



Members of Parachute Regiment securing Lungi airport.

Headquarters Land

# Organizing British Joint Rapid Reaction Forces

By RICHARD M. CONNAUGHTON

**B**ritain sent the spearhead battalion of its joint rapid reaction force (JRRF) to Sierra Leone in May 2000. The unit took control of the airport at Lungi and began restoring order to the capital of Freetown, a preliminary to evacuating Britons and foreign nationals. Some 36 hours earlier, the unit had been in barracks at Aldershot. Operation Palliser was a classic example of a rapid reaction mission, something often sought yet rarely achieved. It validated

the concept of integrating operational planning, preparation, and execution under a permanent joint headquarters (PJHQ).

## Thinking Joint

Both the previous Conservative and current Labor governments have viewed the capability to mount rapid reaction operations as in the national interest, in keeping with global responsibilities as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, to play a part in resolving selected crises. Britain had an inefficient response system in 1994 and a constant though apparently contradictory political intention to improve military efficiency while achieving cost savings.

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CinC Fleet

Helicopter carrier  
*HMS Ocean* during  
operations at sea.

Before the establishment of PJHQ, command of joint forces deployed overseas was usually achieved by appointing one of three service commanders in chief as joint commander who, in turn, would designate his headquarters as joint headquarters. A chief was not normally appointed until the cabinet chose to deploy forces. This ad hoc, reactive arrangement was never efficient nor truly joint. In July 1994, to improve crisis management and responsiveness by the chain of command, the secretary of state for defence announced the creation of a single, permanent joint headquarters under a chief of joint operations (CJO).

### four-star chiefs of staff have no responsibility for command and control of operations

The formation of a joint rapid deployment force was also announced, to become operational by April 1996 at the same time as the new headquarters.

Development of PJHQ was the outcome of the Defence Costs Study (1994). From this so-called front-line first study came the operational, efficiency-based requirement to separate policy from operations, a consequence of which would be creation of PJHQ. An earlier study, *Options for Change* (1991), planned to reduce manpower levels in the Ministry of Defence from 12,700 to 3,750 by 1998. Reductions in Whitehall on that scale were possible partly because of the belief by the government that the core ministry responsibility was policy and that the function of operations could be separated and moved to a more efficient site in the suburbs.

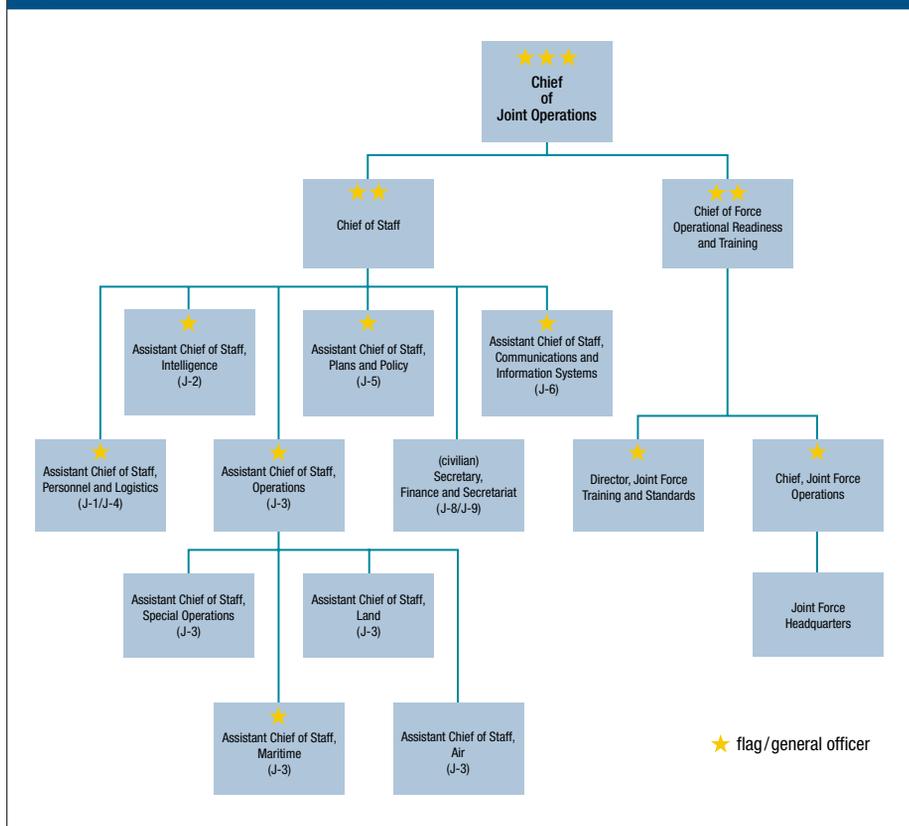
Responsibility for the defense and security of the United Kingdom rests with the ministry. Four-star chiefs of staff advise the chief of the defence staff (CDS) on military aspects of defense policy which affect the services, how the services are engaged, and service capabilities. CDS then represents their views to the government. Chiefs have no responsibility for command or control of operations. The commanders in chief retain full command and are responsible for delivering fully manned, trained, and equipped component elements at agreed states of readiness. The relationship between the single service supporting commands and PJHQ is reportedly very good.

