



# COMMAND PAPERS

*Submarine Command: A Retrospective for Submariners*

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Commodore P.M.J. Scott, CSC, RAN



## AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE COLLEGE

### DEFENCE LEADERSHIP AND ETHICS

The Centre for Defence Leadership Studies was established at the Australian Defence College (ADC) at the Weston Creek campus in January 2002. It moved to the UNSW@ADFA campus in May 2009 and was renamed the Centre for Defence Leadership and Ethics (CDLE) in June 2009 to reflect the increasing focus on ethics education in the ADF. The team joined the Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies (CDSS) in September 2011 and subsequently moved back to the ADC site in September 2013. In 2016, CDLE was renamed Defence Leadership and Ethics (DL&E).

The role of DL&E is to provide the CDSS with corporate-level command, leadership and military ethics development advice in order to help shape expertise in these areas in the learning centre and across Defence in general.

*LEAD, SHAPE, ENGAGE*

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## **Foreword**

There is no doubt in my mind that a period of growth and expansion such as the Submarine Arm is entering now demands the strength, vigour and passion of youth. Equally, however, the ongoing professional support and operation of our submarines demands a measure of experience and wisdom.

Whilst I make no claim to wisdom, the following retrospective is based on my personal experience over many years service as a Naval Officer and as a qualified submariner, including numerous years in command. The text is drawn partially from presentations I have given to Commanding Officer Designate courses. It is necessarily light on Date Time Groups and Position Course and Speed reports, but is presented in as frank and candid a manner as is practicable.

**This retrospective is written principally as an offering to those young men and women who aspire to command an Australian submarine.**

That said; command is very much about leadership – and no matter what your specialisation, rank or station, as Naval Officers and sailors you are all required and expected to lead. At the very least, you need to know what drives your respective Commanders if you are going to serve them well. So this is also written for those who serve or will serve in Australian submarines. I trust that others who know what it is to ‘*snort in the red*’, and why you might need to do that, will find something they can relate to and draw upon.

At the outset, I would like to acknowledge those who inspired my submarine service and thank those who either taught, tolerated or supported me along the way. I would also like to thank each of those who kindly assisted with the drafting and editing of this paper for their significant contributions.



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## **Commodore Peter Scott, CSC, RAN**



Commodore Peter Scott, CSC, RAN joined the Royal Australian Navy as a Midshipman in 1983. His sea service includes postings to the patrol boats BENDIGO and LAUNCESTON, the training ship JERVIS BAY, the destroyer VAMPIRE and the Flagship STALWART. He volunteered for submarines in 1988, serving in four Australian *Oberons* and on exchange with the British Royal Navy in HM Submarines UNICORN and UNSEEN, before passing the submarine command course '*Perisher*' aboard HNLMS BRUINVIS in 1997.

He served in command of HMA Submarines COLLINS and DECHAINEUX between 1998 and 2003, and subsequently as Commander Task Group 627.0 where he was delegated authority as the Australian Submarine Operational Authority. Other command appointments include Commander Surface Task Group and the inaugural Commander of the Australian Maritime Warfare Centre. Scott is currently the Director General Submarines in Navy Strategic Command and Head of the Submarine Profession.

Commodore Scott was the inaugural Head of Submarine Warfare Training and was a member of Directing Staff at the Australian Command and Staff College. He is a graduate of the Royal Australian Naval College, the National Security College and the University of New South Wales at ADFA, where he holds a Masters in Strategy and Management.

His operational service includes multiple Special Operations with the Submarine Arm as well as active service in Iraq, the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan as Chief of Staff in Headquarters JTF 633 during 2006 and 2007. He was awarded a Commendation for Distinguished Service in the Australia Day Honours List 2008, having previously been decorated with the Conspicuous Service Cross for achievements in command of HMAS COLLINS.



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## **Submarine Command – A Retrospective for Submariners**

Commodore Peter Scott, CSC, RAN

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Know Your Why**

At various times during a submarine career, perhaps as frequently as daily, you will question yourself; “*Why am I doing this?*” Know your answer.

As a young officer, having served in patrol boats, a destroyer, the Flagship and the training ship, I came to the realisation that life in the Navy wasn’t all beer and skittles. It was in fact going to demand a great deal more than just hard work; it would impose real personal sacrifice – for both myself and for those closest to me. For their sake and mine, I determined that as long as I remained in the Navy I would commit myself to delivering the most effective and worthwhile service that I could render.

I had joined the Navy as the RAN aircraft carrier capability was being consigned to history and with, not unrelated, visions of ARA GENERAL BELGRANO being destroyed and sunk by HMS CONQUEROR during the Falklands War of 1982. There wasn’t much to compete with that for decisive, contemporary sea power. I knew my why – to serve my country from within the most potent Arm of the Royal Australian Navy. Against the advice of almost everyone I knew, I volunteered for submarines.

#### **The Australian Submarine**

An Australian submarine - properly built, maintained, supported and armed; fully crewed and worked up; well led and appropriately tasked - is the epitome of naval weaponry.

An Australian submarine can train and exercise our fleet, test the skill and expertise of our allies, or represent us in multi-National exercises and in the harbours of our neighbours. Whilst useful and impressive, these attributes are of relatively little consequence or significance when compared with the combatant power and deterrent effect of our submarines.



An Australian submarine, underway and dived, can clandestinely conduct surveillance, reconnoitre and collect intelligence against an adversary. It can deter an adversary from coercion or action against our interests; consume his thoughts, energy and resources; or deny him the sea and strike him down! Both a symbol and a tool of National will, what I am describing is something much more than a pressure hull with a suite of sensors and weapons. It is a living, breathing and vibrant thing; a creature of the sea, quite literally sinewy and steely at once. I am describing that combination of man and machine that coalesce to form a sensitive, cognitive, adaptive, responsive and tremendously powerful instrument – one that can prowl the ocean domains unsuspected, undetected and unmolested. Ensign furled, but unequivocally Australian.



## SUBMARINE COMMAND – AN OVERVIEW

### ***Perisher* - Qualification to Command an Australian Submarine**

Obviously, there's quite some responsibility on your shoulders when you take command of one of these submarines. There are the lives and wellbeing of your Ship's Company and the welfare of all those who depend on them. The potential destructive power of the weapons embarked is, of course, immense. Further, the scale of national investment in the capability and the resultant dollar value of each platform and sea day are matched by the strategic value and importance of the Submarine Force.

To assume command, you will need to pass the Submarine Command Qualifying Course. This is something that is unique to submarines; there is certainly no comparable pre-requisite for command of a warship, air squadron or establishment. Just to gain selection, you will typically need a decade of submarine experience on top of a number of years in the wider Navy. You will likely need to prove yourself at every level up to Executive Officer. Despite the rigorous preparation and selection process, the course is known as '*Perisher*' for good reason; almost inevitably, many who start the course will not make the grade.

For decades, our Officers have travelled first to the United Kingdom and now to the Netherlands to undertake *Perisher* with their Navies. We simply do not have the quantity and diversity of submarines, ships, aircraft and other resources necessary to create an environment sufficiently demanding to fully test the *Perishers*. The course is about five months long, so it's a deployment in itself, and runs through safety and tactical phases ashore and then at sea. In essence, you will do anything and everything it's possible to do in a submarine – inshore operations, opposed transits, underwater looks, trailing nuclear submarines and attacking Carrier Task Groups. For an avid submariner, *Perisher* is laced with opportunity - opportunity to observe and learn; to practice, refine and demonstrate; to err, correct and succeed; to thrive and excel; to lead and command; or, of course, to fail.

