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# *Challenges facing the Australian Army's Land Command*

an address<sup>1</sup> to the Institute on 29 July 2008 by

**Major General M. A. Kelly, AO<sup>2</sup>**  
Land Commander Australia



*Land Command, headquartered at Victoria Barracks, Sydney, has commanded the bulk of the Army's conventional land forces since its inception as a functional command in November 1973. Since this time, Field Force Command (as it was known until 1987) and Land Command have been responsible for ensuring Army's conventional forces are trained, equipped, manned and ready to deploy on operations. In this paper, the Land Commander details the contemporary challenges facing the command as it contends with a high operational tempo in a period of strategic uncertainty.*

The appointment of Land Commander Australia carries with it the responsibility for command of over 28,000 soldiers and the requirement to generate conventional ground forces in sufficient time and in proper order to be employed by Headquarters Joint Operations Command (HQJOC) for both national and international operations as directed by the Australian Government.

I will provide you with an update on Land Command, the largest functional command in Army, outline my responsibilities as Land Commander and explain the makeup of this diverse command. I will conclude by outlining some contemporary challenges we face when generating forces.

### **Strategic Setting**

Notwithstanding the recent withdrawal of our Overwatch Battle Group from Southern Iraq, Land Command remains very busy. Since our big commitment into East Timor in 1999, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) has experienced an enduring high operational tempo which has seen some peaks and troughs and also increasingly diverse areas of commitment.

To illustrate this point, at the beginning of 2006 we had a battle group in Southern Iraq on a second rotation and a combat team in Baghdad securing our embassy on its eighth rotation. A special operations task group (SOTG) had been recommitted to operations in Afghanistan and we were in the process of deploying an Army Aviation rotary wing group (RWG), consisting of CH-47 Chinook helicopters, to provide heavy lift support to this force and other coalition forces in that theatre. We also had a humanitarian assistance team, consisting of medical and health specialists and helicopters, supporting the earthquake relief mission in Pakistan. Our presence in East Timor consisted of a small training element with the East Timor Defence Force and a small number of United Nations military observers; and we had a platoon group

supporting the Regional Assistance Mission in Solomon Islands (RAMSI). Back here in Australia we had a large commitment of regular and reserve forces involved in security operations for the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne; and at short notice we sent other force elements to Innisfail to assist with the aftermath of Cyclone Larry. And we thought we were busy!

However, as result of a wave of violence and destruction in Honiara in the Solomon Islands at Easter in 2006, we were required to rapidly deploy a battalion (minus) with helicopter support and other assets to reinforce RAMSI and restore stability there. Then within a month of that event we found ourselves having to rapidly deploy a brigade (minus) with logistic and helicopter support to East Timor to deal with a deteriorating security situation in that new nation. All this was generated from the 3rd Brigade in Townsville at the same time as they were deploying the third rotation of the battle group to Iraq. We also had to deploy a small force to assist with the evacuation of Australian citizens from Lebanon in July, and then later that year, with all these elements still committed, we commenced the deployment of the first Reconstruction Task Force to Afghanistan involving a significant number of Land Command personnel. So by October 2006, the ADF had more than 4,700 personnel deployed on operations; the bulk coming from Land Command.

At present there are approximately 3,300 ADF personnel deployed on operations overseas. Within that total there are approximately 2,200 Land Command personnel deployed as part of formed units or as individuals, in diverse locations and roles ranging from peacekeeping to combat operations in Southern Sudan, the Sinai Peninsular, Israel, Lebanon and Syria, Iraq, the North Arabian Gulf, Afghanistan, East Timor and the Solomon Islands.

In Iraq, the ADF presence continues and a Land Command combat team provides security at the Australian Embassy in Baghdad, as well as individuals serving in staff appointments in the Australian and

<sup>1</sup>Attended by 98 members and guests

<sup>2</sup>E-mail: mark.kelly2@defence.gov.au

Coalition headquarters. In Kuwait, Land Command logisticians and communicators provide the force-level logistic and communications capability that services all ADF elements in the Middle East Area of Operations throughout Iraq, the north Arabian Gulf and Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, the Reconstruction Task Force in Oruzgan will shortly complete its fourth rotation. On conclusion of its mission, it will be replaced by a Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force (MTRF), which will have the additional task to mentor and train the Afghan National Army. The MTRF is being built around an infantry battalion, with cavalry providing protection. Engineers will remain a significant element and will continue their reconstruction and trade training tasks unabated.

