

An Interview with Anthony Rawlins: Deputy Chief of Army

Samuel Cox (SC): What does the [Deputy Chief of Army \(DCA\)](#) do? Are there any issues/programs you are taking ownership of addressing/delivering during your time as DCA?

Anthony Rawlins (AR): There are four key things within the remit of the role. Under the Army Operating System introduced by this [Chief of Army](#), I look after three out of four portfolio areas. Firstly, I'm Head of People Capability. This involves traditional career management, but also attraction, recruitment, training, and retention of our people. Secondly, I lead the tracking and management of Army's preparedness, which you can think of as the 'fight tonight' function. The actual capability outputs are delivered by [Forces Command \(FORCOMD\)](#), [Special Operations Command \(SOCOMD\)](#) and [Headquarters 1st Division \(1DIV\)](#), but I oversee how we track against the [Chief of the Defence Force's](#) 'Preparedness Directive' which is more the enterprise and policy side of preparedness. Thirdly, I look after Army's enabling functions: finance, governance, and risk.

I also understudy the Chief, who says, "the DCA runs the Army". I don't feel that way, as the Army runs itself, but in terms of day-to-day management I look 'down-and-in' in order to allow the Chief to look 'up-and-out'.

Lastly, I am the mentor and advocate for all of Army's Colonels. I provide them with advice and assistance, and I engage with them to get their ideas on the state of the Army. They're an incredibly important cohort in terms of delivering the effects desired by Army's Senior Leadership Group.

SC: At a much lower level, your relationship to the Colonels is similar to an Adjutant's relationship to Lieutenants in a Battalion.

AR: Except the Colonels are usually much better behaved! [laughs].

SC: With the Chief looking 'up-and-out', what is your left-and-right of arc? Are there Commander's Critical Information Requirements (CCIRs) that trigger his involvement in the 'down-and-in' issues?

AR: I try to quantify and implement the Chief of Army's intent and vision as articulated in his range of strategic documents: [Accelerated Warfare](#), [Command Statement](#), [Good Soldiering](#), [Army's Contribution to Defence Strategy](#), [Aide for Army's Teams](#) and the *National Institution Statement*.

He and I work closely together, and, of course, he also looks 'down-and-in', but I'm trying to give him the capacity to think strategically on behalf of the organisation. He leads strategic committees; I lead implementation committees. While he's applying his considerable strategic acumen, [Head of Land Capability](#) and I take his maxims- like 'Simplify the Army', 'accept risk in Ready Now in order to get after Future Ready', and build 'agility and scalability into Army'- and realise it.

SC: Noting that it's not something junior leaders need to be well-versed in, can you briefly explain the Army Operating System?

AR: The Army Operating System is at the enterprise level where you're trying to take every fundamental input into capability, and all the different specialisations within Army, and get them working as a 'well-oiled machine'. It establishes a vertical and horizontal means of synchronising effort within the incredibly complex organisation that is Army. We cannot operate using 'stovepipes of excellence' within our bureaucracy and extensive committee system in a dynamic, contemporary environment. This system ensures simple and effective communication in order to cross level information between those stovepipes.

SC: As Head of People Capability, what is Army trying to achieve with its workforce and training transformation? Specifically, what sort of changes are being made and/or initiatives being undertaken? [Army's Contribution to Defence Strategy](#) very clearly states that workforce and training will be the drivers of change in Army.

AR: *Workforce 2028* says that we need to completely transform our workforce system. That system worked in the past, but now it needs to be brought from the 20th Century into the 21st Century. It is one of the most exciting things that is going on in Army currently.

In the past, we built our model on a closed workforce system. We brought personnel in *ab initio* and trained them until they transitioned out of Army. Then we repeated that again and again. Three trends are starting to expose that model as brittle and not agile enough for the current environment.

Geo-strategically, we've got competitors who are shaping the environment for a contest or fight in the future. Revisionist powers have already successfully employed cyber, economic and political warfare methods to get inside our systems and change the way that Western liberal democracies are able to function.