It's a blast – but it is not a video game. The ships, rocks and people are very hard, the intensity and pressure are real. The margins for error are slim. You will push the limits and Teacher will push your buttons!



**Personal Example:**

*On my course, we did several weeks of safety training - 'eyes only attacking' - in the fjords of Norway. These fjords were frantic with fishing boats and ferries, very tight navigationally, and more often than not cloaked in fog, snow storms or both. With warships charging around at full speed, timing is critical and comes down to the second. I have had warships pass directly overhead, with as little as ten feet between their propellers and the top of the submarine. Cracking a periscope window on one occasion, they are thunderously loud and shake the boat at this range.*

During the tactical phase you will develop innovative solutions to generate and maintain tactical advantage that were inconceivable pre course.

**Personal Example:**

*On one occasion I drove my submarine into the lee of cliffs on the North East coast of Ireland to evade the searching sensors of maritime patrol aircraft, anti submarine helicopters and frigates. We snorted there at full power whilst stemming a two to three knot tidal stream less than 300 yards from shore, with the lights of cars passing overhead along the cliff tops. Undetected throughout the night, we proceeded to our next tasking with a full battery at dawn.*

A couple of months of that sort of excitement, and you come away with a superb understanding of what you can achieve with a submarine and its crew, and a crystal clear understanding of your own abilities and limitations. Can you command an Australian submarine? By your last day of *Perisher* – you will know the answer to that question.

*Perisher* is ... your qualification to Command an Australian Submarine.

**Leadership with Ultimate Authority & Accountability**

When you sail in command of any Australian warship, you represent the Nation. In certain circumstances, you may be the sole representation of the Nation. In a submarine, somewhat paradoxically, the weight of such responsibility can be greatest and the strategic effect most



profound when your location is unknown - unknown even to your own chain of command - and your presence undetermined. In such circumstances, the independence of submarine command necessitated by the preservation of stealth can be extreme. So, submarine command carries a heavy responsibility; but what is it?

I think of and describe submarine command as *'leadership with ultimate authority and accountability'*. Certainly, each and every officer is commanded to *'observe and execute such orders and instructions as you may receive from your superior officers.'* In other words, everyone has a boss! However, I can assure you that in a submarine at sea, for all intents and purposes, the Commanding Officer is the Navy.

My description of submarine command is intended to cast a mindset; an attitude that starts from a position where, as Commanding Officer, you can do or say anything – you have unlimited rights. An attitude biased toward understanding and executing intent rather than seeking permission. An attitude that ensures you fully realise the power, authority and influence that you actually have.

Equally, my description of submarine command is intended to foster an approach that is ever mindful of that fact that, as Commanding Officer, your responsibilities are just as material. Your decisions, words and actions will directly impact not only yourself, but your people, your submarine and your Navy; for better or for worse. It is intended to foster an approach that continually examines consequence and alternatives. An approach that ensures you honour the responsibilities and accountabilities that you carry – without limit.

### **The Essential Elements**

I consider there are five essential elements, which you will see reflected throughout what is written below, to the role of the Commanding Officer. They are to: combine knowledge and skill with experience; exercise lucid judgment; make sound decisions; provide effective direction; and inspire your people.



This is what a Commanding Officer does. How effectively and efficiently it is done, and what actual results are achieved, is inevitably a function of clear alignment with higher orders and the appropriate use of all the resources available to you.

It is worth noting that exercising judgment and making decisions are very much the purview and responsibility of the individual. However, the combination of knowledge, skill and experience should draw upon all that is available, not just your own – actively seek out the talent within the Ship's Company. Equally, the provision of effective direction necessitates that others be recruited to convey messaging and provide feedback. More importantly, the outcomes that can be achieved by those following your direction will be directly proportional to your ability to inspire them – to breathe life into their efforts.



## PURPOSE, VISION AND REALISM AS GUIDING CONCEPTS

In exercising the above command functions and, in particular, seeking to lead and inspire people, I have found it useful to keep three concepts foremost in my mind - purpose, vision and realism. They are discussed in turn below.

### Nothing Motivates like Real Purpose

To my mind, you cannot command without purpose and in the naval context it is essentially your mission that gives you purpose.

#### Personal Examples:

*As a junior officer, I sailed in one submarine where the command had failed to identify or communicate a clear, unifying sense of purpose. Although inexperienced and desperately focused on my own performance at the time, the absence of purpose and subsequent lack of unity was palpable. It was borne out in low morale, poor teamwork, several dangerous incidents including a near grounding and, by my recollection, a total of seventeen sailors jumping ship over the course of the deployment.*

*By way of contrast, when I was Executive Officer of OTAMA we brought her out of the last full refit of an Australian Oberon. In a few short years, she would be the only operational submarine in the Navy until we got the Collins Class up and running. Our purpose was to pull every possible ounce of operational expertise and capability into that submarine, then sustain it and preserve it; come hell or high water! OTAMA became the nucleus of Australian high-end submarine capability for the future.*

*When I was in command of COLLINS, the Nation had spent five billion dollars on a capability it had no faith in whatsoever. Our purpose was to prove the platform. To do it, we took her away for 185 days and steamed 21,000 nautical miles; most of that dived. It was the longest, and remains the farthest, deployment ever conducted by any Australian submarine. It didn't make a ripple in the papers. It did help restore the confidence of Defence's senior leadership and the Government that they had a capability worth preserving. It was also a voyage of which the Ship's Company remains extremely proud.*



In command of DECHAINED, I had a proven platform. Our purpose was to prove and to put into action the operational capabilities of the class. This purpose was placed at severe risk when the submarine suffered a major flood during final preparations for a series of regional deployments. We were at Deep Diving Depth, in a very deep piece of water, when a flex hose on the Auxiliary Seawater Cooling System burst in Lower Motor Room; resulting in the submarine flooding at the rate of a tonne a second. To paint a picture, that is the equivalent of two and a half thousand schooners of beer ripping into your submarine every second, with no chance the tap will run dry, until somebody does something about it!

At the moment of a flood such as this, everything changes! You go from knowing your environment with almost complete precision and knowing the state of your submarine in intimate detail, to endless unknowns. What is the rate and extent of the flood? Has it been stopped? What, now, is the state of your systems? What damage, casualties or fatalities have been suffered and what is the ongoing risk?

We knew one thing – we knew we wanted to get to surface and stay there! Getting to the roof, we were looking for every breath of air to blow, every turn of the screw, every pump that could draw suction. Staying there, and later getting alongside, took every level of redundancy the submarine could offer. It took every shred of intellect, every ounce of energy, every strand of team-work we could muster. Discipline, method, critical analysis, knowledge, skill, experience, teamwork and doing the right things in the right order to achieve a safe and known state were all required in full measure to survive.

Survive we did. Of course, a mere flood at sea didn't relieve us of the job the operational commander had set before us. My role, from the outset, was to recover the situation and drive through to achieve that mission. The flood was not our purpose, it was a challenge to be dealt with; the deployments beyond remained our purpose.

To fully recover from that flood took a lot more than I had at my disposal. It took the combined efforts of the Ship's Company, Squadron staff, Fleet staff, Navy's senior leadership, accident investigators, design engineers and the tradesmen who repaired and strengthened the submarine. It took the knowledge, skill, experience, determined efforts, leadership and courage of many.





Once we understood the problem, it took a docking, material modifications, the introduction of new operating limits and changes to procedure.

Amidst all these developments, one thing remained constant throughout - the sense of purpose crafted within the crew to prove the operational capability of the submarine. It was there at the moment of the flood, throughout the recovery, as we came alongside and as we re-united with colleagues ashore and families. It was there throughout the subsequent inquiries, as we re-grouped to go back to sea and, eventually, as we conducted the most intense and undoubtedly the most satisfying naval deployments of my career. That sense of purpose provided the necessary rationale and the requisite urgency behind the efforts of everyone involved in fully recovering from the flood. As importantly, it enabled the determination and courage of the Ship's Company.

