

THE LONGEST COMMAND—THE LIFE AND TIMES
OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL ROBERT HAROLD
NIMMO: WHAT HE CAN TEACH THE MODERN-
DAY MILITARY OBSERVER



BY
John Magro

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL COMPLETION OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF
The Certificate-of-Training in United Nations Peace Support Operations



Peace Operations Training Institute®

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DAY MILITARY OBSERVER**

A Thesis

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Squadron Leader John Magro
Royal Australian Air Force

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Submitted

Date

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Forwarded Recommending
Approval

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Signature of Thesis Coordinator

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Introduction

The presence of United Nations peacekeepers throughout the world in the modern era is now a common occurrence. Fortunately, nations more often than not are agreeing to the presence of United Nations observers, peacekeepers, and sometimes, peace enforcers. Like any military operation, modern United Nations missions require credible and effective leadership in order to achieve their mandates. Australia has been privileged to have had a military officer who has held the honour of being the longest serving Chief Military Observer of a United Nations operation. His name is Lieutenant General Robert Harold Nimmo.

General Nimmo was an Australian Army Officer appointed as the Chief Military Observer of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP). General Nimmo served in this position from 28 October 1950 until his death in that post on 04 January 1966. General Nimmo was a natural leader, experienced commander and capable soldier. General Nimmo's personal style of leadership and charisma was pivotal in making UNMOGIP a success during his tenure and is one of the earliest United Nations missions that continues to this day. General Nimmo did not have the benefit of training courses that would instil in him the traits to successfully command a United Nations mission. Instead, through hard earned experience born on the battlefield in two world wars, General Nimmo, as a pioneer of United Nations mission leadership, was able to demonstrate effective command based on the legacy of a 44-year military career and his own leadership style.

This paper will analyse General Nimmo's leadership style as a United Nations military observer, with reference to his distinguished military career. The paper will further identify the traits Nimmo possessed that allowed him to successfully command a multinational United Nations mission. Finally, this paper will demonstrate that despite the elapse of more than 50 years since General Nimmo took command of UNMOGIP, his style of leadership was as relevant back in his tenure of command as it is now, based on modern leadership studies. The paper will further suggest other leadership traits believed to be essential for effective United Nations command and leadership.

Background

Robert Harold Nimmo was born on 22 November 1893 at Oak Park station, a cattle farming area located in the far north of the Australian state of Queensland. He was the fifth of nine children born to a father of Scottish descent. Known within his family as 'Harold' and otherwise by the nickname 'Putt', Nimmo was educated between 1904 and 1911 at the

Southport School, an all boys Anglican day and boarding school on the Queensland Gold Coast. The young Nimmo excelled both academically and as a sportsman, winning various honours in both areas. Nimmo remains listed to this day as a notable old boy on his School's website.¹

On 07 March 1912, Nimmo entered the Royal Military College of Australia - Duntroon, at Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory. Nimmo was in the second intake at Duntroon, which had opened only nine months earlier on 27 June 1911. The curriculum at the Royal Military College was designed as a four-year course with half military and half academic subjects. However, following the outbreak of the First World War, the first intake was specially graduated for overseas service. The next three intakes, of which Nimmo was one, were also shortened and the majority of cadets in the first four intakes served with either the Australian Imperial Force or the New Zealand Army.² In November 1914, Nimmo's class graduated 14 months early following the Australian government's decision to commit forces to the War. Nimmo's leadership skills were noted early in his career as on graduation from the College he received the Sword of Honour Award as the most outstanding graduate of his class.³

Nimmo and World War One

The newly commissioned Lieutenant Nimmo was posted to 'A' Squadron of the 5th Light Horse Regiment, an Australian Army cavalry unit forming part of the 1st Australian Imperial Force. Nimmo joined his Regiment in Egypt in February 1915. Australian units in Egypt at the time were training in preparation for an assault on the heavily defended beaches at Gallipoli on the Dardanelles Peninsular in Turkey. At the time, all the available Australian forces in Egypt were to be sent to Gallipoli, where the first troops landed on the beaches there and at ANZAC Cove on the dawn of 25 April 1915. Nimmo arrived at Gallipoli as a troop commander on 20 May 1915. However, the situation at Gallipoli was not going as well as had been anticipated by military planners. Heavy casualties were reported and large numbers of wounded men were returned to Egypt. It soon became apparent that the allied forces which had already landed at Gallipoli were not sufficient to force the Dardanelles open as an alternative front to Germany, as the British Admiralty had planned. Consequently, the matter of non-infantry reinforcements came up for serious consideration, and it was mooted whether the Light Horse Regiments, of which Nimmo

¹ The Southport School <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Southport_School> at 10 March 2007.

² Royal Military College of Australia - Duntroon <<http://www.defence.gov.au/ARMY/rmc/Main/History/History-Duntroon.htm>> at 18 March 2007.

³ Peter Londey, 'Most Successful UN Observer Ever' (2005) 32 *Wartime* 27.

was a member, should fight dismounted at Gallipoli given the mountainous terrain that would have made cavalry operations extremely difficult.⁴

Accordingly, a meeting was held consisting of the commanding officers of the Australian cavalry brigades to argue the practicalities of dismounted infantry operations and ascertain the feeling of cavalry units as to whether they should volunteer to go dismounted.⁵ Shortly after it was determined that the Australian cavalry units would fight dismounted. By June 1915 Nimmo and his men were in the thick of fighting against Turkish troops on the rugged terrain that epitomises Gallipoli and the Dardanelles Peninsular. Nimmo's leadership, coolness under fire and intellect in battle during the Gallipoli campaign established the reputation that was to remain with him for the remainder of his military career, and set the precedent for the leadership traits of a United Nations military observer.