Land Command soldiers continue to fill a variety of specialist roles in the SOTG and our CH-47 RWG continues to make a significant contribution to aviation support to coalition operations throughout Regional Command (South).

In East Timor, the ADF continues to provide an enduring security presence as well as a training team to help the East Timorese build a professional defence force. The bulk of our contribution is an Australian battalion group supported by an aviation element and combat service support. While the security situation in East Timor has again stabilised, the ADF is likely to remain committed there in some capacity for some time.

In the Solomon Islands, the situation remains calm at present but vigilance by the assistance mission, which is led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, will be required for some time. Army's 2<sup>nd</sup> Division is providing Army's support to this mission and this consists of an Army Reserve rifle company plus headquarters elements deployed as the core of the military component of the overall mission. It is a great demonstration of the capability we are generating from the Army Reserve today.

Back here in Australia, we also have Regional Force Surveillance Unit surveillance patrols involved in national border security operations and teams from regular and reserve units are embarked on Royal Australian Navy vessels supplementing naval boarding parties.

With 2006 as a recent example, Land Command remains postured to respond to any unforeseen contingencies and ready to deploy any force elements should the Australian Government decide to commit them in areas of conflict, instability or humanitarian disaster.

### **Mission and Roles of Land Command**

My mission from the Chief of Army (CA) is straight forward. It is *'to prepare, deliver and remediate land capabilities in order to provide Force Elements (FE) at readiness'*. My specified tasks are:

- the command and preparedness of Land Command force elements,
- the management of the combat forces,
- contributing to development of policy, plans and doctrine,
- contribute effective land force advice for joint planning, and

- be the *force generator* for CA – CA being the *force provider* to Joint Operations Command (JOC), *the end user*.

My mission can be distilled into one primary task, *force generation of conventional land capabilities that are ready, well trained and equipped for operations*. This task of force generation is all encompassing. It includes ensuring the units have the personnel, facilities, training, doctrine, command and management, supplies, systems and equipments – the key elements of any capability – so that they are ready for operations. It is a continuous cycle. As I prepare and certify units for operations my other responsibility is to remediate them on their return. This includes ensuring personnel are rested and given appropriate respite from the stresses of operations and being absent from home. Equipment is also repaired, restored or replaced as necessary, operational lessons are learned and training and doctrine adjusted accordingly. It is this remediation of units and preparing personnel for follow-on deployments that presents one of my most significant challenges, particularly during periods of high operational tempo.

### **Land Command Snapshot**

I would now like to provide you with a quick snapshot of Land Command, which is made up of 28,000 personnel, 85 regular and reserve units, over 500 armoured fighting vehicles, and 70 aircraft. Its principal formations are the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions, 16<sup>th</sup> Aviation Brigade, 17<sup>th</sup> Combat Service Support Brigade, the Combat Training Centre, and Land Command Support Group – which includes the three Regional Force Surveillance Units (RFSU) – NORFORCE, 51<sup>st</sup> Far North Queensland Regiment and The Pilbara Regiment – and other specialist units.

Recent changes to the structure of Land Command have been: the re-titling of 17<sup>th</sup> Combat Service Support Brigade from the Logistic Support Force (LSF); the raising of 6<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment in March this year – comprising a squadron of Blackhawk helicopters and a squadron of Kingair B350 fixed-wing aircraft; the transfer of several Land Command direct command units – 1<sup>st</sup> Intelligence Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Signals Regiment, 16<sup>th</sup> Air Defence Regiment and 6<sup>th</sup> Engineer Support Regiment – to 1<sup>st</sup> Division; and the rationalisation of 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and its reserve formations to include 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Queensland, and University Regiments moving to under command of each regional Brigade. It also includes the re-titling of the Defence Force Support Unit as 39<sup>th</sup> Personnel Support Battalion (39PSB) – in honour of the famous militia battalion that withstood the initial Japanese onslaught on the Kokoda track in July-August 1942. 39PSB conducts individual force preparation for all ADF personnel deploying overseas on operations and in 2007 it trained 10,500 personnel. Additionally, our training detachment at Butterworth, Malaysia, was renamed 2/30<sup>th</sup> Training Group in honour of the 2/30<sup>th</sup> Battalion that conducted a large-scale, successful ambush of Japanese forces on the Malay Peninsula at Gemas in January 1942.

