

# An Infantryman Down Under

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*“Conducting military engagements with partners, fostering mutual understanding through military-to-military contacts, and helping partners build the capacity to defend themselves. These actions are an investment in the future that the nation cannot afford to forego. The Army must cultivate positive relationships before they are needed. It must be a reliable, consistent, and respectful partner to others.”*

— Field Manual (FM) 3-22,  
*Army Support to Security Cooperation*<sup>1</sup>

The U.S. Army and Australian Army Military Personnel Exchange Program is one that has remained reliable, consistent, and continued to cultivate positive relations between the two militaries. Specifically, the U.S. Exchange Officer position at the School of Infantry offers great opportunity for security cooperation. The exchange program began in the late 1960s with the signing of the Australia Status of Forces Agreement, Australian Treaty Series 1963 No. 10. The treaty’s original purpose was to further the efforts of the two countries to promote peace and stability in the Pacific and other areas of mutual interest.<sup>2</sup>

The agreement stands today and is the authority by which the exchange of an Infantry officer and NCO from the U.S. Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning, GA, and the Australian School of Infantry occurs along with many other exchanges of military personnel in Australia and the U.S. This article provides a brief overview of the U.S. strategic guidance and policy with respect to security cooperation, the tasks of Military Personnel Exchange Program (MPEP) Soldiers, specific duties of the American Infantry officer currently stationed at the Australian School of Infantry, and the benefits of this program.

Security cooperation with the United States and other countries is clearly articulated from the Commander-in-Chief through the chain of command in many policy directives. Presidential Policy Directive 23, Security Sector Assistance (05 April 2013) states that security assistance is aimed at strengthening the ability of the United States to help allies and partner nations build their own security capacity.<sup>3</sup> The document provides the goals for U.S. security assistance as:

1. Help partner nations build sustainable capacity to address common security challenges;
2. Promote partner support for U.S. interest;



MAJ John Taylor, MAJ Russell B. Thomas, and CAPT Cameron Clarke participate in Anzac Day Ceremonies in Singleton, NSW Australia. (Photo courtesy of author)

3. Promote universal values, such as good governance; and
4. Strengthen collective security and multinational defense agreements and organizations.

While military personnel exchanges are considered security cooperation versus security assistance, personnel exchanges with partner nations achieve these aims.

The Chief of Staff of the Army in 2011 stated the purpose of security cooperation, writing that the U.S. Army must “engage our partners, foster mutual understanding through military-to-military contacts; and help partners build capacity to defend themselves.”<sup>4</sup> Other U.S. Army policy and directives that address security cooperation are FM 3-22 and Department of the Army (DA) Pamphlet (PAM) 11-31, *Army Security Cooperation Handbook*, which specifies the tasks of all exchange officers as providing training, conducting military-to-military activities, and exchanging personnel for the purpose of counterterrorism, stabilization and reconstruction, coalition operations, and others.<sup>5</sup>

The exchange of military personnel with other countries is exceptional at achieving our national security cooperation objectives. By living and working with our partner countries, properly placed exchange personnel have the ability to positively affect many of the strategic security cooperation goals at a low cost to the nation since it requires no additional manning and minimal funding. Additionally, at the tactical level, the exchange is beneficial for sharing ideas within the specific roles that each of the exchange Soldiers hold.

The position for the U.S. exchange officer at the School of Infantry is a role that affords the U.S. Army a great opportunity for security cooperation. The position has changed over the years, ranging from an instructional specific role to the current appointment of the U.S. officer assigned as the officer commanding and senior instructor (OC/SI) of the Specialist Wing of the school. This command position is indicative of the mutual trust and respect between the U.S. and Australian Army.