Nothing motivates and unites like real purpose. It's essential to effective command and leadership. But it needs to be distilled in the mind of the Commanding Officer; and driven home to those you expect to follow you. They need to take it on like their lives depend on it, and you need to get it right! Devote whatever intellectual rigour is necessary to ensure that you do. Think hard on purpose, communicate it and persistently reinforce it - not for your own sake, but for the sake of the people you will lead.

### **Vision is Foresight with Imagination**

In my view, at the simplest, there are two essential parts to a leader – the Visionary and the Realist.

When I talk of vision, I mean more than just foresight, which can be difficult enough to achieve. I mean foresight with imagination. Picturing where your command might take you, and where you might take it. Imagining the situations you might face - the challenges, the dangers and the failures. Certainly, dreadful things can happen to a warship, both at sea and alongside. My point here is, if you think that "*Those things won't happen to me*", you are quite possibly doomed. Rather, assume that they will happen to you and ask yourself "*How will I command at that difficult time?*" Once this question has been answered, then get on and do your utmost to ensure the dreadful day doesn't arise, knowing that you will be prepared for it when it does.



Of course, vision is also about the opportunities and the success you might enjoy. The standards you might achieve and the rewards you can bring your Ship's Company, your Navy and potentially your Nation. To do this, you often need to take yourself well beyond the present. You need to carve out the time and space to see through and beyond the immediate challenges and crises, and to envisage alternate paradigms and positive futures toward which you can then drive your command. *'If you can imagine it, you can do it!'* may not always be literally true, but it is an excellent starting point.

**Personal Example:**

*I was in command of COLLINS for a year and a half before I achieved what I had thought at the outset would take three months. Having joined at the start of a scheduled docking period, the submarine's program was later beset by a series of substantial and sequential delays. Necessary work was being conducted on the submarine and, later on, useful trials were being achieved. However, the Ship's Company were suffering extensive separation from their families and yet were not achieving a clear submarine effect for Navy. The delays, which accumulated to an eighteen month deployment from Home Port, became seemingly interminable and had the potential to become utterly demoralising.*

*On occasion, I was afforded the opportunity to deliver to the crew the news of another setback; more often than not it came in the form of a dark whisper from the dockyard or strategic headquarters. In such circumstances, it can be very difficult to hold your station and I can admit to feeling some resentment at the time – this was not the command challenge for which I had undertaken Perisher!!*

If you as the Commanding Officer cannot find meaning in the challenges set before you and see a brighter future beyond it, then those you lead will inevitably be lost also. The reason that setting a vision for COLLINS required such a degree of imagination is difficult to describe, but hinges on the total contrast of circumstance. At the time, the submarine's program - and our fate - was being driven by highly politicised and industrialised strategic level decision-making over which we had little influence and no control. Despite being a Commissioned Fleet unit, we were enveloped by a Dockyard that continued to evince a proprietary attitude towards the submarine and were entirely ambivalent to Navy's requirements; which included a timely progression to sea and return to Home Port. Further, a large proportion of the Ship's Company had been



Commissioning Crew. Their submarine experience over the past several years had consisted of interminable delays and incessant trials, and some had known little else. Seemingly denied a sense of ownership, many remained marked with the stain of a build culture. The default vision was a submarine lashed to the yard with hurricane hawsers.

Beyond this circumstance, we had a clear and tangible medium term objective - to return the submarine to her Home Port. But I could clearly envisage a more purposeful future; a day when they would be ready in all respects to deploy on meaningful tasking, unencumbered by trials officers and independent of sea training units, reliant only on those and that which we had embarked in the submarine. To maintain morale in the meantime, it was necessary to not only convince them of this, but also to connect the work they were doing on a day to day basis with that higher purpose and longer term objectives. With the dedicated support and leadership of a number of key officers and sailors, I seemingly managed to do that and we came through those challenges with a remarkably high retention rate, losing only one member from the Ship's Company during the entire protracted period.

### **Reality Can be Stark or Subtle**

All the vision in the world means nothing until it's brought hard up against reality. Pleasant realities are easy to deal with, but not all realities are pleasant and comforting.

In my experience, reality can be stark and frightening.

*'The sea is really rough!' 'The ship looks really big!' 'The rocks are really close!'*

*'I've just injured a fifth of my crew in heavy seas we weren't prepared for.'*

*'I've just run my submarine into the continental shelf – at speed and at depth.'*

*'I'm half way round the world and so completely exhausted I can't stand up.'*

Reality can also be very subtle and frightening.



*'Is that distant aircraft, that pinprick in the sky, really a threat, or can I keep my periscope up for one more all round look?'*

*'Can I keep my diesels on load and get just a bit more in the box, or am I about to be pounced by that patrolling destroyer?'*

*'Is my sonar and my team really good enough, actually good enough, to detect and track the submarine we're hunting, or am I being tracked by her right now?'*

While these are tactical level examples of challenging realities, they exist at the operational and strategic levels also.

**Personal Example:**

*At one stage during my tenure as CTG 627.0, a great deal of effort and a lot of resources had been expended preparing one of our submarines for some particularly demanding tasking during what was already a lengthy and complex deployment. Given certain strategic circumstances, the benefits of achieving that tasking were substantial and readily apparent to those who knew of and understood it, including some very senior officers. For them, it had a very strong profile and expectations were commensurately high. However, in the weeks preceding conduct of the operation, I was increasingly concerned that we had not conclusively resolved or fully mitigated a small number of necessary pre-conditions, resulting in some fragility across several domains.*

*As the CTG, I considered I was best placed to decide whether or not to proceed. Whilst there was no single factor that clearly or absolutely precluded conduct of the operation, I judged that the cumulative risks associated with proceeding did not warrant the benefits to be attained. I determined that the tasking needed to be cancelled and took the necessary action to make this happen. With a clearer and more fulsome appreciation than most of the strategic consequences of either a failed mission or a successful outcome, this was in one sense a simple but in another sense a very painful decision to take. It most certainly disappointed the submarine command team.*

Consigned to history, the wisdom or otherwise of my decision is difficult to discern, even in hindsight. To judge myself compassionately, I had exercised judgment grounded in specialist



knowledge and experience, made a courageous decision and taken the necessary action. To judge myself harshly, I had been paralysed by uncertainty, lacked aggression and determination, and had denied the Navy and the Arm an opportunity to achieve a very particular success!

The classic *Perisher* adage of '*Fight what you see!*' rightly encourages us to deal with the reality of what appears before you; rather than trying to deal with what you might see, might expect to see or might wish to see. However, I offer this example as an illustration of the occasional but absolute responsibility of Commanders to make decisions even in the absence of a clearly discernible reality, and sometimes in the absence of a concrete outcome that might later justify your decision. Notwithstanding the often highly technical and analytical nature of decision making in submarines, there will be times when you need to follow your instincts and trust your gut. Gut instinct as a submariner is the priceless legacy of experience. Trust it, follow it.

### **The Captain Brings it Together**

The Captain needs to instill purpose in the Ship's Company then bring that purpose together with his vision and with reality. To do so, he or she needs to determine what is real and what is not. What is really important, and what is not. And as a realist, needs to be able to accept reality and act on it. He needs to combine all the knowledge, skill and experience available to arrive at sound judgments and make optimum decisions. And then the Captain has to lead and inspire, by shaping the right course and commanding the endeavours of his people with whatever courage and conviction is required.