Nimmo's career as a military commander was born on the battlefield in two world wars. The following example is one such operation in which Nimmo demonstrated his leadership ability. On 28 June 1915, the Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Army Corps at Gallipoli determined that an attack would be made by Australian troops at Cape Helles on entrenched Turkish positions. The Commander-in-Chief requested assistance from Australian units in any way they could to ensure that the Turkish forces engaging Australian troops at Cape Helles would not be reinforced. Accordingly, orders were issued for an attack to prevent possible reinforcements. The 5th Light Horse Regiment, Nimmo's unit, two troops of the 7th Light Horse Regiment and two companies of the 9th Battalion, supported by the 11th Battalion, advanced and attacked the Turkish trenches towards Gaba Tepe and towards the lower ridges of the Lone Pine position. The consequences of the Australian attack were that the Turkish reinforcements at Eski Kouli, between ANZAC Cove and Achi Baba, who were predicted to move to oppose Australian forces further south at Cape Helles, were turned back and advanced to meet the Australian attack. The 5th Light Horse Regiment was being subjected to heavy machine gun and rifle fire from the Turkish positions. The Australians were also being subjected to friendly shell fire from an Australian navy destroyer, the commander of which had not been informed that Australian soldiers were operating outside their own lines. When the desired effect of holding the Turkish soldiers had been accomplished, further orders were given for the withdrawal of the Australians to their own trenches. This operation was successfully carried out despite

⁴ L.C. Wilson & H. Wetherell, *History of the Fifth Light Horse Regiment, 1914 - 1919*, (1926) Chapter 3. <http://www.anzacs.org/5lhr/pages/5lhr_history_full_a.html#appendix1> at 18 March 2007.

⁵ Wilson & Wetherell, above n 4.

Nimmo's regiment suffering heavy casualties during the attack, amounting to 23 killed and 79 wounded.⁶

A further example of Nimmo's courage was on 28 June 1915 when leading his troops towards Turkish positions. During the advance one of Nimmo's sergeants indicated to him that there were Turkish soldiers firing at other Australian troops to the north of their position. Nimmo, appreciating that the Turkish soldiers were exposed from their position in relation to his, quietly collected a dozen men, explained the situation to them and issued quick orders, then gave the signal to rise and fire five rounds of rapid fire. The Turkish soldiers became confused and quickly took cover before fighting back.⁷ The situation soon developed into a skirmish with artillery shells and firing from an Australian warship, affecting the progress of Nimmo's men. But Nimmo's leadership steadied his men and again, his courage under fire was noted.⁸

Nimmo was appointed Adjutant of the 5th Light Horse Regiment in August 1915. By late August, Nimmo had been diagnosed with typhoid fever and evacuated to the United Kingdom to recover. Nimmo returned to his regiment, now in Egypt, in May 1916. Nimmo served throughout the Palestine campaign in various command and staff positions with the 5th Light Horse Regiment, 1st and 2nd Light Horse Brigades and the British 160th Infantry Brigade⁹ and was also promoted to the rank of major in July 1917. On cessation of the War, Nimmo was mentioned-in-dispatches; a British military honour for gallantry or commendable service in action, for his leadership and quick thinking in battle, which was gazetted on 22 January 1919. Nimmo returned to Australia in February 1919.¹⁰

The inter-war period

Nimmo resumed services with the permanent Australian Military Forces in 1920. He was posted to the Royal Military College-Duntroon in Canberra for instructional duties. Nimmo married 'Peggy' Cunningham on 21 June 1921. This marriage produced a son and daughter. During 1925, Nimmo held various staff appointments at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne. Aside from Nimmo's reputation and bright military future, it was his sporting prowess that

⁶ Ibid Chapter 4.

⁷ The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, *Vol. II, The Story of ANZAC: From 4 May, 1915 To The Evacuation*, Chapter X 'Operations in June and July' (1941) 296.

⁸ Wilson & Wetherell, above n 4.

⁹ Neil James & Peter Londey, *Nimmo, Robert Harold (1893-1966)*, Australian Dictionary of Biography – Online Edition (Australian National University) <<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/AS10372b.htm>> at 18 March 2007.

¹⁰ James & Londey, above n 9.

further identified him as both a gifted athlete and natural leader. Nimmo represented Australia in hockey during 1927, 1930 and 1932. Additionally, Nimmo represented the state of Victoria in hockey, rugby union, cricket, tennis and polo.¹¹ The inter-war period saw Nimmo rise steadily through the ranks.

Nimmo and World War Two

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Nimmo was a lieutenant colonel at Headquarters 1st Cavalry Division, Sydney. At this time the Australian Army's armoured capability was in its infancy and Nimmo remained in Australia to develop this important capability, as did most senior Australian cavalry officers at the time. It was during this period that tragedy struck Nimmo's family. His wife Peggy was killed after a fall in a tragic accident in March 1940 and a devastated Nimmo was transferred to Brisbane on a compassionate posting. Nimmo, however, progressed in rank and was promoted to colonel in September 1941 and brigadier in January 1942. Nimmo married his second wife, Mary Dundas Page, on 10 February 1942 and had varied postings, commanding the 4th Cavalry Brigade, the 1st Armoured Brigade and the 1st Motor Brigade during 1942 and 1943. From 1943 to 1945 Nimmo was a staff Brigadier on the 3rd Australian Army Corps and the 2nd Australian Army, before assuming command of the 4th Australian Base Area in New Guinea. This also included time at the Headquarters of the 1st Australian Army at Lae. It was during this time that further tragedy struck Nimmo. His son by his first marriage, James Nimmo, a bomber pilot with the Royal Australian Air Force, was killed in action on 10 April 1944 when his aircraft was intercepted by German night fighters on return from a mine laying task along the German and Polish Baltic shores.