As the OC/SI, the U.S. officer supervises, manages, resources and leads the Specialist Wing, which consists of the Reconnaissance Team, Sniper Team, Pioneer Team, Direct Fires Support Weapons Team (DFSW/heavy weapons), and the Combat Shooting Cell (CSC). Each team is responsible for conducting courses throughout the year based on a directed-training requirement (DTR) derived from the needs of the Australian Army. At the school, the Specialist Wing instructs officer/NCO courses as all of the basic specialist courses (sniper, recon, pioneer, and DFSW) are taught at the soldiers’ home battalion.

The Reconnaissance Team trains the officers and NCOs of the Australian Army via the Reconnaissance Officer/NCO Course. The course is offered twice a year, training soldiers in the rank of lance-corporal (LCP) through captain for employment within the battalions of the Royal Australian Regiment (RAR). Prior to leading a reconnaissance platoon, the platoon leaders and platoon sergeants must attend this course. A parallel course does exist in the U.S. — the Reconnaissance and Surveillance Leaders Course (RSLC) at Fort Benning and similarly, the Army Reconnaissance Course.

The Sniper Team provides training to the RAR via the Advanced Sniper Team Leaders (ASTL) Course and the Sniper Supervisors Course. Unlike U.S. Army snipers who are centrally trained at Fort Benning, snipers in Australia receive their basic sniper training with their respective battalions. After gaining experience as a sniper in a battalion, they then receive centralized training at the School of Infantry in the ASTL Course. Here, they are instructed on the finer sniper skills required for long-range precision engagements and advanced sniping techniques; however, a critical component of the course is instruction on the Military Appreciation Process (MAP). The Australian MAP is very similar to the U.S. military decision-making process. By receiving this training at the ASTL Course and in the other Specialist Wing courses, the soldiers depart able to readily participate in the planning process and facilitate employment of their trade or specialty platoon at the company and battalion levels. The Sniper Supervisor Course is a two-week course that further develops sniper leaders (typically the senior NCOs) to plan and supervise sniper training and missions within an infantry battalion. This differs greatly from the U.S. Army Infantry in that there is a sniper supervisor (rank of SFC) and a reconnaissance platoon sergeant (rank of SFC) in every reconnaissance and surveillance platoon. Thus, the dynamics of incorporating snipers into planning is very different and the level of sniper expertise is greatly increased.

The Assault Pioneer Platoon is an organization with no true parallel in the U.S. Army. Australian Assault Pioneers most closely resemble a U.S. engineering sapper platoon, but the soldiers in a Pioneer Platoon are all infantrymen. Each battalion has an Assault Pioneer Platoon that specializes in engineering tasks of mobility, counter mobility,



**Australian Defence Force machine gunners with 7th Battalion, Australian Army, demonstrate the MAG 58 machine gun's ability to aim at an enemy target in Shoalwater Bay Training Area during Talisman Sabre 2011 in Queensland, Australia on 9 July 2011. (Photo by SPC Mitchell Ternay)**

and survivability. The Assault Pioneer Team in Specialist Wing provides two officer/NCO courses a year training LCPs through captains in the skills and knowledge required of this trade. The training consists of engineering training such as field defenses, water/boat operations, combat breaching, and infantry search training.

The DFSW Team trains all DFSW officers and NCOs on how to employ the platoon as part of a company or battalion. The weapons utilized by DFSW platoons include the 240B 7.62mm machine gun (called the MAG 58 in Australia), the 84mm Karl Gustav, the .50 caliber M2 Machine Gun, the Mk-47 (40mm) Lightweight Automatic Grenade Launcher (just this year replaced the Mk-19), and the Javelin. During the five-week course, officers and NCOs learn how to integrate with a battalion to achieve the commander's desired effects with these anti-armor and suppressive effects weapons. While the majority of the weapon systems within a DFSW platoon are very similar to what are used in the U.S., the Australian Army uses the 240B in the extended range mode, something not done in the U.S. To execute this, a C2 sight is attached to the machine gun (similar to a mortar), and the gunners use predicted data to allow the machine gun to be fired in the indirect mode using a Ground Fire Controller (GFC). This can have great benefits, allowing the machine gun to fire effectively at ranges up to 3,000 meters away without needing to have direct line of sight on the target. To conduct this effectively requires exceptional attention to detail and training, which the Soldiers first receive at their battalions and then become experts at while at the DFSW Officer/NCO Course.