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## METHODS IN SUBMARINE COMMAND

### Command within the Strategic Context

The holistic accountability of command means that whatever your preferred leadership model might be, understanding the wider context of your command is really important. Day dreaming about glorious battles in far off seas is probably a waste of time. Thinking constructively about the circumstances you may find yourself in is essential. So, when you can, read and engage widely to build a comprehension of the current and future environments: the circumstances surrounding your submarine and your people; the defence and political context; the economic and geostrategic context. Strive to understand the forces shaping those circumstances.

It is equally important that you understand the expectations of your command - not of you personally, but what it is that your submarine needs to be! What's really important to the Fleet Commander? What's really important to the Chief of Joint Operations, the Chief of Navy and to the Minister? When you understand the environment and expectations surrounding your command, you will be in a position to take your preferred personal command philosophy and style, place it within that strategic context and adapt as required.

### Set your Expectations

To effectively command your people, you must effectively set your expectations. Step one is to be clear on what you expect of yourself. Step two is to be clear on what you expect of others. Step three is to clearly convey these expectations.

#### **Personal Example:**

I set my expectations out in my Captain's Standing Orders in the first instance. In part, they read;

*'Individually, I expect the highest level of personal commitment to duty from each of you. I expect you to do your utmost to achieve the aims of the submarine and to be personally responsible for the level of your own performance. I expect you to be loyal to your fellow Ships Company, to the Command, to the Navy and to yourself.'*

And elsewhere, they read;

*'I expect COLLINS/DECHAINEUX to be prepared, to be committed, and to be successful. We are here to succeed.'*



## **Foster Good Submarine Practice**

The term Good Submarine Practice is not easily defined, as it can be applied to any facet of submarine support and operations. However, it is an essential part of the submariner's ethos, and goes a long way to shaping our professional standards. Essentially, I consider it to be any practice that has stood the test of time in submarines, during both peace and war. Some examples are; meticulous attention to detail, taking positive control of systems and their state, and strong submarine and environmental awareness. Similarly, it is Good Submarine Practice to demonstrate tolerance and acceptance of people's differences whilst honouring their professional knowledge and their willingness to work hard as a member of the team.

Just as the principles of flying do not change with the design of a new aircraft, there is no need to reinvent the art of submarine warfare for a new class of submarine or a new generation of submariner. The principles of submarine warfare remain constant and adherence to Good Submarine Practice remains essential, regardless of the class of submarine being operated. As such, I expect that submariners will conform to proven principles and procedures in operating their submarine and I place significant value on submarine experience in any platform in any theatre.

Good Submarine Practice does include striving for a detailed understanding of the capabilities and limitations of the platform and the environment in which we operate, as it is only with this understanding that can we apply flexibility and imagination to our operations. However, it is not Good Submarine Practice to rigidly or ignorantly adhere to tactics, techniques and procedures when circumstances necessitate a change. A lack of willingness to challenge norms or a lack of ability to innovate and adapt in response to changing circumstances, particularly when confronting an adaptive or determined adversary, can rapidly lead to mission failure or the loss of your submarine.





## LESSONS IN SUBMARINE COMMAND

### Submarines are Crewed by People

I was exceptionally well served by my very first Commanding Officer at sea. Either intentionally or otherwise, he daily demonstrated the justice, value and importance of unfailing respect and care for your people. People are the muscle, sinew and bone, the lifeblood, nerves and brain of a submarine. No submarine is a weapon of war without a skilled and motivated crew. In a warfighting sense, the submariners are the submarine. To quote a former 'Senior Survivor' - "*The boat doesn't make the people, the people make the boat.*" It is the duty of a submarine crew to know and understand their mission, their platform - including sensors and weapons - their environment, and, of course, their adversary. It is the duty of the Commanding Officer to lead them in their quest.

In recognising the above, you should realise that you control your assets, including your sensors, weapons and platform, but you command your people. I often described my boats as '*voice activated submarines.*' I merely had to say '*Dive the Submarine*' and it happened without me lifting a finger. But I was not commanding the platform to do something – I was commanding the people.

#### **Personal Example:**

*I was reminded of the distinction during my early days at sea in COLLINS. The submarine had been conducting a series of licensing and trials activity that had been interrupted by Emergency Stations on multiple occasions over the preceding days and weeks. When we suffered an inadvertent Halon discharge forward whilst dived I decided enough was enough - it was time to surface and proceed alongside.*

*In a subsequent signal, received several hours later, the Squadron Commander chose to remind me of the strategic importance of the outstanding trials and suggested I 'may have made my decision in haste'. In fact I had made my decision in OCCABA! As it was, we were still yet to secure from Emergency Stations. I continued toward port as intended. Once we had assumed Passage Routine, however, I re-assessed my appreciation of the overall situation, including the fact that I personally would need to command these men and women*



*for the next year; facing immense challenges in waters and situations that many of them could not yet envisage. I called the Command Team together, stated my intention to return to allocated dived water and resume the conduct of the trials. I told them to brief me in one hour on what would be required to achieve this.*

*This statement was met with what I would describe as a ‘mixed response.’ To be clear, the Ship’s Company had been operating under immense pressure over the preceding weeks, with a submarine that was continually failing their expectations. At one point during that time I had received a personal letter written by one of the most knowledgeable, experienced, respected and loyal Senior Sailors onboard. Over several pages it spelt out to me what he thought were the risks of continuing to operate the submarine, including the risk that the Ship’s Company might lose confidence in my ability to safely command them!*

*At any rate, an hour later I received my brief from the Command Team. I explained the importance of the program and my confidence in their ability to safely execute it. I stepped into my cabin and ordered the Officer of the Watch to reverse course and make preparations to dive on the watch. To my substantial relief, my cabin curtain remained undisturbed and the aft control surfaces came over.*

It was never clearer to me than on that day, that to command a submarine you must be able to effectively command the people. This means more than knowing and understanding them. When you are really exercising your command authority, it means being crystal clear on all that you are demanding of your people and totally convinced that your objective is worth those demands.

***“When a Submarine Goes to Sea, it Goes to War!”***

This lesson was brought home to me early in my career by the Captain Submarines of the day while he was seariding during a particularly demanding set of operational workups. I had risen to assume the responsibilities of a Navigating Officer, and had served in both the best and the worst submarines in the Squadron. It became clear to me that for the best submarines, this maxim - *When a submarine goes to sea, it goes to war!* - was much more than a poster slogan. It was the way they were operated. I adopted it as the Submariner’s Maxim.



The subtext to this maxim is that ‘... *it’s only the mission that changes.*’ On each occasion of sailing, our submarines make a significant contribution to Australia’s maritime power. Every activity should be conducted with a commensurate level of forethought, preparation and commitment. So whether you are going to sea to conduct licensing and work-ups, to develop new tactics, or to deploy for international exercises; whether you are going for a day or six months; and regardless of the perceived tactical environment, you need to prepare yourself, your submarine and your people as if you were going to war.

**Personal Example:**

On the conduct of operations, my Captain’s Standing Orders stated:

*‘Our duty is not to second guess the nature of the regional environment or the likelihood of conflict. Our duty is to prepare for that conflict and act as directed when it occurs. In determining standards and assessing performance, Officers are to bear in mind the transition to periods of low tension, high tension and armed conflict. Adherence to the above principle will ensure a smooth transition, and maximise survivability and effectiveness. Our ability to sustain effective operations and survive in a hostile environment is the ultimate benchmark of performance.’*

When you assume this attitude, you leave nothing to chance. You think through the problems and the potentials. You ensure that you are as prepared as possible; that you have everything and everyone you might need; that your submarine is fitted with the right kit, which is serviceable and optimised for the task; that your people are ready in all respects - fit, trained, cohesive and motivated. When you assume this attitude, the step up to operations and combat isn’t insurmountable – it’s just another step up! It’s one more mission, with different objectives, constraints and limitations, and a different adversary to know and understand. When you assume this attitude, you will have the best possible chance of mission success; whatever that mission might be.