By the conclusion of the Second World War, Nimmo was commanding the 34th Australian Infantry Brigade at Morotai, New Guinea. The 34th Infantry Brigade was to become one of the first full time formations of the newly created Australian Regular Army. During this time the Brigade was awaiting orders to take part in the occupation of Japan. However, the end of the war presented new challenges to Nimmo, being a commander faced with a brigade of restless soldiers.

In January 1946, Australian soldiers at Morotai were being told that they would only remain in New Guinea for a short period of time before redeploying to Japan. However, over the ensuing weeks of remaining in location, boredom set in and rumours amongst the

¹¹ Ibid.

Australian soldiers began circulating. The rumours included speculation of when American General Douglas MacArthur would send the Australians to Japan. Another, more worrying rumour, was that Japanese prisoners were infected with syphilis and this further inflamed the situation with the restless Australians, as the Japanese prisoners were known to be using the same latrines as the Australian soldiers.¹² This culminated in the Australian soldiers staging a ‘mutiny’ parade to outline their frustrations and present their demands for change to command.

The Australian soldiers had chosen a senior non-commissioned officer to present their demands to Nimmo. When the soldiers paraded before the headquarters they discovered Nimmo was in Australia attending meetings, so the attempted ‘mutiny’ was not successful. But on Nimmo’s return to New Guinea, he was made aware of the discontent amongst his soldiers and informed of the parade that had occurred in his absence.¹³ Naturally, Nimmo expressed grave concern at what had happened during his absence, and through what can only have been a calculating move to quickly control the threat of mutiny within his command, Nimmo summonsed the senior non-commissioned officer who had led the parade. Nimmo could have controlled the threat in a number of ways, which included having the ringleaders arrested and placed in detention for threatening such a challenge to command, or charging the architects of the mutiny. Instead, Nimmo exercised superb judgement and demonstrated why he was the successful leader that he was known to be. As the non-commissioned officer who led the parade said:

*“I’d never seen [Nimmo] before, but the moment I clapped eyes on him I knew that all would be well. Humanity and intelligence, his face said. Blue eyes, brown face, white hair. Quiet and unhurried confidence in his tone, he discarded preamble and launched into the business at hand...”*¹⁴

The non-commissioned officer proceeded to inform Nimmo of his personal concerns, as much as anyone else in his command, by the conditions faced by the Australian soldiers in Morotai, in addition to the rumours which were circulating about the future of the brigade. The non-commissioned officer further explained that he had in fact been approached by other soldiers to lead the parade to Nimmo’s headquarters, and had explained to Nimmo himself that he had settled down the protest, pending Nimmo’s return to his command. Again, in the non-commissioned officer’s own words:

¹² T.A.G. Hungerford, *A Knockabout with a Slouch Hat* (1985) 50.

¹³ *Ibid* 57.

¹⁴ Hungerford, above n 12, 60.

*“I didn’t know what to expect, but you could have knocked me over with a feather when [Nimmo] agreed with me. I was even more surprised when he thanked me for what I had done. On the other hand, I wasn’t at all surprised that among the assembled lesser Brass the opening gambit soared up with all the verve of a lead balloon.”*¹⁵

Nimmo quickly got to the point, asking the non-commissioned officer if he knew of anything else the men were still worried about but which had not been brought up during the course of the discussion. The non-commissioned officer raised the concern that Japanese prisoners were using the Australian soldiers’ latrines, and the fact that the soldiers did not like it. Nimmo’s concern for his men became quite obvious:

*“Before my eyes that avuncular-looking senior army officer changed into a Brigadier. [Nimmo] turned about in his chair and fixed one of the officers with a killer’s eye. ‘Major Fogg! Are the Japs using the men’s latrines? Can that be so?’ Mumble-mumble, said the unfortunate Fogg. ‘Then get out, now, and arrange for separate latrines to be dug!’”*¹⁶

Nimmo subsequently mentioned to the non-commissioned officer on his departure that in future if he had something he believed should be discussed, that he was not to worry about the usual channels and to report directly to him about the problems.¹⁷ Shortly after this episode, in February 1946, Nimmo was to lead his brigade in their redeployment to Japan as part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces (BCOF). The Australian contingent of the multi-nation BCOF was focused around Nimmo’s 34th Brigade, which was sent to Japan to assist with Japanese reconstruction. The BCOF had its area of control in Southern Japan, which centred around the port of Kure and included the devastated Hiroshima.¹⁸

Indeed, Nimmo’s role in Japan could be argued to have been a prime training ground for his subsequent appointment as Chief Military Observer in Kashmir, as in modern parlance, many of the BCOF’s activities could be termed as peacekeeping-like. This included keeping the Japanese population under surveillance for any signs of resistance or disaffection, guarding facilities against possible attack or sabotage, repatriating thousands of Japanese soldiers whilst concurrently returning thousands of Korean nationals home. The

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Peter Londey, *Other People’s Wars: A History of Australian Peacekeeping* (2004) 2.