The Defence Cost Study recommended establishment of PJHQ to permit “a proper, clear, and unambiguous connection between [government] policy and strategic functions and the conduct of operations at the operational level to be achieved.” This proposed simplification of command and control resonates with the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986. In the post-Cold War era, when armed forces can increasingly be utilized in pursuit of diverse foreign policy objectives, the number of political actors interested in influencing operations has grown. Conceptually, CDS must shoulder the aspirations, interests, and often divergent opinions of the broad range of political leaders on the strategic level, leaving PJHQ to focus on operations.

An unambiguous connection between CDS and PJHQ has not been established. A ministry committee, the defence crisis management organization (DCMO), intervenes between the two, thus blurring command and control lines and providing further points of contact for political and military intervention. Prime Minister Winston Churchill loathed military committees: “You may take the most gallant sailor, the most intrepid airman, or the most audacious soldier, put them at a table together—what do you get? The sum total of their fears.”

Britain divides activity on the strategic level into grand and military strategy. The difficulty of having DCMO intervening between CDS and PJHQ is the overlap of interest as organizations compete to perform on the military strategic level. As one commentator explained, “The problem with DCMO is that members bring to it their own experience and memories of the operational level of conflict so that instead of providing strategic level direction there is a tendency to duplicate that which is the responsibility and within the competence of PJHQ.” It became evident after Operation Palliser that relations between DCMO and PJHQ had to mature. Political leaders and commanders must reflect on their precise areas of responsibility and confine themselves to them.

Figure 1. Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ)



## Planning Operations

In addition to dealing with crises, CJO is responsible for deliberate planning in the form of joint guides and contingency/operational plans. The latter replace joint theater plans originated in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, essentially noncombatant evacuation operations concerned with extracting nationals in an emergency. Merging deliberate and crisis action planning enhances PJHQ flexibility. Nowadays, crises and subsequent operations do not telegraph their imminence, and PJHQ has a proven system of spotting, monitoring, and prioritizing emerging crises.

PJHQ classifies conflicts in four categories (quiescent, stirring, quickening, and surfaced), which then are put in three categories of interest. The normal state is the lowest level of activity, whereby intelligence is maintaining a watching brief on areas of operational interest and creating a priority list. Concurrently, staff planners are engaged in the joint staff development of contingency plans. Step 1 occurs when it is evident that a

crisis is emerging. A multidisciplinary contingency planning team is organized on the working level under a senior officer from the planning division. A team is expected to master the situation in order to advise the entire chain of command.

Not all efforts move to the third category of interest (step 2), formation of an operations team (OT). If a crisis evaporates or a decision is made that no operational activity is necessary, the contingency planning team may be disbanded. If the team progresses to step 2, it is subsumed into an operations team headed by a dedicated leader with a rank appropriate to the scale of operations. The role of the team is dealing with details associated with command, deployment, sustenance, and ultimately the recovery of the assigned force, and to be proactive and responsive in interfacing with the ministry and supporting commands. It does not deploy assets but continues until the operation is over. Unlike the United States, which allocates regional responsibilities to unified commands, PJHQ maintains a global watch and JRRF has a global liability. It is this crisis action planning that is undertaken with the ministry as part of the defence crisis management organization, whose main players are not collocated but are linked by a service

video conferencing system which also includes single service headquarters and key allies. The organization conducts conferences at least daily to review ongoing and emergent operations.