As we look at the Land Command organisation I would like to emphasise three key points.

The first is that Land Command is an integrated Command in which both the regular and reserve components are expected to be ready and capable of contributing to operational capability. While, the regular elements of the force remain at a higher degree of readiness, the reserve component, in particular the formations and units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, provide capabilities that augment the regular force or, as in the case of RAMSI, relieve the regular force of certain tasks. The provision of the rifle company group to the Solomon Islands and a rifle company on rotation to Butterworth from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and the deployment of countless Land Command reserve personnel to round out staff positions and specialist roles in operational areas, are critical to my ability to generate forces for CA. A special mention also needs to be made of our reserve medical professionals who provide the high-end medical specialisations which are the only way we can sustain a surgical capability in Army.

The second point I would like to highlight is the role of the Combat Training Centre (CTC). As Land Commander, I am responsible to ensure that focused, tough and realistic collective training is occurring and that capabilities are being exercised and developed. While the bulk of collective training occurs in Land Command formations and units, CTC is used by me to validate and measure the actual capabilities of selected force elements at combat team and battle group level as well as brigade headquarters. Through the conduct of realistic and intense live field exercises and constructive command post exercises, which include simulation and performance data capture, CTC is able to quantify the capabilities of the force element being trained and evaluated.

A CTC rotation provides commanders at all levels with a “warts and all” assessment of their unit's performance. CTC is an important force-level asset and is one of my key tools for measuring capability across the command and for honing collective warfighting skills as well as conducting realistic mission rehearsal exercises to assist with the preparation and certification of force elements about to deploy on operations.

The final point I would make is that Land Command is a functional command where force level capabilities, such as 16<sup>th</sup> Aviation Brigade and 17<sup>th</sup> Combat Service Support Brigade, are aggregated with the tactical combat capabilities of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions. The ability to aggregate this combat power facilitates my ability to conduct realistic collective training and to task, organise and prepare combined arms teams for deployment on operations and other contingencies. *This is my core business.* As the functional commander with responsibility for all conventional land combat capabilities, I provide a ‘one-stop’ shop for CA when he is asked by the Chief of the Defence Force to provide forces to HQ JOC for operations.

### **Force Generation – Land Command's role and relations with HQJOC**

I will now explain my key task of force generation in more detail. The establishment and subsequent evolution

of HQJOC from early 2007 has led to some significant changes within Land Command, particularly within my headquarters. From March 2007, Land Headquarters (LHQ) ceased being the Land Component of HQJOC and also relinquished command and control of a number of minor regional and non-regional peacekeeping and peace support operations.

Despite these adjustments, my role as CA's principal force generator has remained unchanged. At the same time, the operational tempo has remained high and demands on Land Command formations to provide units and personnel for operations have continued.

My primary task during this period has been to ensure that Land Command remains focused on its main effort of preparing for operations and that the command provides capable, balanced forces when called upon to deploy them. Throughout this period, I have emphasised to HQJOC that force generation is the business of Land Command and that I am best placed to determine the detailed composition of any land force required, and also best placed to prepare and certify that force as ready for operations.

### **Principles of Force Generation**

We have refined our thinking about what force generation means, and have distilled these thoughts into four principles.

#### *Principle No. 1*

*To have informed force preparation that ensures force elements are 'fit for purpose' as defined, while allowing broader raise, train, sustain efforts to progress.*

The first principle articulates the requirement that before Land Command prepares a force for deployment, clear guidance from HQJOC is required as to the nature of the deployment, likely tasks and other strategic guidance that may impact on the preparation of the force. The provision of this ‘force design guidance’ ensures Land Command can prepare force elements that are ‘fit for purpose’ as efficiently as possible without impeding the preparation and training of other elements within the Command.

#### *Principle No. 2*

*To get the right force, in the right place at the right time and for not a day more than needed.*

The second principle is self-evident but is particularly important given the high operational tempo and demands on our soldiers. With many Land Command soldiers having deployed three and four times in recent years to a number of theatres, it is essential that the force preparation, deployment and re-deployment cycle is as efficient as possible with soldiers spending the minimal time away from home.