BCOF's mission further included the major task of locating and taking over all Japanese military installations and supervising the destruction of huge quantities of unused ordnance and weaponry.¹⁹

Three months after Nimmo led his brigade to Japan as part of the BCOF he was recalled to Australia in May 1946, on promotion to major-general. Nimmo was made General Officer Commanding Northern Command, located in Brisbane. On 08 June 1950, Nimmo was awarded the British honour of Commander of the Order of the British Order (CBE), and was set to retire from the Australian Regular Army in November 1950. However, Nimmo's retirement was short-lived. In a place unknown to Nimmo, a disputed province between the newly independent India and Pakistan called Kashmir was to be the catalyst for Nimmo's finest hour as a military commander and the site in which he would set the unsurpassed precedent of being the longest serving United Nations Chief Military Observer in history.

Kashmir

In August 1947, Great Britain gave India its independence, but also partitioned the nation into two states: secular India and predominantly Muslim Pakistan. The rulers of some 562 princely states straddling both countries were given the option of joining either India or Pakistan. By a mixture of diplomacy and coercion, India was able to absorb all the princely states which fell within its boundaries.²⁰ The second largest princely state, Jammu and Kashmir, (commonly referred to only as Kashmir) with an area in excess of 200,000 square kilometres, had a predominantly Muslim population despite being ruled by a Hindu dynasty. But after some hesitation Kashmir's Hindu ruler opted to join India.²¹

Kashmir quickly erupted in turmoil, with various uprisings and massacres of Muslims in the town of Jammu by Hindus and Sikhs, and invasions by Muslim Pathan tribesman. On 26 October 1947, the Maharajah of Kashmir and Jammu, faced with the imminent fall of Srinagar, the chief city in Kashmir to the Pathan tribesman, signed a document handing Kashmir over to India in return for Indian military assistance. Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Governor-General of India, accepted Kashmir's accession.²² Indian forces quickly repelled the Pathans from Srinagar but fighting continued between the Indians on one side, and a coalition of Muslim tribes and Pakistani forces on the other. The tension between India and Pakistan was such that by mid-1948 India and Pakistan were fighting a war for territory,²³

¹⁹ Ibid 3.

²⁰ Ibid 39.

²¹ Londey, above n 3, 27.

²² Londey, above n 18, 40.

²³ Ibid.

with Kashmir itself being divided into areas controlled by both India and Pakistan.²⁴ Fortunately, with the assistance and urging of the recently created United Nations, India and Pakistan held off from the brink of escalating war and agreed to a ceasefire with effect from 01 January 1949.²⁵

One year prior to the ceasefire, India had complained to the United Nations about Pakistani involvement in what was now formally Indian sovereign territory. As a consequence, in January 1948, the United Nations Security Council established the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP). However, during this initial period, and as the hostilities between India and Pakistan escalated, UNCIP moved at a leisurely pace and did not reach the troubled spot for another six months. UNCIP was however able to act as an intermediary to the 01 January 1949 ceasefire, on the condition that a plebiscite be held to determine Kashmir's future.²⁶

It became apparent in the months that followed the ceasefire that it was impossible to withdraw opposing forces from the area. Additionally, American Admiral Chester Nimitz, who was selected as the plebiscite administrator, was never able to take up his role in that position as he was deemed to be an unacceptable candidate to the Indian government. Instead, the Military Advisor to UNCIP, Belgian General Maurice Delvoie, decided to concentrate on establishing a clear ceasefire line and demilitarised zone, achieved at a conference in Karachi, Pakistan, in July 1949.²⁷

Previously, in August 1948, UNCIP had requested the use of 40 military observers to form 20 teams, each consisting of one senior and one junior officer. By 02 January 1949, these observers had begun to enter the field. Their role was to assist local commanders agree on the location of the ceasefire line on the ground and report any breaches of the ceasefire. The challenge was significant, given the ceasefire line was 800 kilometres long, much of it in rugged mountains over 4000 metres above sea level.²⁸ Military observers were stationed with troops on both sides and were to accompany them in their investigations, gather as much information as possible and report to the Chief Military Observer. Three to four-man observer teams were stationed with Indian or Pakistani military units on either side of the cease-fire line. Each team was rotated from one side to the other to avoid a spirit of

²⁴ Londey, above n 3, 27.

²⁵ Londey, above n 18, 41.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Londey, above n 18, 41.

²⁸ Ibid

partisanship on the part of the observers, which would occur by remaining too long with one army.²⁹

UNCIP was unable to make further progress and was discontinued in early 1950. The observers, however, remained to monitor the ceasefire, and in 1951 became an independent mission known as the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP).³⁰ The UNMOGIP Headquarters alternated between India and Pakistan, spending six months of the year in each country.³¹ UNMOGIP's Indian headquarters were located in Srinagar whilst the Pakistani headquarters were located in Rawalpindi. This alternating format continues to this day.³²

With the dissolution of UNCIP, a single mediator was appointed to attempt to affect a solution in Kashmir. Following a number of candidates, including Admiral Nimitz, Sir Owen Dixon; a highly respected Judge of the High Court of Australia, was finally selected. Sir Owen criss-crossed Kashmir's dangerous roads by jeep attempting to find common ground for compromise between the Indian and Pakistani leadership. These efforts proved fruitless, and Sir Owen declared his mission a failure and departed.³³