## Implementing Joint Capabilities

Vice Admiral Sir Ian Garnett is the current chief of joint operations. His headquarters of 438 personnel has as its primary role:

*To be responsible, when directed by CDS, for the planning and execution of U.K.-led joint, potentially joint, combined, and multinational operations, and for exercising operational command of U.K. forces assigned to combined and multinational operations led by others, in order to achieve [the ministry's] military strategic objectives.*

CJO has no permanently assigned forces. Assets only come under his headquarters for operational missions. The ongoing military contribution to Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Middle East is therefore the responsibility of PJHQ. Added tasks include command of sovereign base areas in Cyprus, Gibraltar, and the Falkland Islands. Exclusions are precise, namely the strategic nuclear deterrent and defense of home base (territorial waters and



Marines aboard  
HMS Ocean.

airspace, Northern Ireland, and counterterrorism). In general war, PJHQ has a role under article V of the NATO Treaty, possibly forming the national joint headquarters. CJO operational responsibilities include direction, deployment, sustainment, and recovery of the joint force.

Under CJO are two staff officers of two-star rank, a chief of staff, and a chief of joint force operational readiness and training (CJFORT). The branches under the chief of staff reflect U.S. and NATO staff organizations, facilitating the proper interaction with a NATO-organized coalition. A combined headquarters is similarly organized with branches 1 through 9, the principal difference being that it would be staffed by representatives of two or more member states. As a development of the St. Malo initiative, an Anglo-French combined headquarters exercise was held in June 2000. In short, both the chief of staff and PJHQ staff are organized to work with coalition partners.

Figure 2. Joint Force Headquarters Deployments

Operation	Location	Timeframe
Caxton	Montserrat	March 1996
Purposeful	Central Africa	November–December 1996
Determinant	Congo/Zaire	March–June 1997
Alleviate	Albania	June–July 1997
Bolton	Kuwait	February–April 1998
Carrick	Indonesia	May–June 1998
Ladbrook	Congo	August–September 1998
Desert Fox	Middle East	December 1998
Basilica	Sierra Leone	January–February 1999
Agricola	Kosovo	June 1999
Langar	East Timor	September–December 1999
Barwood	Mozambique	February–March 2000
Palliser	Sierra Leone	May–June 2000

U.S. Marine Corps (Jimmie Perkins)

CJFORT responsibilities were intended to ensure preparedness. The position of deputy for operational readiness and training arose from the Strategic Defence Review (1998) with the role of preparing JRRF and joint force headquarters (JFHQ) and monitoring readiness and joint training across five components (land, sea, air, special forces, and logistics). This involves directing tier 3 training on the operational and military strategic levels, coordinating tier 2 training on the tactical and operational levels through defense exercise planning, and formulating and assessing standards and essential tasks for JRRF with reference to manpower, equipment, sustainability, and collective performance. Oversight is achieved through monitoring, testing, and reporting on training and operations and facilitating dialogue among the services to exploit training opportunities.

JRRF comprises a pool of combat and support forces from which the United Kingdom will meet all short notice, crisis action planned, military contingencies. Its mission is:

*To be a pool of highly capable force elements, maintained at high and very high readiness and trained to the required joint standards. JRRF is to be deployable and sustainable in joint force packages, tailored to meet the operational requirement, in order to conduct operations up to medium scale warfighting, nationally or multinationally under NATO, [Western European Union], U.N., [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe], or ad hoc coalition auspices.*

The pool comprises the best trained units from across the military. This shift from relying on core formations is where JRRF differs from its



92nd Signal Company (Jeremiah Lancaster)

Scimitars deployed in Egypt, Bright Star.

predecessors. The inclusion of special forces is another. Pool units are configured into two echelons. First echelon force readiness varies from 48 hours for spearhead forces and a joint task force headquarters (JTFHQ) to completion in 10 days, followed by more substantial second echelon capabilities with a phased entry in 11 to 30 days.

The first JRRF echelon could represent a potent force. It can contain a maritime task group organized around a carrier with frigates and destroyers, cruise missile capable attack submarines, maritime patrol aircraft, mine warfare protection forces, and royal fleet auxiliary (RFA) support ships. The naval element might also include an amphibious task group.