**Personal Example:**

*This approach has paid off frequently for me, including on one occasion in command when, having recently deployed from Home Port, intelligence reports suggested a potential change of tasking. I shaped course and speed to optimise the opportunity that presented. The previously scheduled transit to another Australian port, which would routinely have been used to refine internal orders and finesse onboard training, was foregone. Within a number of days of our departure the submarine was conducting a clandestine boat transfer and embarking Submarine Operations and other staff to provide briefings and associated intelligence in amplification of our new orders.*

*Although the entire shape and purpose of the deployment had been abruptly shifted in response to regional developments, the deliberate focus on complete and thorough pre-deployment preparations enabled the skills and teamwork we had assiduously built during workups to be turned very effectively to the new tasking. Whilst this real world challenge initially caught some by surprise, the platform was ideally placed and the Ship's Company found that they were in fact very well prepared to respond. Consequently, they performed admirably and achieved outstanding results.*

One of the greatest benefits of adopting an approach like this – “*When a submarine goes to sea, it goes to war!*” - is that it places successive, but not necessarily continuous, demands on your people; including the demand of excellence as the standard and the demands of progressive challenges that need to be overcome. Because it results in a pattern of success and, almost inevitably, occasional failure, it also builds a habit of tenacity in the face of adversity and an innate ability to respond to crisis or shock.

**Communication is the Key to Command Performance**

I outlined earlier those five parts to the role; combining knowledge and skill with experience, exercising judgment, making decisions, providing direction and inspiring your people. The importance of communication in achieving the end result is self-evident and my performance very often came down to the clarity of my expectations and the effectiveness of my communication. You simply will not achieve the full potential of your submarine if you are unable to effectively communicate with your Ship's Company, or the host of external agencies



and entities you will interact with. As such, no effort expended improving your communication skills will be wasted.

A related concept I applied whilst in command was to envisage a personal 'contract' with each and every officer and sailor onboard. By 'contract' I do not mean written contracts or workplace agreements - this is not something I discussed with my people - but those contracts were very real. They were founded in my own very personal and internal commitment to those who served under my command. They were built on mutual trust and respect, and measured in terms of skill, dedication and loyalty. I had my part of the deal, and they had theirs.

The contracts were quite varied, depending mainly on the individuals' responsibilities and personality. Some of the contracts were incredibly complex, others remarkably simple. Some were 'negotiated' on a very personal basis, others through a short line of Divisional staff. They were often 'renegotiated'. Most stood the test of time, including through some real challenges. A few did not. In the main, they all had to be underwritten by my genuine interest in the welfare of my people and they could only be sustained with an honest commitment to Naval Service from both parties.

As the concept of these contracts was not apparent to others, I often used it as a personal test of my own performance as a Commanding Officer; particularly with respect to testing the effectiveness of my communication. In the event of poor performance, related questions came to the fore. Are my expectations actually clear and have they been effectively communicated? Does that sailor know and understand what I expect of him? Do I know and understand what she expects of me? If not - why not, and what is to be done about it? If so, then have I accurately judged the integrity of my officers, or the proficiency of my senior sailors, or the willingness of my junior sailors?

I always considered I had a personal contract with the relevant Admiral as well. Though they were equally oblivious to the concept, they usually held up their end of the deal. Up, down, or around, communication is the key to command performance.



## Delegation is the Key to People Potential

In my view, delegation is key to any successful command philosophy. By delegation I mean giving individuals, teams or departments real responsibility with a clear expectation that they get on with their job and that I will hold them accountable for the results. Importantly, there are two fundamental aspects to this sort of approach - trust and risk. If you don't know the capabilities of your people, you can not trust them; you can only set them up for a fall. If you don't understand the context or the environment you are operating in, you can not assess the risks, because you don't know what the real threats are.

So, convey your expectations to your Ship's Company. Ideally do that demonstrating trust, faith and confidence in the first instance. Then, spare no effort in continually assessing the actual capabilities and limitations of your submarine. In particular, understand the knowledge, skills and talents of your officers and sailors then delegate wherever it is practicable to do so.

### Personal Example:

*To give meaning to theory and encourage a forward leaning mentality, I set the following challenge, adapted from my high school motto, before my people:*

*'Dare to be the best Submariner you can!'*

*Whilst I applied the same principle of delegation and empowerment throughout both my submarine command tenures, I found that my capacity to delegate was substantially greater during my second command. One element of this Ship's Company that took strong advantage of my willingness to delegate was the Electronic Warfare department. With a clear understanding my command intent and sufficient guidance to ensure that they remained on the right side of the law, they led a truly creative approach to warfare onboard. Increasingly encouraged by various successes over the course of a number of deployments, they astounded me and surprised themselves with the results of their technical and procedural innovations.*



It is worth noting that an Australian submarine Commanding Officer possesses, at the very most, about two percent of the total mental and physical capacity of an entire Ship's Company. Ensure you create an environment to achieve the very best outcomes by enabling all your people and drawing a full measure from the talents and energy of the other ninety-eight percent!

### **Simplicity and Clarity are the Gifts of Command**

Regardless of the mission, notwithstanding the task, we require that our submarines can contend with the considerable demands of the sea, and of the depths. We require that they can sustain human life in complete isolation from material support or replenishment. We require that they can generate the situational awareness necessary to so dominate the information environment that they can maintain tactical advantage and achieve tactical, operational and strategic effects, in whatever role they have been tasked. We require that they achieve all this across vast distances and over extended periods of time. No wonder then that our submarines are comprised of highly technical platforms and systems, with an equally complex array of sensors, processors and weapons.

Of course, success will be measured in terms of naval effectiveness. So, recognising the inevitable levels of technical and operational complexity that the environment invokes, but recalling the fundamental fact that people need to live in, operate and exploit the advantages of the platform in the most demanding conditions, you need to embrace simplicity and offer clarity wherever you can find it. In doing so, you will give the crew an opportunity to fight the enemy with the submarine; rather than having to fight the submarine, the enemy and the sea all at once.

#### **Personal Example:**

*When I was in command of COLLINS, a practice had been established over several years of unberthing the submarines at Fleet Base West by propelling astern for the length of Diamantina Wharf, with tugs connected, before eventually finding enough open water to turn the submarine and proceed up the sound. The shiphandling was slow, awkward, unpredictable and risky. I knew there had to be a better way and devised, with my team, a method of manoeuvring the submarine to turn to seaward immediately on letting go, enabling us to sail out of the basin unencumbered by tugs and with a good deal more power, control and grace than previously!*



This method had probably not been developed earlier because it most certainly ‘appeared’ more risky, with very limited manoeuvring room between ourselves and the surrounding warships and submarines berthed in the basin. In actual fact it was safer and more effective, largely because it was simpler. Given the inevitably high degree of complexity in the submarine environment, you should search for and offer your Ship’s Company simplicity wherever you can achieve it, and encourage their contribution to this objective.