Meanwhile, the officer commanding the United Nations observers in Kashmir, Canadian Brigadier Henry Angle,³⁴ was killed in a plane crash in July 1950. Through Sir Owen Dixon's involvement and influence, the Australian government was subsequently invited to select a replacement commander for UNMOGIP. The successful nomination was identified as Major-General Robert Nimmo. Nimmo was appointed as the Chief Military Observer for UNMOGIP on 28 October 1950. He arrived in Kashmir to take command in November 1950, almost 57 years old. Three months later, he was joined by his wife.³⁵

Nimmo as Chief Military Observer in Kashmir

Nimmo was to remain as Chief Military Observer in Kashmir for 15 years up until his death on 03 January 1966. From the very beginning, colleagues were quick to highly praise Nimmo's leadership style. Shortly after Nimmo's arrival in Kashmir, comments were made on the United Nations being fortuitous in gaining the services of 'so outstanding a soldier'

²⁹ David W. Wainhouse, *International Peace Observation – A History and Forecast* (1966) 364-365.

³⁰ Londey, above n 18, 41.

³¹ Charles P. Schleicher & J.S. Bains, *The Administration of Indian Foreign Policy through the United Nations* (1969) 10.

³² UNMOGIP website <<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unmogip/facts.html>> at 01 April 2007.

³³ Londey, above n 3, 28.

³⁴ Wainhouse, above n 29, 364.

³⁵ Londey, above n 18, 43.

who was a ‘model of firmness, tact and silence’.³⁶ Several years into Nimmo’s command, one high ranking United Nations official noted:

*“Mission successful and working excellently. Morale good; personal relations with local commanders excellent and Military Observers of different nationalities get on well together, all largely due to the personal qualities of General Nimmo.”*³⁷

Nimmo was hardworking and reputedly drove his staff hard. He was also an efficient administrator. Nimmo’s credibility in Kashmir was further enhanced by him being a skilled polo player, a sport which had been a legacy of the British Raj in India.³⁸ Nimmo’s passion for his role as Chief Military Observer was further demonstrated through development of what was referred to as the ‘Blue Book’, which was partly an administrative directive to observers, providing information on local conditions and instructions in the form of reports. The Book also included background material on the dispute in Kashmir, together with information on current Indian, Pakistani and UNMOGIP positions. Copies of the book were provided to the forces of Pakistan and India with the hope that observers could achieve some uniformity in their approach, and that the two opposing forces would better understand the observers’ actions.³⁹

The first group of military observers in Kashmir were from the United States, Belgium, Canada, Norway and Mexico, with Sweden and Denmark having joined the operation at an earlier stage. More contributors were however needed, as Nimmo hoped to raise personnel strength for UNMOGIP from 35 to 65 officers. Interestingly, this strength was never achieved except during the initial period of the crisis before Nimmo took command. From the very beginning, Nimmo had assumed that Australia would soon be a military observer contributor, and by late 1951 the United Nations made a formal request for eight Australian Army officers, ranking from captain to lieutenant colonel. The initial eight Australian officers were sourced from the Citizen Military Forces; the former name for the Australian Army Reserve, or from the Retired List. These officers arrived in country in January 1952. By the end of 1952, Australia’s contribution to UNMOGIP had risen to ten officers.⁴⁰

Nimmo’s command was small and he was never an empire builder. Nimmo was vigilant against unnecessary numbers of military observers which, as well as being a drain on

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Londey, above n 3, 28.

³⁹ Londey, above n 18, 43.

⁴⁰ Ibid 44.

contributing countries, could also sap morale as observers found themselves with too little to do. What Nimmo did ensure was that UNMOGIP, with its limited resources, did as good a job as possible in preserving the uneasy peace in Kashmir.

Three years after arriving in Kashmir, Nimmo had reached the Australian Army statutory retirement age of 60. Extensions were at the discretion of the United Nations Secretary General. Fortunately, Nimmo was so highly regarded by the United Nations that his extension continued. What Nimmo had brought to UNMOGIP as Chief Military Observer was a supreme understanding of what could be possible to achieve through maintaining an open and firm but tactful relationship with both belligerent parties, yet showing no favour to either. Nimmo had stated in his 'Blue Book' to incoming military observers that "tact is more of a virtue here."⁴¹

Satisfaction with Nimmo was high and the United Nations had no thoughts of replacing him. However, in 1953 on his way to New York for consultations, Nimmo suffered a heart attack and was out of action for several months. During this time, the Acting Chief Observer was Nimmo's Chief of Staff, the Australian Colonel Alec MacDonald. Due to the United Nations' desire to have an officer of general rank heading UNMOGIP, the Belgian Major-General Bennet Louis de Ridder stepped in as acting chief observer of UNMOGIP during Nimmo's convalescence. Following Nimmo's return to duty, de Ridder remained with UNMOGIP. Whilst Nimmo had been happy for de Ridder to be appointed to the mission as a temporary measure, he soon became aggrieved when he discovered de Ridder was still with the mission a year later. This was especially so because de Ridder believed he would soon replace Nimmo as Chief Military Observer.⁴²

Nimmo's concern was the fact that there were two officers of general rank in UNMOGIP, therefore blurring his position as commander. When this was made apparent to the Australian Department of External Affairs with the accompanying proposal that Nimmo be promoted to lieutenant-general, the initial reaction from the Department of External Affairs was that the suggestion had originated from Nimmo himself. But when United Nations officials made the same suggestion, the Australian Minister for Defence was pleased to agree. Nimmo was accordingly granted the honorary rank of lieutenant-general in November 1954, coincidentally the fourth anniversary of his arrival in Kashmir.⁴³

⁴¹ Londey, above n 3, 28.