### JFHQ is commanded by a chief of joint operations, a brigadier from the army or Royal Marines

In addition to light forces, the army could be represented by lead battlegroups from 1 Armored Division with parent brigades in the second echelon. Successful positioning of assets depends upon the force alignment with the strategic lift required to move it to be in place to deal with precise crises (six roll on-roll off vessels have been ordered and C-17 aircraft are to be leased pending the availability of the Airbus A400M in 2006–2007). Apache Longbow helicopters will soon be available. The Royal Air Force (RAF) first echelon contribution will be taken from across a range of capable systems. This is particularly important because of the need for air that can respond rapidly with intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance as well as the destructive capability to support light, high readiness land forces. Of note is the

construction of joint task forces from elements in the JRRF pool, as this leads to an inevitable ad hoc nature in the deploying force. Although this can be mitigated through training, there is a need to develop a genuine desire to fight as a team.

JFHQ is commanded by a chief of joint force operations (CJFO), a brigadier from the army or Royal Marines who will normally oversee JRRF operations that fall within the one-star command level. A larger scale operation would probably have a two-star commander. A group of two-star officers from all the services have appointments making them potential JTF commanders. The 55 members of the staff are broadly organized in the J-staff tradition. The headquarters forms the deployable element of PJHQ.

The JRRF concept is evolving, with phase 1 development having been completed in 1999. Culmination of phase 2—development of the full capability—will be Exercise Saif Sareea, planned for the Middle East in late 2001. Meanwhile, procedures are being refined as deployments go on. For example, there are operational liaison and reconnaissance teams (OLRTs), one of which can always move on 24 hours notice. Ideally the 6-man team will be commanded by CJFO, supported by staff officers who can be drawn from any branch of the staff. The impression that the team is top-heavy may have arisen during Operation Langar in East Timor, where the CJFO presence with an augmented OLRT was evident despite the total ground contribution of only a battalion tactical headquarters and a Gurkha company. The team also contains individuals with valuable experience who can advise ambassadors or heads of government in hot spots like Sierra Leone.

### Jointness in Action

By May 2000 the U.N. peacekeeping force in Sierra Leone had seriously deteriorated. A number of the 8,700 peacekeepers had been killed and as many as 500 detained by the rebel Revolutionary United Front. Secretary General Kofi Annan appealed to the United States, United Kingdom, and France for forces. "We know that the international community and the Western countries were not ready to go to Rwanda, and after Sierra Leone I think there's going to be very little encouragement for any of them to get involved in Africa." These nations, who had plausible rapid reaction capabilities, declined the invitation from Annan to put combat troops in Sierra Leone under the U.N. flag.

Britain announced that it would only provide technical and logistical support to the United Nations per earlier agreements. Anticipatory contingency action was thus put in hand in the event that an evacuation of entitled personnel was necessary. At 1000 hours, the JTFHQ

commander, Brigadier David Richards, was ordered to deploy to Freetown to prepare a non-combat evacuation operation (NEO) under national auspices. He would have the capability to conduct the evacuation in a hostile environment and his OLRT was as much a reconnaissance as operations organization. Emerging hot spots were under constant review. British forces practiced an NEO in Sierra Leone over Christmas 1998 and two operations were conducted in the country during 1999.

Annan's linking of rapid reaction to Rwanda was apposite. To better respond to crises the United Nations formed the standby arrangement system in 1993. It contained information on units from member states available in principle on short notice. When acts of genocide began in earnest in April 1994, the details of 19 member states were held in the database. As urgent calls went out, no state made its forces available. All the database provided was swifter negative responses.

A decision was made after the Rwandan crisis to replace the database with a high readiness brigade (SHIRBRIG). National components would be designated from states normally associated with traditional chapter VI peacekeeping. Provision was made for command and control, training, and standard operating procedures.

SHIRBRIG made no move toward East Timor or Sierra Leone. When Bernard Miyet, the head of the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations, was asked to account for this inaction, his military adviser, Lieutenant General Giulio Fratlicelli, replied:

*There are two issues related to the employment of SHIRBRIG. Firstly, it is not an entity that is currently under the control of the U.N. Each deployment needs the approval of the individual contributors. Secondly, the current advice we have from SHIRBRIG is that it will only be made available for operations mandated under chapter VI of the U.N. Charter, although we believe the SHIRBRIG nations are reviewing this policy. The mission in Sierra Leone . . . is mandated under chapter VII of the Charter (enforcement).*