The tactical courses in the Specialist Wing are very similar to those in the U.S. but at the same time are vastly different. As an exchange officer, it has certainly opened my aperture as to how different armies organize and fight and the implications of that in interoperability. Minor differences such as those described above can make a great difference in discussions of planning. For example, an Australian "troop" is equivalent to a U.S. platoon; an Australian infantry section is equivalent to a U.S. infantry squad; and an Australian "brick" is equivalent to a U.S. team. This basic understanding of terminology differences with a force that speaks the same language highlights the difficulties that can arise when partnered with other nations where there is an additional layer of difficulty due to a language barrier.

The newest addition to the Specialist Wing at the School of Infantry is the CSC. The School of Infantry established the CSC as part of a larger initiative to improve combat shooting within the Army and Australian Defence Force (ADF). The CSC is the hub for Army innovation and expertise in combat shooting (from 0 to 200 meters), responsible for inculcating the Australian battalions and larger ADF with the latest shooting techniques and enhancing doctrine to increase the lethality and survivability of the Australian combatant. Through the use of innovative targetry (robots, steel, etc.), pistol incorporation, reality-based training, and adult learning techniques, the CSC is the lead for combat shooting in Australia and an exciting new addition to the wing.

As the OC/SI of Specialist Wing, the U.S. exchange officer to the School of Infantry in Australia is able to execute two of the primary tasks for exchange officers of providing training and conducting military-to-military engagement on a daily basis. Additionally, the commander of the School of Infantry has entrusted the U.S. officer to be the lead for many of the modernization efforts that the school is involved in. These projects can range from developing new requirements within a specialist trade (new weapons, optics, sights, etc.), to facilitating the efficient introduction of new weapon systems into service. At a time when the Australian Army is considering incorporation of an infantry fighting vehicle to their formations by 2025, the U.S. exchange officer, who often has experience in a Bradley or Stryker battalion, can be very beneficial to the development of this capability now and in future assignments.

As evident above, the position as an exchange officer at the School of Infantry is not only beneficial to the Australians as I fill a critical command role, but the assignment is also extremely beneficial to me professionally. In this role, I have learned a vast deal of how the Australian Army as a whole operates — from the army's headquarters down to the tactical battalion level. My understanding of the difficulties with interoperability and the importance of facilitating it have increased greatly over a very short period of time. Observing how different armies employ similar assets, such as the sustained-fire machine gun and Assault Pioneers, is very advantageous and has broadened my understanding of just how different maneuver tactics can be with similarly organized forces. Without a doubt, the knowledge I have gained in this position is immeasurable and will certainly serve me well in any future assignment.

The School of Infantry is an institution where the trust and mutual respect between the Australian and American armies is evident to all Soldiers assigned to the school and every soldier who completes a course there. This bilateral respect permeates throughout the Australian Army and cultivates positive relationships that are required between our two partner nations. Every exchange member within Australia and other partner nations have this same effect in the organization; thus, the relationships are well-established and — in the case of the United States and Australia — will continue to provide mutually strategic benefits for years to come.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> FM 3-22, *Army Support to Security Cooperation* (January 2013), 1-5.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Treaty Series 1963 No. 10, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/treaties/1963/10.html>, accessed 2 March 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Presidential Policy Directive 23, *Security Sector Assistance*, 5 April 2013.

<sup>4</sup> GEN Raymond T. Odierno, "CSA Editorial: Prevent, Shape Win," <https://www.army.mil/article/71030>, accessed 2 March 2017.

<sup>5</sup> DA PAM 11-31, *Army Security Cooperation Handbook* (6 February 2015), 37.

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