⁴² Londey, above n 18, 47.

⁴³ Ibid.

During 1954, the United States government agreed to provide military aid to Pakistan. The Indian government naturally reacted angrily, and asserted that American United Nations observers attached to UNMOGIP could no longer be considered neutrals. The then United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold's first reaction was to write Nimmo, reaffirming in the strongest possible terms the neutrality which was expected of United Nations military observers. Hammarskjold also reminded Nimmo of military observers' responsibilities to 'safeguard any military information that is normally transmitted to a [United Nations Field Observer] Team by the local army command.'⁴⁴ Consequently, the United Nations agreed that the American observers, who made up almost half of UNMOGIP's observers, would be steadily withdrawn. Nimmo was at this time agreeable to allowing a drop in observer numbers.

In Kashmir during the majority of the 1950s there were less than 100 alleged ceasefire line and border violations reported each year. In 1954, through discussions with Nimmo and representatives of the United Nations Secretariat, conditions along the border were relatively tranquil, with no more than twenty incidents. By 1961, the number of incidents had grown from two dozen to two thousand.⁴⁵ In 1965, Pakistan was despairing of the United Nations to do anything to alter the *status-quo* in Kashmir. In early 1965, fighting broke out in a desolate marshy area on the India-Pakistan border well south of Kashmir, known as the 'Kutch'. Internal unrest, ranging from non-violent opposition to the Indian government to full scale acts of terrorism was on the increase in Indian controlled Kashmir. Having agreed to a ceasefire in the Kutch area, the Indian government found itself under pressure to take a tougher line on Kashmir. Consequently, in August 1965, the Indian government announced the abandonment of the 1949 ceasefire. Fighting erupted along the ceasefire line and the Indian Army seized key passes on the Pakistani side. Pakistan retaliated with a major attack in the Jammu area.⁴⁶

By September 1965 the fighting in Kashmir intensified to become an all-out war between India and Pakistan. Britain and the United States immediately announced a cessation of military aid to both nations, whilst the threat of a broader conflict with China, Pakistan's ally, further encouraged India to end the fighting. The United Nations Secretary-General, in his report to the United Nations Security Council on 03 September 1965 pointed out that Nimmo had received 2231 complaints from both sides of the conflict. Of those, 377 violations were confirmed: 218 by Pakistan and 159 by India. According to Nimmo's

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Wainhouse, above n 29, 368.

⁴⁶ Londey, above n 18, 49.

investigations the most serious violation was the capture of Kargil by India.⁴⁷ The Security Council demanded a ceasefire, implemented on 23 September 1965, as Soviet mediated discussions in Tashkent led to an end to hostilities and a resumption of normal relations. These negotiations did not, however, deal with the Kashmir problem. A separate United Nations India-Pakistan Observer Mission (UNIPOM) operated from September 1965 until February 1966, supervising the ceasefire and withdrawal of forces along the border at the end of the Second India-Pakistan War. Australia provided three observers, one seconded from the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) and two seconded from UNMOGIP. Nimmo was also included as part of UNIPOM until October 1965.⁴⁸ Regrettably, the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan was set to continue for many years, outlasting Nimmo's command.

Over a period of 15 years, Nimmo had performed the role of Chief Military Observer in Kashmir admirably and with great accord. In 1964, an Australian diplomat in New York reported that the United Nations Secretariat considered Nimmo to have "been by far the most successful United Nations observer ever. This was largely due to his ability to have all complaints investigated promptly and in detail and to give awards with complete impartiality."⁴⁹ It was because of this highly respected opinion of Nimmo that there was never any pressure from the United Nation to withdraw Nimmo from Command. Nimmo himself did not even seek retirement. Only death could end Nimmo's command. Nimmo died in his sleep on 04 January 1966 at Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Nimmo had been the longest commander of a United Nations force in history, and this record has yet to be surpassed. Nimmo was buried with full military and United Nations honours in the ANZAC section of Mount Gravatt Cemetery, Brisbane, Australia.

The Nimmo legacy and what he can teach the modern day military observer

General Nimmo's legacy of command over such an extended period of time and in trying conditions is inspirational. Nimmo's style and method can teach the modern-day military observer and commander many lessons in how to conduct themselves as a leader on a difficult mission, in difficult conditions and when positioned between two opposing forces reluctant to compromise.

⁴⁷ Surendra Chopra, *UN Mediation in Kashmir: A Study in Power Politics* (1971) 217.

⁴⁸ Report of the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade 'United Nations Peacekeeping and Australia' Australian Government Publishing Service Canberra (1991), 17-18.

⁴⁹ Londey, above n 18, 50.