#### *Principle No. 3*

*The absolute need for precise and collegiate planning from the outset between Force Employer (JOC) and the Force Provider (and thus Force Generator) to save time and reduce nugatory staff effort.*

The third principle underscores the need for a

collegiate and cooperative approach to planning. A key to this is a clear understanding of responsibilities and tasks in order to minimise duplication. We have achieved some success here with the use of a 'vertical planning slice' involving staff from HQJOC, LHQ and respective formations used during operational planning evolutions earlier this year.

**Principle No. 4**

*The absolute need to generate 'informed' follow-on forces and to 'adapt' already deployed forces informed by dynamic requirements as fast as possible through a mandated system of review and modification.*

The final principle highlights the need for a formal, mandated system of capturing lessons learned from forces already deployed in order to better prepare follow-on forces still in the force preparation training cycle. As Land Commander, I am responsible for ensuring this 'short learning loop' is energised and effective and we continue to be engaged with HQJOC and deployed force elements to ensure Land Command gets access to relevant operational correspondence dealing with lessons learned.

**Force Generation – a graphic depiction**

The relevance of the above principles can be made clear by depicting the force generation cycle graphically.

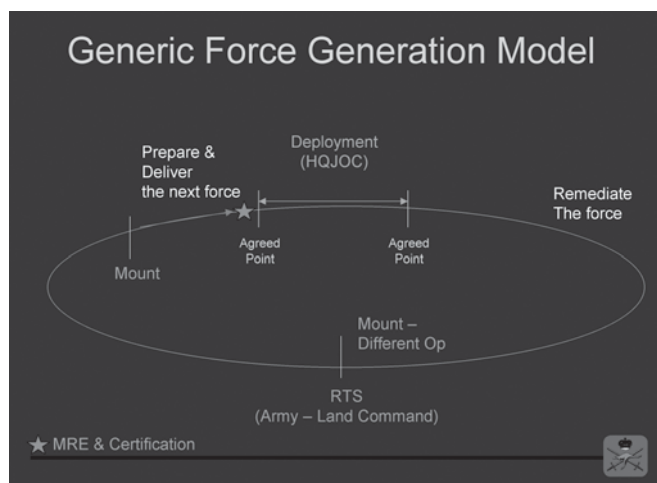


Figure 1: Generic force generation model [MRE = mission rehearsal exercise; RTS = raise, train, sustain]

Figure 1 illustrates the challenges of force generation and the importance of the principles just described. It depicts a single force generation cycle. An individual or unit will be engaged in a routine cycle of training and will be warned for an operation. Planning will occur at this time and a reconnaissance conducted. At an appropriate time, the force to be deployed will concentrate and begin force preparation training specific to the assigned mission. At an 'agreed point', this force will be certified by Land Command and assigned to HQJOC. The force will then deploy on operations. On conclusion of the operation, the force will return to Australia and, at an 'agreed point', will be formally handed back to Land Command by HQJOC. This will occur soon after returning to Australia. At this 'agreed point', Land Command is provided a full account of the personnel, equipment and

logistic issues relevant to the force. From this point on, Land Command commences the remediation of the force prior to its regeneration for a subsequent operation or other tasks. During this remediation phase, soldiers take leave, attend career courses, equipment undergoes deep maintenance and the unit resumes a normal annual training cycle. As Land Commander, I am directed to ensure that all Land Command soldiers get at least a 12-month respite between operations during this remediation period.

It will be evident from Figure 1 that, while Land Command is focused on preparing force elements for operations, in any given force generation cycle the force element spends only a small portion of the cycle on operations under command of HQJOC. The bulk of the time is spent in Land Command. The graphic emphasises the point that while success on operations remains the objective of all stakeholders, the majority of the effort to achieve this success occurs within Land Command.

If you consider the need to prepare follow-on rotations, you will appreciate that there will be other units focused on preparing for the same mission that will be at different phases of this force generation cycle. If you consider this model is for only one operation and that Land Command is currently preparing forces to deploy to Iraq, Afghanistan, East Timor and the Solomon Islands as well as a range of smaller tasks, such as providing a task force to support the recent World Youth Day, then you gain an understanding of the pressures Land Command faces when generating ready force elements.