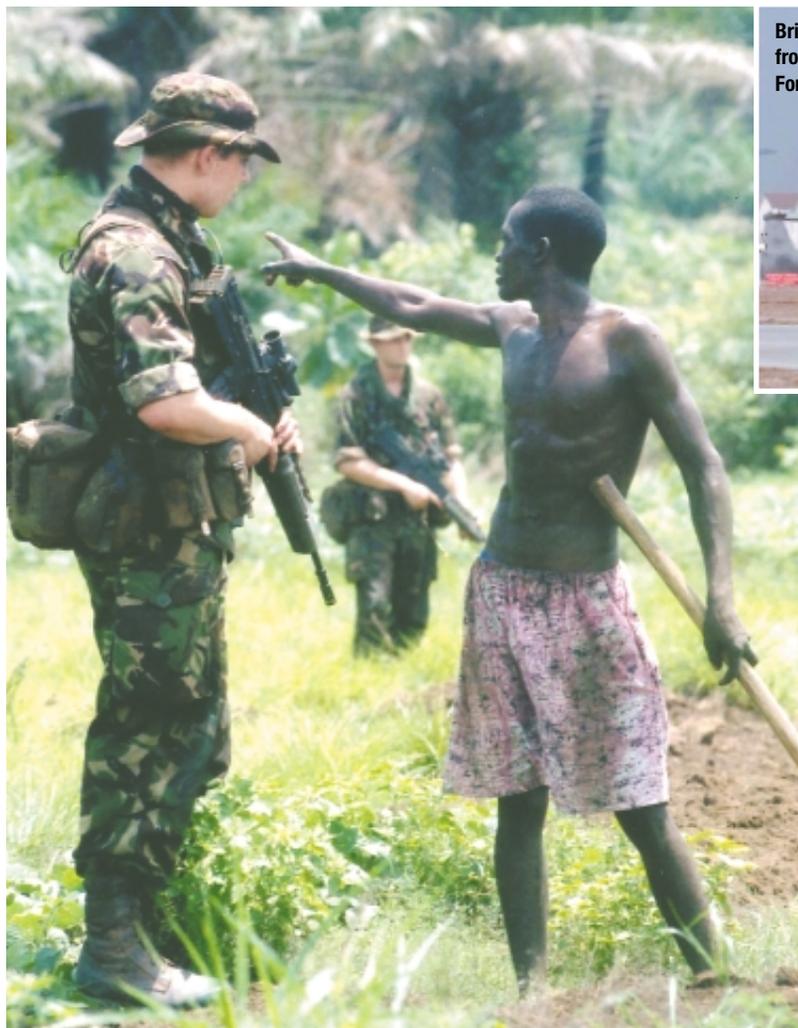
Because chapter VI peacekeeping is initiated only after diplomatic efforts and with consent of the parties involved, there is arguably no requirement for rapid reaction.

Initial support by London in response to the crisis in Sierra Leone stood in stark contrast to the zero response of SHIRBRIG. Britain, however, was the former colonial power in the country and provoked international condemnation by breaking the U.N. arms embargo. Accordingly there was a compelling reason for making good not only for having supported mercenary activities but also because of valid criticism of the late response by Britain to floods in Mozambique in early 2000. SHIRBRIG and the prevarication over Mozambique prove that military effectiveness is insignificant in the absence of the political will to use it.

Some JTFHQ officers joined operations team planners in PJHQ to enhance understanding with subordinate headquarters. The eight key OLRT officers were in the air eight hours after being ordered to deploy 3,500 miles, arriving at Lungi Airport by midday on May 6. Richards requested PJHQ to immediately release the lead company of the spearhead land element, then the remaining forces. Because NEO could not be properly effected without helicopter support, four Chinooks were ordered to Sierra Leone via Gibraltar, Tenerife, Mauritania, and Dakar. The first pair arrived on the evening of May 7, only 30 hours after being tasked.

Meanwhile, the concurrent political and military activity





Patrol from 42 Commando, Sierra Leone.



British EA-3 lifting off from Aviano, Allied Force.

U.S. Air Force (Keith Reed)

CINCFleet

upon which rapid crisis reaction is founded moved apace. On May 7, orders were sent from London to redeploy Royal Navy assets. The amphibious ready group, led by the helicopter carrier *HMS Ocean*, sailed from Marseilles to Gibraltar and then to West Africa. This group had spent up to six months annually in the Mediterranean. In addition to *HMS Ocean*, it comprised the frigate *HMS Chatham*, two landing ships, and a replenishment vessel. Embarked in *HMS Ocean* was the 600-strong 42 Royal Marine Commando Group, which had heavier weapon support than the spearhead battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Parachute Regiment. In the event close air support was required, the carrier *HMS Illustrious* with seven Sea Harriers and six RAF Harriers, with an RFA ship, was ordered to make for the West African coast from Lisbon.