**Personal Example:**

*At another time during the same command, we had conducted a demanding three month work-up which had proceeded very well; right up until the final night of the Unit Readiness Evaluation. Having attacked a task group of warships, I had taken the submarine deep to evade their supporting maritime patrol aircraft and close the coast overnight for the next, and final, task - an inshore operation at daybreak. With explicit Night Orders issued, I lay down in my cabin and went to sleep. I awoke some time later to a fluttering sensation rising through my bunk; the submarine was ‘smelling the ground’. Immediately sick to the stomach, I ran to the Control Room. Sailing at speed and at depth, I had driven my submarine into Continental Shelf. Predictably, the subsequent inquiry would show that this significant feature was precisely where the Hydrographer had forecast it would be!*

*We were now screaming along the bottom, having thankfully met a steady gradient of shale rather than a cliff face. What I initially observed was that those on watch, having moments before been entirely confident of the submarine’s position and intending to remain at that ordered depth for at least another hour, either could not comprehend - or did not want to comprehend - what was happening. Bubble lost! I instinctively announced ‘We are aground!’ I had not taken the submarine, I had not given an order or any direction, but the response was immediate as they sprang into action, executing Emergency Operating Procedures, regaining their situational awareness and bringing the submarine to a safe position and state. Bubble found!*

On this occasion, one clear and simple statement had cut through the apparent confusion and provided clarity of the situation. Importantly, it also demonstrated a sense of accountability and





an acceptance of reality. In moments of crisis and confusion, there is nothing more useful to your Ship's Company than providing them with clarity of the actual situation.

### **Manage Fatigue to Generate Resilience**

Whilst I had brought clarity to the above situation, clearly I had done so all too late. The Board of Inquiry found that I had made a decision *'which was tactically valid but may not have been appropriate given the experience and tiredness of personnel on watch'*. I had set my people up to fail by underestimating the effect of fatigue on them. At the back end of a long work up and an intense evaluation, fatigue was a primary consideration in my judgements. However, I erroneously assumed that if I still had the wits and energy to conceive and draw up the plan to approach the coast, balancing tactical expedience with navigational safety, then they had the wits and experience to execute it. In fact, many of my people were substantially more fatigued than I was; in no small measure because they had been working harder than I had. To varying degrees, they lacked both the depth of experience - including experience in managing fatigue during work-ups - and the physical and mental reserve that I mistakenly took for granted. The resultant navigational errors that led directly to the grounding were astoundingly simple, certainly in hindsight, yet were not identified by any member of the watch until after the incident. In terms of emotional intelligence, I had misjudged the impacts of stress and fatigue on my people and erroneously ascribed my level of alertness and ability to them. Consequently, I had transgressed my own dictum to *'Know your people'* and my Teachers dictum to *'Never risk your pressure hull!'* - and endangered both.

Having survived the grounding, minus a few under-hull fittings and a lot of paint but otherwise relatively unscathed, it became a remarkably effective growth opportunity for both myself and the Ship's Company. The conduct of the Board of Inquiry obviously demanded complete transparency; it also demanded a great deal more integrity and personal courage than I would have previously imagined. However, it resulted in a very clear understanding of what had occurred and a most effective lesson on the potential consequences of 'getting it wrong'. I became blessed with a significantly more cohesive and resilient Ship's Company than might have otherwise been achieved and this substantially enabled us to meet the many remaining challenges of that Commission.



There is a direct relationship between fatigue managed well in challenging environments and the achievement of greater resilience in your people. An analogy can be drawn between fatigue and resilience in your people and the Main Storage Battery of a submarine. The purpose of the battery is to store energy and potential – *chi* – ready for immediate use. That energy and potential can be discharged, or fatigued, either slowly or rapidly. Equally, it can be recharged either slowly or rapidly, and it can be discharged or charged either partially or fully. For people, as for a Main Storage Battery, the lower the charge, the greater the risk involved when you demand a high discharge rate. The greater the charge, the more readily it can accept high demands. Charging your battery requires planning, forethought, the application of certain skills and a direct investment of energy; and doing so in the right tactical circumstances is critical. Importantly, you physically cannot get to a 100% charge without going through the other 99%. Building the immediate capacity of your people is no different.

Equally, maintaining the overall health of your battery requires long term planning and forethought to ensure deep discharges and gassing routines are conducted, both of which are necessary to maintain a healthy battery with a full range of potential. To continue the analogy, both collective and individual capacity and resilience are important - and when a sick cell is identified, it needs to be treated or cut out as necessary. Of course, both people and a Main Storage Battery are limited by their chemistry, but the performance of your people is not intrinsically limited by design. The potential for your people to generate, and expend, resilience is far more elastic. It is through shared and individual experiences in challenging circumstances, successful or not, followed by appropriate opportunities to recuperate and replenish that opportunities to generate resilience are created. The fundamental difference is that a Main Storage Battery has no sense of purpose, morale or fighting spirit. If you can imbue these in your Ship's Company you should assume their potential is limitless.

### **Take Care of Yourself**

In the longer term, there will be times in your career when you have an opportunity to recuperate mentally, physically and spiritually. It is an entirely professional approach to be aware of your weaknesses and work to overcome them. So be certain to avail yourself of the support you require when you can access it, in order to make absolutely sure that you are fit to sail and fight when required.



**Personal Example:**

*In the course of my career, I have undergone rhinoplasties, hernia repairs, shoulder and knee surgeries when the opportunities presented to ensure my physical fitness to serve when needed. As a Lieutenant, I sought counselling and treatment to deal with alcohol problems. Some who have had a drink with me since might think that failed miserably, but it actually enabled me to set some limits and curb excesses that might otherwise have ended my submarine career. Equally, I have sought professional help to deal with the aftermath of a number of difficult incidents, deployments and other stressors.*

Life in submarines is hard and a submarine career is an endurance sport, not a high-speed run. So look after yourself. Seek and accept the professional help of others as and when you - and those closest to you - think you need it.

**Understand Fear to Command in Adversity**

Nothing has the ability to fatigue your people and sap their reserves like fear and anxiety. Yet fear and anxiety will affect many of your people to varying degrees every day. Fear of success or fear of failure. Fear of being responsible or fear of being powerless. Fear of change, uncertainty, loss of control, mistakes or misadventure. Fear of personal loss, loneliness, pain and death. Fear of consequences for loved ones. Recognising the sources and understanding the effects of fear, in yourself and others, is important because leadership has its part to play in countering fear and anxiety, and in bringing people through the difficulties and adversities that they encounter. It is particularly important in times of extreme adversity because it can have very real impacts, including affecting how people think, communicate and act.

It is incumbent on a Commanding Officer to never add to the fears of your people. Rather, give them the courage to face what threatens them. The flood described earlier was one of the most frightening incidents I have experienced; particularly when, having completed the EOPS - achieved a bow up, increased speed, blown in normal and emergency – absolutely nothing happened! The submarine hung suspended for, what certainly appeared to be, a very long time. The fear was very real.



Nonetheless, during the initial reactions to the flood, I effectively did ... nothing! I moved to the control room, where the Executive Officer as Duty Commanding Officer had conduct and the team were doing precisely the right things very well, and I did nothing further for quite a long time. Internally, I was checking every single order and every single action, with a mind racing to understand the present and place myself in the future. Outwardly, I sought to calmly demonstrate trust and faith in the skill, training and teamwork of my people, and confidence in the submarine.

Of course, my enduring memory of the Ship's Company on that day is not one of fear, but of cool, calm determination and discipline. Reflecting the character of those who crew submarines, my enduring memory is one of courage and strength in the face of a fearful disaster.



## THE OBLIGATIONS INHERENT IN SUBMARINE COMMAND

### Responsibility to Learn

It is often said that, rather than being the end of a journey, the award of your submarine qualification is actually a licence to start learning. Our apprenticeship in the Trade is a long one; and one that should last until our final days of service. Notwithstanding the very structured nature of subsequent qualifications, professional development and career progression, the responsibility to learn needs to be assumed by individuals at a very personal level. Further, the submarine profession is by necessity an active learning environment - in doing so we become! Whether at sea or ashore, every day spent as a qualified submariner - or a command qualified submariner - will offer opportunities to learn and develop, build knowledge and experience. They should be prized as such.