Secondly, technology. It's always been changing, but the rate at which we're seeing step-changes in capability is accelerating. Think about it: your phone gets an iOS update every couple of months; the software is updating several times a year and taking us to a new level of sophistication each time. That means that Army can no longer be the low-tech, low-brow service. We need people with much greater technological capacity who have the ability to adjust to changes in technology much faster. Army's traditional models of training and learning are being overhauled to match that.

The third change is Australia's demography. Our population is aging, and the proportion of young people is diminishing. Therefore, their marketability is increasing. We're seeing massive shifts in terms of where people want to live and in the number of double income families; we've had an 800% increase in our Member With Dependents (Unaccompanied) [MWD(U)] population since it was introduced, and our people won't tolerate the uncertainty of getting children into schooling based upon their posting location. These factors mean that Army is no longer in a position to dictate to the market like we have in the past. Our model is

based upon a one income earner, who is a white, Caucasian male with a wife and three kids, traipsing around the country and it's harder and harder to sustain that model nowadays.

Workforce 2028 rejects a binary separation between those people who are 'in' (full-time, service category [SERCAT] 7) and those who are 'out' (part-time, SERCAT 5). There is no such thing as being 'in' or 'out'. You are Army for life. We will manage our Army as one complete workforce system. Whether we realise it or not, we are touched by this uniform; once you join the Army, you are indelibly marked. You always identify with the organisation, and it just depends what service category you are in.

We need to value things in our workforce which we've never valued in the past. For example, industry experience outside Army needs to be appreciated and factored into remuneration. Rather than just recruit people *ab initio*, we need to find ways to draw the Corporals, Sergeants, Captains and Majors who've left Army for a period in industry back into the organisation. We need to understand what are the 'pull factors' we can leverage and which of the 'push factors' we can undermine.

Workforce 2028 is going to 'throw on its head' so many of the fundamental assumptions and 'sacred cows' upon which Army's workforce was built in the 20th Century. It'll be more adaptive, and more appreciative of the full range of skills and attributes that are inside our workforce (irrespective of service category). It's dynamic and exciting. We're going to have to 'build this aircraft while we're flying it' so the organisation has to get on board. Our vision is deemed the most ambitious and transformational in the world by many other armies.

SC: I can understand that Army as an organisation wants to ameliorate the divide between being 'in' and 'out', but is that something that your workforce wants?

AR: Our people always continue to identify with Army; service proves to be a formative, defining part of their life. People continue to feel that they owe something to our organisation because of the personal growth serving facilitated.

Our succession-based model means we must transition people into different service categories in order to allow the next generation to promote, but the vast majority of people do not want to go. They feel as though they still have much more to contribute; that they haven't done enough; that they owe more to the organisation. That's very powerful, and we need to harness that.

Army's value proposition has three components: remuneration, conditions of service (which are designed to help you get through the privations and ensigncies of service, especially having to move around the country as part of your growth and promotion prospects), and the third thing is an intangible factor, the pride in self and sense of purpose from being in uniform. Our veterans talk about having 'lost' something when they transition out of Army. That's reflected in the huge difference in suicide rates between those who are in uniform and those who no longer wear it.

There is something about uniformed life that makes us trust in people and understand that there is more to life than material things. We need to reinvest in the intangible benefits of Army, that sense of community, by investing in reinvigorating our mess life, adventurous training and sport. We also need to recognise it as a 'pull factor' when the remuneration and conditions of service can't quite compensate members for geographic stability or a two-career family.

SC: That answer reminds me of the message in [Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging](#) by Sebastian Junger. Is our organisation open to change of that scale?

AR: As we go about implementing *Workforce 2028*, I've been attracted to a quote by recently-retired Australian Federal Police Commissioner Andrew Colvin: "There's two things that every police officer knows and hates. One is the way things are, and the other one is change". Without a shadow of a doubt, you can put a military uniform on that quote. We are very quick to seize upon and identify sub-optimal practices, processes and procedures in our current system, but when alternative models are suggested we quickly begin defending those same things we were just criticising.

However, I think there is enough of a groundswell to get this done. People realise we don't have enough agility in the system and that the organisation is facing significant threats; they are ready for change. Nevertheless, we are fundamentally uncomfortable with the idea that 'building this aircraft in flight' will be a really untidy process. We love the language of 'steady state', not the idea of being an *Army in Motion*.

