely optimum size.
- The offer for the TA officer and NCO must improve and in particular this must include the possibility (not certainty) of them deploying in a command role on operations.
- The overall size of the TA must reflect the output required. If the output being asked to support OP HERRICK is used as a guide, then the TA Infantry has to increase in size to sustain this output.
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- To achieve larger sub units, relocation will be required in some cases to enable large population centres to be targeted.
- Capbadge identity is an important recruitment, retention and operational volunteering force multiplier. Every effort should be made to keep TA Infantry structures that give TA battalions an identity that broadly resembles their regular counterparts and role that links them to their regular cap badged counterparts.



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