



# EDITORIAL

MANAGING EDITOR JOHN HUNTER FARRELL

**D**ON'T GET ME wrong, I don't want this to sound like a 'light at the end of the tunnel' editorial. One of those 'why did you commit that to print moments that one regrets for the rest of their writing career.'

For once, I am optimistic about the direction the war against Islamic extremism is taking.

Unlike almost everybody else I saw commenting in the media, I was delighted to hear that Osama Bin Laden had been 'removed from the battlefield'. I was even happier when I found out he'd been taken down face to face by a US sailor. I would have liked it even better if I had had the chance to view his body, like we did with Saddam's sons and Zarqawi in Iraq. But, hey you can't have everything.

From a Coalition perspective the death of Bin Laden is also all good news. Only a fool would deny that the failure to kill or capture Bin Laden has been one of the West's biggest failings so far in this war. I know for a fact that there were already a number of 'stupid US can't capture goat herder' themed documentaries under production aimed at this year's 10 year 911 anniversary. No doubt there were to be more than a few media stories about the madman's full decade of evading the greatest power on this planet. I guess there will be some rapid rewriting of scripts.

Now, we know the truth it puts a completely different perspective on the whole hunt for Osama. Bin Laden was not being protected by the Muslim faithful or Almighty God. He was just the comfortable guest

of our Pakistani allies, living large in one of the better suburbs of their version of Duntroon. He wasn't hiding, he was being hidden with all the resources of a major nation to protect him.

While they might try to deny it. Osama's death at the hands of SEAL DEVGRU is a disaster for the Islamic extremists. The hand of God has been revealed and it was not with the sickly Saudi.

While our leaders in the West waste far too much rhetoric trying to deny it, this war is in fact a religious war. Bin Laden and his backward cobelligerents claimed the mandate of God as their rationale for insane acts of violence and have declared Jihad or holy war as an integral part of their war plans.

To me, and no doubt more than a few Muslims, Bin Laden's claim to religious sainthood is now looking decidedly dodgy.

In the end, Bin Laden's claim to divine direction proved as shoddy as his Jihad. Just so much hot air, from a madman who

was shot down like a dog in his jarmies, with his carcass thrown in the sea by the infidel.

I have always believed that Coalition strategists got the Islamic Jihad wrong. So many 'experts' claim that time was on the jihadis' side. That we in the West would lose our will to fight long before Allah's soldiers would lose their will to spread the Koran across the globe.

I'm no theologian but I saw very little Islam emanating from Al Qaida. Apart from death, all they produced were hate and snuff videos which called for others to die in their name. What I did see in Al Qaida was that it was a very efficient manipulator of a particular technological time, a time that is passing.

Let me explain my perspective. While the roots of the current Jihad go back to the 1800s, think Sudan, the huge growth in underground Islamic extremism occurred in the 1980s when groups like the Muslim Brotherhood pioneered the use of VHS video to spread their hatred. In an Arab world, crushed by the weight of fascist, socialist and old fashioned military dictators

with total control of the media, the extremists hate films were a smash hit especially in countries where local television was only government propaganda pushing the local dictators cult of personality.

I would go so far to say that extremist videos, and later technologies like DVD and early internet sites were probably the only really accessible alternate Arabic media within the entire Muslim world where television, radio, newspapers and even

public billboards existed only to praise the leader.

Through this adept manipulation of early electronic media, Osama and his uglies were able to make themselves superstars in a world where the only alternative was rich old corrupt dictators and their secret police.

This situation is now evolving. Mass internet access throughout the Muslim world and the start of Arabic broadcasters like Al Jazeera have allowed hundreds of competing voices to be heard. Not just the ravings of would be prophets or emperors.

Around December, some of those new voices called for democracy and within hours the suffocated streets of Islamic cities all over the Middle East exploded. The thousands of middle class Arab kids that have risen up in Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria against totalitarians have demanded liberty not sharia law.

While still dangerous, I am saying that for all the throats it



**Inappropriate behavior - Minister of Defence Stephen Smith**

cut and the girls schools and funerals it bombed, Al Qaida failed to build on the momentum it tried to create. Its big moment was a few years ago, when the Arab-speaking world had so few alternate voices. The Islamic future may still present serious threats to the West, but I doubt a new Caliphate will ever arise.

Osama's death will unfortunately not make much difference for our Diggers on the front lines in Afghanistan in the immediate future. The Afghan insurgency may have been put back on the front page by Bin Laden and the looming 10th anniversary of September 11, 2001, but the issues our Diggers face during day to day operations are often very local and a world away from the oil fields of Saudi Arabia and New York City.

