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Commander  
Canadian Expeditionary  
Force Command



Commandant  
Commandement de la Force  
expédicionnaire du Canada

101 Colonel By Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0K2

101, promenade colonel By  
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0K2

1080-1 (DComd)

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Distribution List

CEFCOM REVIEW OF BOI REPORT ON THE ACTION  
AT FOB ROBINSON, AFGHANISTAN, 28/29 MAR 2006

- References:
- A. Report of the Board of Inquiry into the action at Forward Operating Base Robinson, Afghanistan, 28/29 Mar 06
  - B. HQ CEFCOM 1080-1 (J1), Terms of Reference – Board of Inquiry, CF Casualties, Afghanistan, 28-29 March 2006
  - C. US DoD Memo – AR 15-6 Findings and Recommendation - Collateral Fratricide Investigation FOB Robinson, 28-29 Mar 06 dated 6 Aug 06
  - D. QR&O Chapter 21, Boards of Inquiry and Summary Investigations
  - E. CFAO 24-6, Investigation of Injuries or Death
  - F. DAOD 7002 Series, Boards of Inquiry and Summary Investigations

1. I have carefully reviewed the Board's report, Ref A, and find it complete and well prepared. My review process has taken a significant period of time as a result of a number of factors that include the intensity of ongoing operations, challenges with staff continuity, and the additional requirements to coordinate with our allies.

2. The report clearly documents the sequence of events and the situational context in which a number of converging circumstances lead to an intense firefight in which our troops were engaged by other friendly forces defending FOB Robinson. So as to explain my conclusions with respect to this report, I offer the following resume of the most significant aspects of the event.

RESUME OF THE EVENT

3. On 28 March, a large resupply convoy, escorted by ANA and Coalition forces, was subjected to a significant and coordinated attack en-route to FOB Robinson, and was later struck by an IED. In the preceding 42 days the FOB itself had been subjected to 21 attacks. In response to the circumstances, Coalition Task Force AEGIS deployed the Canadian Quick

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Reaction Force (QRF) to reinforce the FOB. The QRF, comprised of a [redacted] arrived in the FOB by helicopter after dark, one hour before the arrival of the convoy. The defensive forces at the FOB were alerted to the deployment of the QRF 15 minutes prior to their arrival.

4. On arrival the QRF linked up with the on-site forces and were assigned positions to contribute to the defence of the FOB. Shortly thereafter the convoy arrived, swelling the population from [redacted] to over [redacted] personnel. Approximately five and a half hours later the FOB was attacked. Responding to enemy fire from the northeast and the northwest, [redacted] with its C-6 detachment, moved forward to reinforce the FOB's north defences. This move placed them forward of a defensive gun position, whose crew was unaware of the presence of members of the QRF to their front.

5. During the attack, incoming tracer fire was directed at the FOB, originating from the same relative direction as the berm at which [redacted] had taken cover, and from which they were returning fire. The defensive gun crew, unaware of the presence of the QRF forces to their front, and taking incoming fire from that general direction, opened fire on the berm, engaging [redacted] with the resultant casualties.

CAUSES

6. Fundamentally, the death and injuries of Canadian soldiers at FOB Robinson were the result of an intense attack by insurgent forces under circumstances and at a time when the forces defending the FOB [redacted] As the Board has reported, combat operations are usually accompanied by high levels of uncertainty and friction brought on by a variety of factors. The "the fog of war" featured prominently in this incident: insurgents conducted a deliberate and complex attack, on a very dark night, against a [redacted], whose leader was faced with the added challenge of coordinating the sudden influx of coalition troops that more than [redacted] the size of the force within the FOB.

7. Causes. The Board has confirmed that Pte Costall was killed, and other Canadians wounded, by friendly fire originating from a US gun truck positioned at the [redacted] corner of the defensive position within the larger FOB Robinson defensive complex. The Board identified the causes of the incident to be incomplete coordination and control, poor situational awareness, and an error in battlefield combat identification. I note the following facts:

- a. There was no [redacted] to illustrate the location of defensive positions or arcs of fire.
- b. No measures were put in place to restrict the traverse or elevation of the weapons systems.
- c. Defenders manning some positions had not been informed of the arrival of the QRF, nor of its assigned positions.