Nimmo demonstrated many leadership qualities that were a legacy of experience, in addition to a natural flair that was developed on the battlefield. Interestingly, Nimmo's leadership ability was sufficient and flexible enough to transfer from the battlefield to that required in peacekeeping operations as an observer. Nimmo's qualities can be compared to those outlined in the Peace Operations Special Issues and Lessons Learned Seminar. This Seminar occurred over the period 11 to 18 September 2002 at the Centre of Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance in Honolulu, Hawaii.⁵⁰ This seminar discussed leadership in complex contingency operations, and the definition of complex contingencies includes United Nations peace operations. Essentially, complex contingency operations differ from typical relief operations such as humanitarian assistance or aid to the civil power. Complex contingency operations are both more difficult and more demanding. They often require balancing uncertain domestic support, differing allied goals, varying bureaucratic interests, and other political factors, often for a considerable length of time. Moreover, the military is regularly called upon to perform difficult and unusual tasks, such as separating combatants and providing for refugees that are not necessary in more typical disaster environments. Indeed, unlike relief after a natural disaster, the provision of relief in response to a civil war or the depredations of a brutal government can strengthen combatants and actually worsen a conflict.⁵¹

Complex contingency operations go beyond simple disaster relief and demand the coordination of multiple actors. They often require a response to man-made crises such as civil war or poor governance, in addition to alleviating humanitarian disasters. Complex contingency operations do not include smaller operations such as domestic disaster relief, counterterrorism, hostage rescue and non-combatant evacuation, nor does it include International armed conflict.⁵² From these characteristics, UNMOGIP under Nimmo can be defined as a complex contingency operation.

What Nimmo's leadership of UNMOGIP can demonstrate, however, is that 50 years before the doctrine and definition of leadership in complex contingencies was presented and discussed, Nimmo was already demonstrating such leadership qualities in a complex contingency operation. What this can teach the modern day military observer and

⁵⁰ The Center of Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance 'The Peace Operations Special Issues and Lessons Learned Seminar – After Action Report' 11-18 September 2002 <<http://www.coe-dmha.org/APRI/Koolina/06.htm>> at 20 March 2007.

⁵¹ Daniel Byman, Ian O. Lesser, Bruce R. Pirnie, Cheryl Benard & Matthew Waxman, 'Characteristics of Complex Contingency Operations' *Strengthening the Partnership: Improving Military Coordination with Relief Agencies and Allies in Humanitarian Operations* (2000) 7. <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/mr1185/mr1185.ch2.pdf> at 20 March 2007.

⁵² Ibid 8.

commander is that the fundamentals of leadership have not changed, but this is not to say that they cannot be refined or improved upon, with the aid of modern education and a critical study of history.

The Peace Operations Special Issues and Lessons Learned Seminar identified qualities essential for successful command to include:

- a. Vision,
- b. Broad understanding of the international political landscape,
- c. Courage to take risks,
- d. Ability to interact with those outside the military,
- e. Broad intellectual background and the mental agility to conduct intellectual warfare,
- f. Patience,
- g. Sensitivity,
- h. Confidence to delegate, and
- i. Steady principles and moral steadfastness based on core values.⁵³

Whilst the Seminar-produced paper did not expand on these qualities in any particular detail, there was some basic discussion on these qualities that provides food for thought. The Seminar identified that these qualities cannot be acquired in the classroom. These qualities instead develop over time and through graduation of responsibility, which is borne from managing people at different levels. This style of leadership requires experience through practical work in an arena not based on general principles of education.⁵⁴

⁵³ The Center of Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance, above n 50.

⁵⁴ The Center of Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance, above n 50.

The Seminar correctly identified that leadership is an art. There is no one formula for a leader and it is therefore an individualistic endeavour. However, the Seminar identified that the leader should be astute enough to manifest their leadership. Orders issued from commanders themselves are not the traits of an effective leader. Respect must be earned, and this is particularly so in a multinational environment such as a United Nations mission, where the commander must feel the sensitivities of the various contingencies that make up the force; hence the reason why a leader must have political sensibility. A successful leader will reflect the credibility of their force and credibility requires a leader who has the capacity to function well in a crisis. Leadership requires a number of approaches, and the kind of leadership required in any situation will include good vision and an ability to assess a situation to adopt a style of leadership that will bring their subordinates together.⁵⁵

A fascinating aspect of the qualities identified above as essential for successful command is that they have not only been advocated by the Peace Operations Special Issues and Lessons Learned Seminar. On 03 June 1999, the United States Institute of Peace; an independent, non-partisan federal institution created by the United States Congress to promote research, education and training on the prevention, management and resolution of international conflicts, hosted a Panel presentation on 'Strategic Leadership for Peace Operations: Military Perspectives'. The Panel featured United States Army Fellow 1998-99 Colonel Howard A. Olsen, General (Retired) William C. Crouch and Lieutenant-General (Retired) William G. Carter. The event was chaired by the Institute's Executive Vice-President Harriet Hentges. The discussion focused on the need to improve the training and preparation of senior United States military officers for peacekeeping duties overseas. In this particular instance, the Special Report produced by the Panel concerned lessons identified from the United States military involvement in Bosnia and Kosovo whilst serving as part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)-led Implementation Force (IFOR) and Stabilization Force (SFOR).⁵⁶

The Panel presentation produced a list of leadership skills considered essential to be effective in subsequent peace enforcement operations. The list evolved from the experience of general-ranked officers who had served in Bosnia. Whilst the Panel identified that the most important skill needed in peace operations remains as warfighting, the bulk of the skills listed are, surprisingly, very similar to those identified by the Peace Operations

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Howard Olsen & John Davis, *Training U.S. Army Officers for Peace Operations: Lessons from Bosnia* United States Institute of Peace Special Report, (29 October 1999), 7. <<http://www.usip.org>> at 20 March 2007.