Those days when your professional knowledge and skill will be put to the test may not be predictable, but they will come frequently. For the professional submariner seeking to learn about submarines and submarine warfare, it may appear that you have all the time in the world. Inevitably, in truth, there is no time to lose.

### Responsibility to Train

In the main, although we work hard and manage some intense situations, life at sea in submarines generally moves along pretty smoothly. But, when things go wrong, they can go seriously wrong very quickly.

#### **Personal Example:**

*On St Patrick's Day in 1994, I was serving on exchange with the British Royal Navy as a Sonar Officer and Watchleader. Conducting trials overnight, we were several hundred miles west of the coast of Ireland in an Upholder Class submarine. We were at periscope depth and snorting - in a Force 10 gale! Sonar and visibility were both severely degraded and, predictably, we were having difficulty keeping depth. Shortly before watch handover we suffered an engine run on which rapidly filled the submarine with toxic diesel exhaust. Having gone to Emergency Stations, inadvertently locking half the crew forward in the*



*accommodation spaces as bulkhead doors were shut, the Captain decided to surface to ventilate.*

*Shortly after the Officer of the Watch, lookout and an upper hatch sentry were sent to the fin, the submarine was pooped and driven back beneath the surface. Bows down, at speed and with minimal buoyancy, we were effectively diving again; but with a full bore of exceedingly cold Atlantic seawater flooding through the conning tower. Although we managed to shut the lower lid and stop the ingress, we had three people locked outside the pressure hull and approximately 20 ton of seawater in the Control Room. One periscope, only partially raised, had been jammed by the impact of the seas. As the submarine was smashed from starboard to port and back again, we lost our sonar, fire control, navigation and internal communications systems. As the free surface made its way below, hydraulic pumps and gyroscopes were lost and the main storage batteries threatened. Every indicator on the ship's alarm panel was lit up. The Mayday call went out but was not acknowledged.*

As an aside, I run an occasional endurance trail marathon – just for sport. Perhaps curiously, one of my favourite mantras is ‘*This will get worse before it gets worse.*’ In a perverse way, this helps me deal with the pain and suffering of the moment and brace for what is to come. This was one of those days!

There is certainly nothing natural about taking submarines to sea - built of high tensile steel to withstand the forces of the sea at depth, packed with high pressure air, high pressure hydraulics, high currents and voltages and high explosives. My point, however, is not how dangerous submarines can be, but rather just how safe we can make them through training, knowledge and experience.

The Commanding Officer of that submarine was renowned for his consummate technical expertise and the incredibly high standards that he set for himself and demanded of his people, including standards of weapon and system knowledge. He was also renowned for his absolute determination to ensure that his Ship's Company was trained, drilled and exceedingly proficient in everything from warfare skills to damage control.



Notwithstanding how grim that situation was, if the Ship's Company had not been prepared and known how to respond to the crisis, it would have been a very bad day indeed. But they did know. They knew their boat, their shipmates and the sea well enough to not only survive themselves, but to save the submarine. Courage, teamwork and exhaustive training enabled them to confine the damage, regain control of the submarine, restore systems, treat the casualties and navigate to a safe harbour. We made it through the night, got ourselves alongside Loch Ewe late the following day, and we were back at sea just a fortnight later. The outcome was absolute proof for me of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's sage advice – *'The best form of welfare for the troops is first-class training.'*<sup>1</sup>

### Responsibility to Teach and Mentor

Submarine experience is, in any relative terms, a remarkably rare commodity. This being the case, as qualified submariners - no matter what our level of experience - we each have a responsibility to disperse knowledge gained and share our hard won experience across the Arm; particularly knowledge and experience gained at sea and on operations. Further, in my view, there is no better opportunity to refine and develop your professional submarine knowledge than to assume teaching responsibilities.

#### Personal Example:

*I discovered this early in my submarine career during a six-month period ashore as the Submarine Warfare Instructor and re-discovered it much later again as Head of Submarine Warfare Training. I learnt that the depth of comprehension required to do your job at sea may not be sufficient to clearly explain and impart subject matter expertise to a class of inquiring submariners, who lack your experience and the context it provides. Quite apart from the intrinsic rewards it brings, teaching is a clear opportunity to both impart knowledge to others and also, sharpen your own comprehension.*

Separately, no matter what level you are operating at, there will be others with latent talent who you can mentor, guide and foster on a more personal or individual level. The value of timely and thoughtful guidance and the impact it can have on motivation and career direction should

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<sup>1</sup> Collins, A. *Common Sense Training: A Working Philosophy for Leaders*, 2011, Random House Publishing Group, p. 230



not be underestimated. Conversely, unrealised potential or the attrition of quality submariners from the Arm through carelessness in our dealings with our people is worse than wasteful – it is the equivalent of doing the work of the enemy for him. Actively look for the potential your people, wherever it may lie, and do whatever you can to help them realise it.

### Responsibility to Educate

By the time you are qualified, you will intuitively know and understand more about what a submarine actually is, how it really operates and the effects it can and can't achieve than the vast majority of the population; including some of the senior leadership within Navy and other decision makers across Defence and within Government. The submarine environment is unique, and not one that lends itself well to accurate portrayal by Hollywood caricature or those who use vivid imagination to compensate for an absence of actual knowledge and experience.

#### Personal Example:

*Some years ago, in discussion with a colleague in Canberra, I spoke of a submarine conducting an at sea activity for a certain period of time – in excess of several days. Genuinely seeking to understand my commentary, she asked me “Where do you stay?” As you know, there are no stupid questions in submarines – this would come pretty close, but it was an honest quest for understanding. This intelligent, highly regarded, relatively senior Defence bureaucrat was trying to imagine what form of alternate accommodation we might have available for the end of the working day if we were still out at sea! For this person, the prospect of working and living onboard a submarine was an anathema. I was astounded, but have never since allowed myself to underestimate the profound miscomprehension of the fundamental principles of submarines and submarine operations that can reasonably derive from a total absence of related experience.*

It can be a mistake to underestimate the value of the understanding that you possess or the possible lack of understanding of others. The lesson is that with our knowledge of submarines comes both a qualification and a responsibility to educate. Within the bounds of security constraints, we are obliged to support decision makers by ensuring, not assuming, that they have the comprehension and understanding they need.





## BEHAVIOURS AND TRAITS TO VALUE AND NURTURE

In my experience, there are certain behaviours and traits that are particularly germane to submarine command and life at sea in submarines in general. My thoughts on these behaviours and traits, which should be valued and nurtured in both yourself and others, are outlined below.

**Collaboration.** In most environments, there are opportunities for collaboration. This might be limited in a submarine at sea, but do not underestimate the value of, or neglect to invest yourself in, collaborative efforts ashore to generate the resources and support required from others to achieve your mission.

**Criticism.** If you are doing even a half decent job, you will make mistakes and you will burn capital. You will be criticised, your submarine and your people will be criticised. Indeed, to quote Aristotle - *'There is only one way to avoid criticism: do nothing, say nothing, and be nothing.'* You will, and should, also be self-critical of your own performance and that of your people. Offered constructively, sound criticism is an invaluable tool for the professional submariner striving for excellence, and it should always be welcomed. So remember this; it is your attitude to criticism and your application of criticism that will shape your people and define the environment within your command, for better or for worse.

**Competition.** Competition is an essential driving force for achieving professional standards and I always encourage a competitive nature. However, taken to extremes, it can be damaging and negative; especially if it becomes divisive at Watch or Departmental level. Both Officers and Senior Sailors need to ensure that onboard competition contributes to higher standards and the attainment of the submarine's aims. Similarly, while you have every reason to be proud of your submarine, this should never be expressed at the expense of other RAN or Allied submarines or units. They are not the enemy!