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- d. The QRF was not fully aware of all of the defensive positions.
- e. All defenders were not monitoring the same radio net.
- f. The use of \_\_\_\_\_ was not fully considered.

## MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES

8. In reviewing the actions of the individuals and the causes of the incident, I have carefully considered the following mitigating circumstances:

- a. Operational Tempo. The in-place force had experienced a protracted period of intense attacks, 21 in 42 days. This, combined with the \_\_\_\_\_ work to establish and build the FOB, led to a \_\_\_\_\_ on the part of the in-place soldiers and leaders.
- b. Light. The entire series of events, including the arrival of the QRF, the arrival of the Convoy, and the subsequent attack took place on one of the darkest days of the year, with \_\_\_\_\_.
- c. Visibility. The local soil was an extremely fine powder, which caused it to remain suspended for significant periods after being disturbed.
- d. Intensity of events on 28/29 Mar. The defensive forces, within a period of one hour, received the QRF with little notice, and the convoy, which had numerous dead and wounded.
- e. Complexity of integration challenge. The defence of the FOB required the integration of a wide variety of forces, from a wide spectrum of contributing units and nations, in the dark, with the recognized threat of an impending attack.
- f. Inexperience. This represented the first major combat engagement for the members of the QRF.
- g. Intensity of the attack. This attack, launched from two points, was the most complex and intense attack on the FOB that had been experienced by the defenders.

## SUMMARY

9. This incident occurred through the alignment of a number of difficult circumstances and consequent omissions under the most trying of combat conditions.

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FINDINGS

10. I fully support the findings of the Board, with the exception of their response to Ref B para 8.e. *Were the rehearsal and liaison activities conducted between the Canadian QRF and other coalition forces adequate?* The board categorizes these activities as “more than adequate”; however, the lack of appropriate control measures for the integration of defensive forces, particularly given the wide spectrum of forces present, should have been observed upon and addressed during the rehearsal and the liaison activities.

11. With respect to the Board’s assessment of fault, I have thoroughly reviewed their report of the actions of all individuals, the errors committed, and the mitigating circumstances present, and concur with the Board’s conclusion that no blame can or should be assigned to any individual involved in this action. In my view, there is nothing in the Board’s report that suggests any individual wilfully acted inappropriately. Based on the evidence, I conclude that the leadership at all levels did their best under extremely trying circumstances.

RECOMMENDATIONS

12. I have proposed an Action Plan at Annex A to address the numerous issues raised by the board, and their recommendations. Many of these are either complete or are well under way.

FOLLOW-UP

13. I propose that the families be briefed, followed by a public technical briefing, delivered by a combined team formed in cooperation with the appropriate US authorities.

14. Staffing is underway to prepare the Board for public release; I recommend that US authorities be engaged to determine what concerns or issues they may have with the release of any portion of the document.

15. I request your authorization for the following actions:

- a. to provide a copy of the BOI report to appropriate US authorities in order to solicit their input with regards to severance, release, and public disclosure, and
- b. to approach the US authorities with the objective of forming a combined briefing team to brief the families and to conduct the technical briefing.
- c. Following this consultation, I will work with ADM(PA) to bring forward a proposed communications strategy to you and the DM

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CONCLUSION

16. This tragic incident was the result of the unfortunate alignment of a number of actions and omissions, under the most trying of circumstances, in the intense crucible of combat. Numerous lessons have been learned, and changes made to our procedures to reduce the likelihood of a similar incident in the future; however, the extreme complexity and demands of combat will always entail risk to our troops.

J.C.M. Gauthier  
Lieutenant-General

Approved / Not approved

R.J. Hillier  
General  
CDS

Annexes:

Annex A	Action Plan
Annex B	Draft Communications Approach

Distribution List

Action

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