On May 8, Lungi Airport had been secured and 1 Parachute Group, which included strong special forces elements, began to dominate its tactical area of responsibility. The paratroops were

operating in the hostile environment of Sierra Leone within 36 hours. They faced a drugged-up, well-armed guerrilla force intent on inflicting casualties to stimulate the kind of withdrawal seen in Mogadishu (1993) and Kigali (1994). Moreover, the British troops were not acclimatized or fully protected against malaria, endemic in Sierra Leone. But they were trained to recognize symptoms: of the 4,500 personnel deployed, only 80 contracted the disease.

Some 299 expatriates were evacuated in the first 48 hours but the calming influence of the military stemmed the flow. By now OLRT had become JTFHQ, and Richards realized his mission was complete. However, he faced the probability that withdrawal would lead to the failure of the U.N. mission and fall of the elected government. JFC continued to perform protective operations. In the tradition of mission-oriented orders, this initiative was endorsed by London some days after it was unavoidably implemented in Sierra Leone. Following the evacuation, JRRF was ordered to protect the airhead to allow U.N. elements to enhance and reinforce.

The success of Palliser was largely due to commanders on the tactical and operational levels who were entirely focused on their responsibilities. On the tactical level, the paratroopers pressed on, keen to engage in the business for which they were trained until relieved by the commandos on May 26. In mid-June, 42 Commando also withdrew, leaving behind a profoundly more confident United Nations, a bolstered president, and a large team to help train the Sierra Leone army.

JFHQ staff members are used to working routinely on the operational level. Daily political-military meetings held in Freetown were rooted in traditional intervention doctrine. Their aim was penetrating the rebel decision cycle. Key considerations in that effort are the media; legal means; tasking special forces; information operations; liaison with coalition, political, and civil



Permanent Joint Headquarters

Chief of joint operations being briefed.

agencies; campaign planning; and force level logistics. As ever, success depends greatly on the commander, who must be a natural leader, the ultimate professional, schooled in joint and combined operations, politically aware nationally and internationally, and an astute manager of media relations.

### Looking Ahead

The Strategic Defence Review provided real momentum for developing a joint operational capability. Operations in Sierra Leone, East Timor, and Kosovo were supported by ministry funds, which was militarily and fiscally sound. The \$490 million (£325 million) CJO budget is used for routine expend-

itures. As PJHQ is streamlined, it has directed responsibilities for formulating joint operational doctrine to a doctrine and concepts center. Logistic support has been rationalized under a chief of defence logistics. Joint helicopter command has been formed for command and control of battlefield helicopters, including 67 British-built WAH-64 Apaches. Both Harrier GR-7 and Sea Harrier FA-2 have been amalgamated in joint force 2000, which became operational in 2000. Joint training is planned for army and RAF ground-based air defense. A joint nuclear, biological, and chemical defense force has been organized with army and RAF assets. Moreover, there has been a basic change in officer training, combining service staff colleges into a joint staff college.

The movement toward an enhanced joint operational capability is unstoppable. The process will enlarge understanding and harmony with

other government departments and allies with a view to greater flexibility and interoperability. Joint staff officers represent a purple wave of the future who are doctrinally aware of the need to work together for interservice ideals.

Such laudable achievements reflect organizational change rather than a bottom-up initiative to influence attitudes. Joint and combined operations rarely reach down to touch common soldiers. Traditionally they are staff oriented. Therefore it is unsurprising to discover, after the organization of the joint nuclear, biological, and chemical regiment, for example, that there is no disciplinary act for joint organizations; thus the army commander cannot personally discipline the RAF members of his unit. And, as change progresses, servicemembers must realize that they are part of more than their own services.

As a teaching vehicle, Operation Palliser was rich in both lessons and promise. It defined the coming of age for PJHQ. "The real key to success," according to Brigadier Richards, "was and will remain the quality and motivation of personnel on every level; a willingness to encourage and use individual and collective initiative; a determination not to be thwarted by inevitable setbacks matched by a corresponding preparedness to innovate; an inability to accept anything other than excellence in the pursuit of assigned tasks; and, as ever, an irrepressible humor that ensures high morale."

JFQ

**daily political-military meetings were rooted in traditional intervention doctrine**