Army in Motion doesn't describe a 'busy' Army, but an Army that is constantly 'on the balls of its feet' because the situation is constantly changing. The idea of Army reaching a 'final end state' or 'conclusion' is no longer valid. We need people who are able to actively, willingly seek to update a solution they only just implemented. Our current and future workforce is ready for that. In the past, senior leadership have directed the Army to 'get on board or get out', but that's reversed now; if our senior leaders can't 'get on board' with Army's future workforce then we need to 'get out of the way'.

SC: What are the leadership characteristics that enable an [Army in Motion](#)? What does leadership for an *Army in Motion* look like?

AR: Our capability advantage resides in our people and their leadership. *Army in Motion* describes a response to the challenges of *Accelerated Warfare*, but it can't be realised without quality leadership. We've got that already, but it needs to be more adaptive. Mission command needs to be more than a misunderstood mantra, it must become central.

We are comfortable in the field, with a dynamic environment around us, with an adversary that is actively working to subvert, undermine and make our plan unworkable every single minute, of every single day. When we re-enter barracks, we suddenly become a lot less agile and flexible; suddenly it's all about policy and certainty; suddenly we're working on 'lag indicators' rather than 'lead indicators'. We don't back ourselves to be ready for tomorrow

and instead focus on avoiding the problems of today. We need to bring our operational leadership back into our enterprise and our barracks.

The small number of people who cannot abide by our organisation's values have a disproportionate effect on the stability and cohesion of our system. We can't allow that. We must accept and subjugate ourselves to the [stoicism of our profession](#). This requires leadership in the modern environment where we don't have as many adhesive factors inside our society and where there tends to be more people fracturing into the cult of personality or the rights of individualism. Our leaders need to be able to harness the power of diversity through inclusion and generate better cognitive thinking. Previous leaders in Army haven't had to grapple with this. When that's done, we need to take those people into unfamiliar environments and optimise their performance. People are looking for a leader to make sense of a situation, imbue confidence and bind the team together. The glue for all this is *Good Soldiering*.

SC: What have you taken away from [Army's Contribution to Defence Strategy](#)?

AR: This document is definitely applicable at every level, but in different measure and in different contexts. By calling it *Army's Contribution to Defence Strategy*, and not *Army's Strategy*, the Chief is making the valid point that Army contributes to a broader Defence strategy; we are not an entity unto ourselves. We are a land domain expert operating in, from and across all other domains; we are a joint inter-agency, whole-of-government organisation that delivers effects across the spectrum of cooperation, competition and conflict.

SC: What have you learned from the [Chief of Army](#) in the past year?

AR: I've realised he's a dead-set legend for having done the job of Deputy Chief of Army for three years! But I can't bring myself to accept that he's a Collingwood supporter [laughs].

He brings a gravitas, a calmness, and an ability to look at things in context and simplify problems into simple statements. All his strategic documents are descriptive, rather than deductive, in order to bring the power of the organisation to bear through a 'contest of ideas'. This Chief is empowering us to accept risk now in order to act upon 'lead indicators'.

He, like every service chief at the moment, understands that the power of a high quality, low quantity defence force nests with being joint; the tribalism of the past cannot continue.

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Counselling for men, available 24/7*

Major General Anthony (Tony) Rawlins is a graduate of the Australian Defence Force Academy and the Royal Military College – Duntroon. He commissioned into the Royal Australian Armoured Corps in 1989. The bulk of his command experience has been within the 2nd Cavalry Regiment and his most recent command appointment was as Commander 7th Combat Brigade.

His staff, training and representational appointments have included ADFA, Aide-de-Camp to the Governor General, Senior Career Adviser DOCM-A, instructor at Australian and Canadian Command and Staff Colleges, Colonel – Plans at Headquarters 1st Division/DJFHQ and Director General – Military Strategic Commitments.

Operationally he has served as a military observer on UNTSO, Commanding Officer of Overwatch Battle Group West in Iraq, and Chief of Joint Operations on Headquarters ISAF.

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