



AFTER a decade of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Australian Defence Force has changed beyond recognition.

The lightly armed, lightly armoured force that landed in Dili in September 1999 has evolved into integrated Battle Groups equipped with the best vehicles, weapons, munitions and training facilities that money can buy.

An Army that was almost without veterans is now brimming with them and a bright new generation of warriors is now walking in the footsteps of the immortal Anzacs.

But some things still remain the same.

When I read the recent Australia Day honours' lists I was sad to say that one of the worst aspects of the Australian Defence Force culture is still alive and well and drinking from a trough near you.

Of the 69 Army personnel that were awarded honours in the 2012 list, a war list if ever their should have been one, 36 of them were officers. Of the 36 officers awarded decorations, 25 were of Lieutenant Colonel rank or above.

The above, I need not remind you, is at a time of war. A war that is not fought by Lt Colonels or above. It is a war being fought by privates and corporals with nobody above the rank of major doing much more than getting in the way.

The officers not only took the lion's share of 2012

decorations. Their medals retain the old identities that link them with the decorations earned by other officers in high level combat during the 1st and 2nd World Wars, Korea and Vietnam.

Our fighting warriors are denied any such respect, our country's reward for a private or NCO's courage under fire is the grimly titled Commendation for Gallantry. It sounds like a pat on the back or like a second best compliment meant for second tier achievements.

When the Army adopted its new honours system in 1991 rather than do away with the old system of awarding gold embedded crosses to officers and dull metal medals to the fighting troops, the ADF's commanding classes reinforced their perceived class superiority rather than stand with their men.

The brass showered itself with Distinguished Service Crosses, Conspicuous Service Crosses and various other orders but felt the need to change the awards given to the enlisted men who face the angry militants, bullets, fragmentation and IEDs.

It took away the respected Military Medal and Mentioned in Dispatches replacing them with the US sounding Star of

Gallantry and the more acceptable sounding Medal for Gallantry. Apart from the seemingly SAS only Victoria Cross for Australia, the Star of Gallantry is now our highest award.

Not that any soldier of the line need worry about such things, by the time the Lt Colonels and above are through there is not much room to reward the people who earned their honour on the field of battle.

The titling of bravery awards may seem a trifling subject, not worth getting into a argument over while much more important issues like the war in Uruzgan should be getting the airtime.

But, after years of watching high ranking officials reward each other for what is simply doing their job I don't think it should be ignored. Not when they're doing that job in far greater comfort, in far less danger and for far greater pay than the men who actually walked the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan who should be being honoured.

Now I am not saying that every officer on the list of awards

was not deserving of their gong. There were ten captains and majors and one lonely lieutenant in the list and they certainly saw action. For all I know one of those Major X or Captain Y's is the greatest hero of our time. I do not dispute that.

What I am saying is that the ADF's officer class awards itself a disproportionate percentage

of wartime decorations. As you can see by the numbers the situation is close to shameful.

I believe that if an officer does not write up his troops who are in sustained combat for decorations than he should refrain from accepting ALL decorations himself.

I also believe that the ADF as a whole is far too stingy with its awards. If 36 officers can be decorated for their role in recent operations then by simple mathematics their should have been more than one thousand bravery decorations issued to the troops who have been up close and personal with the enemy.

In the past 'Old School' soldiers would say 'we were just doing our job.'

But, soldiering is not and has never been just a job. Assaulting a quala complex under fire is not just another day at the office.

We must honour the brave warriors who do the fighting not the generals who do the talking.

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