Special Issues and Lessons Learned Seminar. The skills identified are: vision, courage to take risks, the ability to interact with those outside the military, confidence, a broad intellectual background, the confidence to delegate authority, and adherence to principle and moral steadfastness. These skills, according to the United States military general-ranked officers interviewed for the Special Report are essential for successful command in peace operations.⁵⁷ It is interesting to note that whilst 'patience' is listed by the Peace Operations Special Issues and Lessons Learned Seminar as a quality essential for successful command, none of the officers interviewed for the United States Institute of Peace study listed 'patience' as a required skill.⁵⁸

Reflecting on the Peace Operations Special Issues and Lessons Learned Seminar, it is notable that the leadership qualities identified by the Seminar can be used successfully in an analysis of the leadership qualities of Nimmo. It is further interesting to observe that Nimmo possessed these prerequisites long before he assumed command of UNMOGIP; Nimmo was a veteran of two world wars, had combat command experience at many levels from the very junior to the most senior, had experience as part of an occupying power and also had experience of command in conditions other than combat operations, as was the case when Nimmo led his brigade into Japan as part of the BCOF following the Second World War. It could be said history prepared Nimmo for the ultimate role of his military career, that as Chief Military Observer, as no other period in Australian military history could have placed the requisite stress and forced preparation on Nimmo to facilitate his command experience and leadership roles that he held in his later career.

Additionally, Nimmo had, and maintained, the vision as to what UNMOGIP was present in Kashmir to achieve, and this was evident from his continued extension of service with the United Nations. Nimmo's 'Blue Book' for UNMOGIP military observers was further testament to his broad understanding of the international political landscape. Nimmo's ability at polo and sport in general also bestowed upon him credibility during the mission, as he was able to interact with the local population in and around Kashmir, and the reputation Nimmo had as a 'model of firmness, tact and silence' satisfied the leadership virtues of patience and sensitivity.

But Nimmo was fortunate in having had active service in two global conflicts and the command experience to prepare for his role leading UNMOGIP. The aspiring military

⁵⁷ Olsen & Davis, above n 56, 6.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

commander in the modern age may not have the same opportunities to develop their leadership skills. However, through adopting a proactive desire to have experiences for self-development and command experience, the modern day military observer can place themselves in such situations to develop their leadership skills in complex contingency operations, which now appear to be a regular occurrence around the world. The present global climate has a number of United Nations operations occurring concurrently, as well as numerous military operations occurring in the global war on terror and other regional engagements. Further, one advantage the modern world has is the complexity of such operations, which will test and develop most modern leaders.

Nimmo's leadership traits are further comparable to those traits listed in the previously discussed Seminar, as he was also able to assert his credibility with military commanders on both sides of the conflict in Kashmir, and to his United Nations superiors. As has been discussed, Nimmo was a brilliant polo player and used this as a means to break down barriers between the Indians and Pakistanis and facilitate positive interaction. Further, Nimmo was able to maintain cordial relationships between the top levels of Pakistani and Indian military leaders.⁵⁹ Further, it has been asserted that because of the respect Nimmo enjoyed in India and Pakistan due to his work in Kashmir, this may have allowed him to mediate the political issues more effectively than the United Nations representative. Nimmo's longevity as Chief Military Observer is of note during his time with UNMOGIP, in contrast to other United Nations missions such as UNTSO, where the Commander was more frequently replaced.⁶⁰ Likewise, an argument can be made that the very success of Nimmo in restraining violence reduced the pressures for a political settlement.⁶¹ However, it must be remembered that the crux of being a military observer is impartiality, and it is interesting to know that if the United Nations had used Nimmo in this capacity whether it may have compromised his impartiality.

To take the Peace Operations Special Issues and Lessons Learned Seminar command traits further, it is submitted that another skill that would be beneficial to a United Nations commander would be remaining proactive and maintaining the initiative. This would be a beneficial leadership trait as it would ensure the commander maintains the momentum for the mission and ensures that the force or the commander will not stagnate. This would be of particular significance if a commander was facing a lack of cooperation from local parties,

⁵⁹ Wainhouse, above n 29, 370.

⁶⁰ David W. Wainhouse, *International Peacekeeping at the Crossroads: National Support-Experience and Prospects* (1973) 76.

⁶¹ Wainhouse, above n 29, 370.

or from the bureaucracy. Relating this to Nimmo's experience, in the last quarter of 1964 and into 1965 the tensions between India and Pakistan had become greater than any other period during Nimmo's time in command. Nimmo had made proposals intended to arrest the deteriorations of conditions in Kashmir, but neither side had accepted them.⁶² Although Nimmo's initiative in this instance was not further developed, there is no evidence to suggest that it did not dissuade Nimmo from remaining proactive and continuing to follow the UNMOGIP mandate and vision as to why the United Nations was in Kashmir.

Conclusion

This paper has provided an overview of the life and times contributing to the outstanding military career of General Robert Nimmo, and identified why he was able to command a United Nations mission for an extended period of time – a period of time unsurpassed in the history of armed conflict and United Nations operations. Whilst Nimmo's military career itself, spanning two world wars, was the preparation that enabled him to be the successful military leader he was, this paper has also identified what are the essential qualities of a leader in a complex contingency operation. The paper has further outlined that whilst the modern day military observer may not be in a position to obtain the experience and preparation that history granted Nimmo, the aspiring commander can adopt a proactive approach in developing their leadership skills. Finally, this paper has demonstrated that the fundamentals of leadership have not changed remarkably over the past 50 years, but in today's modern arena of smaller regional conflicts and the ever growing presence of the United Nations in observer and peace operations, there is scope to refine these qualities to enhance the leadership qualities of military observers and commanders in United Nations missions.

⁶² Ibid.