### **WOMEN IN WAR**

I don't know how angry all this talk in the media about women in combat is making deployed females. It must be extremely annoying to hear about the 'woman in combat' debate while freezing in a bunker or out on a CiMiC or SOTG patrol in Uruzgan.

From my perspective, the debate about women in combat was resolved decades ago. Too many women have been killed or wounded in combat to deny them a place in our military history.

The new debate, which I believe is being dishonestly put before the public as a debate about women in combat, is about women (and lets be honest gender politics) being allowed a place in Close Quarter Battle units like infantry, artillery, armour and combat engineers.

What should be a debate of enormous consequence has evolved largely into a debate about women rights, driven in most part by current Minister of Defence Stephen Smith, after he had promised to punish the ADF at a press conference after reading an incorrect media report relating to an unrelated inappropriate internet use and teenage sex scandal at ADFA.

Minister Smith has since adeptly manipulated the media and turned the story into one about women's rights in the ADF.

What should have been a serious debate about what is involved in Close Quarter Battle and could (let's not forget should) women fill that role, was soon turned into a silly media circus with all the integrity of one of those childish 'girls can do anything' stickers that are so popular these days.

One part of the debate that has been assiduously avoided is the really big question. Do women really want to enter CQB units? I don't mean a woman. I mean all women.

As a bloke who has seen a little bit of the legacy of 'kinetic' activity, I would advise women to think long and very carefully before letting a few politicians make this massive cultural decision for them. Especially if that politician is just a man trying to save his political skin.

Men have been volunteered for Close Quarter Battle by adventurers, gold diggers and plain old madman since the first stone crushed a caveman's skull. And we all know the consequences of that.

I would advise women to think carefully before they give away their right to avoid CQB. It raises issues like future conscription. Are women to be among the future ranks of cannon fodder thrust at the enemy in tomorrow's wars?

What implications does this have for the right of the State to remove a mother from her child during wartime? What

implications does this have for status and security of non combatant women and the children and elderly they protect during wartime in the advent of foreign occupation?

Then there is the obvious questions of whether women have the strength, endurance and ferocity for CQB. Technology may have improved, but the infantryman is never far removed from a fight to the death in a tight trench was a rusty shovel.

### **WRITTEN OUT OF HISTORY**

One of the truly sad parts of my job comes from experience. After more than 20 years as a full time defence correspondent I can usually recognise the early signs of units, whole tours and even campaigns being written out of history by the ADF's failure to give them a place in it.

As you read this, a hard fighting Australian battalion deployed in the War on Terror is completing an arduous and dangerous eight-month tour in Uruzgan. 5RAR, like sister battalion 6RAR before her, has been involved in an extraordinary expansion of ISAF/GIRoA occupied territory throughout Uruzgan.

Building on the efforts laid by previous Task Forces and the Dutch, the Australians in theatre are now operating from what were Taliban strongholds since the time of the Soviet invasion at the very fringes of the Province.

Sad to say, the Australian public has been pretty much denied very much information on 5RAR and even less digital imagery and video.

While Defence has released hundreds, upon hundreds of images of Ministers Smith, Snowdon, Clare and co, along with any senior ranking ADF officers that can conceal their embarrassment long enough for the photo to be taken, it has released next to no imagery or video of the brave mech Digs of 5RAR and the part they have played in our recent tactical success in Afghanistan.

Worse, even on Anzac Day, the combat soldiers' holy of holies, the only imagery from the Forward Edge of Battle Area in Afghanistan was of, you guessed it, Steven Smith.

I don't know if the Minister was responsible for such an outrageous violation of Anzac Day's spirit and commemoration or whether it was just an accidental outcome of his bizarre media policies. Either way, it was not a good look.

What I do know is that the man who could not find the time to clear a whole battalion's tour worth of imagery over eight months, sure found the time to clear his photos on Anzac Day quick smart.

The Minister, who has been very quick to label others inappropriate to be in defence, may not realise it but it is INAPPROPRIATE for a man in his position to use his power to push his own face for petty political purposes on the nation's Day of Remembrance.

To do such a thing while Australian Diggers are fighting and dying in the field is not just inappropriate Minister, it is downright unAustralian.

To the men and women of Mentoring Task Force 2 we apologise for failing to record your story as thoroughly as we could have.

**John Hunter Farrell**  
**Managing Editor**