

INFANTRY: Commandos Become Separate Arm in Australia

December 26, 2002; Australia's Defense Forces will finally follow their US and British counterparts, by separating their elite special forces from the Army and making them the fourth arm of the Australian Defense Forces. Prime Minister John Howard made the announcement at the Special Air Services' Campbell Barracks in Perth on 19 December, while welcoming home special forces who had just spent four months fighting the war against terrorism in Afghanistan. This move is meant strengthen its fight against terrorism at home and abroad, although some critics claim that it's merely a "robbing Peter to pay Paul" move. Opposition party defense spokesman and Senator Chris Evans was concerned that funding for other Australian units may be depleted to boost the special forces, and that standards may be dropped to fill the elite ranks. He claimed that it was likely to be some years before special forces numbers actually increased, although other special forces have been successfully expanded in short time.

The Australians will also appoint a special forces commander to oversee counterterrorism operations. Major General Duncan Lewis, the 50-year-old former Special Air Services Commander, will now control 1,800 soldiers (including the SAS and navy clearance divers). The Holsworthy Army Base in Sydney will house most of Australia's special operations soldiers. The new command will include the SAS Regiment in Perth, the Fourth RAR Commando Funding for another 12 Blackhawk helicopters will be fast-tracked, to join the three dozen already in service.

In addition to Afghanistan, the Australian special operations folks will probably serve against Iraq. If so, Australian SAS troops will likely to be offered experimental vaccines against anthrax, mustard gas and bubonic plague. The Australian Defense Department (one of the BEST practitioners of OPSEC or "Operational Security") will not reveal which vaccines may be offered. Iraq is known to have had stocks of VX

(a liquid nerve poison), sarin and tabun nerve gases, as well as anthrax (as well as other possible biological and chemical agents).

Australia's presence has also been expanded at the US Central Command, the military headquarters for the Afghanistan, Iraq and Middle East theaters. Australian officers are being given an unusual level of access to the Iraqi plans. Recently, Australian observers were in Qatar, for the US Central Command test of their command systems.

However, anonymous senior Australian military officials think that the country's role in both conflicts should be to provide specialist forces like the SAS, aerial surveillance and naval support - rather than post-conflict peace keeping - yet an unnamed senior Pentagon official told the Sydney Herald that Australia would almost certainly be asked to contribute to a post-war occupation force in Iraq. - Adam Geibel

SASR 6X6 Land Rover in Australian service, pictures online at:
<http://remlr.150m.com/lrpvinservice.html>

December 25, 2002; The Australian prime minister promised to add 310 troops to Australia's commando force. This will take about 18 months to implement. To get that many new commandos, the armed forces will have to recruit 2-3000 more troops. This is because only about eight percent of those who volunteer for commando duty can qualify. The army is determined not to lower standards for commandos, pointing out that it was the high standard of training and leadership that made the commandos so successful in Afghanistan. Australia is also raising other rapid reaction forces in response to the death of nearly a hundred Australians in a Bali, Indonesia terrorist attack, and the discovery of terrorist activity among its own Moslem population.