**Camaraderie.** You should expect that firm, long-standing relationships will be formed during your service in the Submarine Arm. I trust that you will enjoy the strong camaraderie and intense personal loyalties I have witnessed during my submarine service. These loyalties and friendships are based on shared hardships and experiences, and on mutual respect and confidence. The submarine environment most conducive to strong performance is one where



your submariners consider and respect each other as professional colleagues, first and foremost, and conduct themselves appropriately at all times.

**Consistency.** Sailors, in particular, but people in general, crave consistency in their leaders. Consistency in your dealings with others is a function of '*constancy of purpose*'. If you know what your real mission is, and you base everything you say and everything you do on that, then you will be unfailingly consistent.

**Commitment.** As a Commanding Officer, you cannot expect anybody to care more passionately or deeply about your submarine and your people than you yourself do. You will need to recognise the limits of your knowledge, experience and ability; noting that recognising these limits is different to being satisfied with them. You will need to acknowledge that you can't do everything and that your submarine can't do everything. But in doing so, be evidently and unequivocally committed to your duty.

When you are afforded the privilege of command, do not renovate your house, read for your Masters, turn to drink or have an affair. Do not absent yourself from your command in any other way. Why not? Firstly, it is just too rare an opportunity to waste. Secondly, nothing, save perhaps your own family, will be more important than your command. The Admirals will demand, and the Ship's Company will certainly expect, your very best. More importantly than that, they deserve nothing less than the undiminished attention of a complete Captain.

**Character.** We each have our own character. As a Commanding Officer, you will play many roles (including patron, preacher, confessor, martyr and saint) and there will inevitably be occasions where some theatre is required. No matter what your role on any given day, know who you are - with and without uniform and title - and be yourself. Remember that there is a difference between strong charisma and true character; one is not essential for effective command in the Navy; the other is absolutely vital.



**Courage and Compassion.** Field Marshal Sir William Slim, GBE, KCB, DSO, MC wrote that '*courage is not merely a virtue; it is the virtue.*'<sup>2</sup> As a Commanding Officer, you need to be acutely aware of courageous acts and behaviour; physical and moral, conspicuous and inconspicuous. Courage is an expendable resource. It can be rapidly depleted but replenishing stores of courage can be a matter of not days but of weeks, months or years. Finding yourself, or others, without a reserve of courage can put you in a dangerous place.

Finally, I place courage and compassion together because Naval command, and Naval service in general, demand a full measure of both, and because it very often takes courage to be compassionate and compassion to be courageous. I have frequently observed that in situations that clearly call for either courage or compassion, the other is invariably required and also exceedingly valuable.

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<sup>2</sup> Cross, T. 'Military Values and Traditions' in Cahill, K.M. (ed) *Traditions, Values, and Humanitarian Action*, 2003, Fordham University Press, p.104



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## SUBMARINE COMMAND TRANSLATES

Serving at sea and in command of submarines inevitably shapes us into leaders who can survive and achieve in that particular environment. However, there is nothing truly unique about any singular aspect of submarine command; it is often only as a matter of degrees that the demands, challenges and effects achieved will differ from naval command in other environments. It is equally true that the lessons of submarine command and the leadership skills acquired can be applied to and exploited in other domains beyond the submarine and even beyond the Defence environment. Some examples of how submarine command translates are provided below.

**Priorities.** Every Australian submariner is familiar with the classic priorities of maintaining safety of the submarine, avoiding counter-detection – being noticed for the wrong thing – and achieving the aim. These priorities appear to cascade in importance. However, in truth and certainly in extremis, no one priority can be achieved without concurrently achieving the other two. As such, they drive the daily efforts of our people and shape every piece of advice offered or recommendation made. Similarly, the Ship's Company will view every command decision through this same lens. Whilst these priorities are bespoke for submarine operations, the intrinsic value of clear, simple and unequivocal priorities to align people's efforts and their judgements is universal.

**Vulnerabilities.** Australian submarines possess immense capabilities and awesome lethality. However, as professional submariners we are acutely aware that those same submarines can rapidly become vulnerable if your people are not up to the task at hand, if technology fails and leaves you at the mercy of the sea, or if stealth fails and tactical advantage is lost. We are also constrained by the truly finite nature of our resources, including energy reserves, once we sail. So, whilst capability and strength are vital to the effects we achieve, it is actually our understanding of the inherent vulnerabilities of our people and platforms that shapes us most distinctly.

Crucially, it is this understanding that drives our heavy investment in planning and preparation, our discipline in Licensing and Work-ups, and our determination to achieve the highest possible standards; ahead of any exclusive focus on execution. It also drives our tendency toward a conservative approach and judicious expenditure of energy, and a dis-inclination to waste time



or effort on matters that are unlikely to succeed or are beyond our remit. Although particularly germane to submarines, understanding your vulnerabilities to preserve and optimise your strengths can, again, have universal applicability.

**Knowledge.** Through my submarine career I have learnt the absolute necessity and inevitable value of a having a strong grasp on your mission and deep knowledge of your people, submarine, environment and adversary. As Sun Tzu would attest, a lack of understanding in any one of these domains might render even the most detailed knowledge in the others utterly futile. Serving beyond the tactical level, it takes time to understand your command or role and even more time to build effective arguments, to generate influence and achieve effects. This is certainly the case across the strategic domains of Defence; an environment where collaborative skills and political acumen assume pre-eminence, divergent political agendas compete and disparate sources of power and authority prevail. To paraphrase an American saying - *'No-one will give you power or money in Canberra'* - certainly not without reasoned and compelling argument, at the very least!

Again, the fundamental submarine command tenets of understanding your mission and truly knowing your people, platform, environment and adversary can be applied in any command or leadership role and can translate to environments well beyond the submarine at sea.



## CONCLUSION

### Know The Why!

In the opening paragraphs of this paper, I urged you to ‘*Know your Why!*’ It is equally important to be clear on the wider purpose of our Submarine Arm.

Submarines are offensive weapons systems, designed to sink ships and other submarines. Be in no doubt, the Navy exists to defend the Nation and you are here to fight its wars when called upon. At the end, superiority at sea is the true test of our relevance to the security of the Nation. With their unique combination of stealth, reach, endurance and destructive power, our submarines present as the most lethal maritime strike platforms in the Australian Defence Force. The inherent potency of our submarines combined with their ability to operate over significant ranges and for sustained periods at sea engender credibility as a combatant, a deterrent or both. Regardless of how we may variously be perceived amongst our own, Australia’s submarines and submariners command the hard won respect of the region’s Navies. Our ongoing challenge is to realise the full potential of the capability, ensure that our Submarine Force consistently achieves credible presence in strategically significant waters and continuously delivers the Nation’s principal strategic deterrent.

### Submarine Command – a Privilege without Rival

Finally, to those young men and women who aspire to command an Australian Submarine, I say this:

*“The Australian Submariners I know are trustworthy, courageous and patriotic. They tolerate extensive work hours, arduous conditions and exceedingly confined quarters, and long periods of profound isolation from general society. They are respectful of the sea, service oriented, tolerant, psychologically sound, physically fit and healthy, and capable of performing to exacting professional standards. With a strong aptitude for teamwork and leadership, they are ready, willing and able to conduct hazardous and warlike at sea operations, independent of direct support, whilst crewing the Nation’s principal strategic deterrent. The opportunity to command these people at sea, as one of their number, is a privilege without rival.*”

*Good Hunting!”*



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