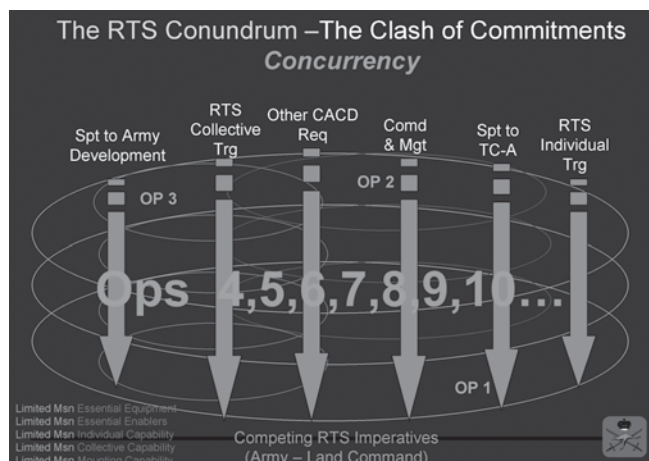


Figure 2: The raise, train, sustain conundrum [RTS = raise, train, sustain; CACD = Chief of Army Capability Directive; TC-A = Training Command-Army]

The requirement to balance these competing commitments and to prepare multiple rotations for multiple operations while maintaining regular Land Command activities such as collective training, individual training and capability development, is what we call the 'raise, train, sustain conundrum' (Figure 2). It must be remembered that while identified individuals and units are prepared for operations and are remediated on their return, the requirement to maintain units at readiness for other contingencies in accordance with the CA's capability directive, as well as conducting both individual and collective training, and participating in international

engagement activities, remains extant. With these competing demands, conducting meaningful collective training to maintain baseline warfighting skills and generating force elements to participate in large combined and joint exercises, such as Talisman Sabre and Swift Eagle, presents a challenge.

### **Informed Force Generation & Force Adaptation – learning lessons**

Another area which required attention was our capacity to learn operational lessons quickly. In order to ensure that Land Command provides 'fit for purpose' forces at the 'agreed point', we must make sure that force preparation is informed by tactical and other developments within any force element – in particular those that are already deployed. This has presented some challenges on occasions. Lessons learned were not readily flowing back in a formal sense to the force generators, and post operational reports were being received too late.

To achieve timely force adaptation, lessons from the operating environments need to enter Land Command in a time frame that allows us to alter the preparation of the deploying forces and, most desirably fast enough to also allow adaptation within the deployed force. This has now been facilitated through an 'enhanced mandated technical lessons learned' methodology which supports adaptive force generation. To achieve this, Land Command conducts a 'force generation lessons learned board' designed to harvest all lessons learned and apply them directly to adaptive force preparation. We now have the system in place to generate 'informed' follow-on forces as well as the capacity to 'adapt' our deployed forces through this mandated system of review and modification.

### **Tackling the Challenge of Force Generation**

Notwithstanding the demands of known commitments and a known force structure, strategies have been developed that allow Land Command to generate the required force elements without compromising collective capabilities and the readiness of the other units and formations. These strategies are easing the stress on an already busy command and provide opportunity for soldiers to spend more time with their families and assist in managing the demands on Land Command units and formations.

The first initiative is the adjustment to an eight-month rotation cycle for all formed units for deployment. While the addition of two months to the deployment of Land Command force elements provides the deployed force more effective time in the area of operations, it does represent an additional burden for soldiers whilst deployed and for their families. However, soldiers will now get a longer respite period between operational tours which will allow more time to complete leave, career courses and also achieve a more robust unit training cycle aimed at maintaining our baseline war fighting skills. This slightly longer deployment means that, for any given operation, Land Command now has to generate three rotations every two years rather than four. This relieves

pressure on all Land Command force elements and other key enablers and also provides more opportunity to conduct meaningful collective training.

The other initiative which has been very successful is the increasing involvement of our reserve capability to provide individuals, small teams and sub-units for operational service. I have already mentioned the more notable examples where reserve soldiers and units from Land Command are making significant contributions to operations and emphasised how these contributions assist in easing the operational tempo on our regular units. With appropriate warning, our reserve units are capable of supporting a number of our operational commitments both domestically and overseas. There is a strong operational focus within 2<sup>nd</sup> Division which is very positive.

### **Development – growing the force and introducing new capabilities**

While Army is busy on operations, it is also busy growing new capabilities – in terms of units, size and equipment. The 'Hardened and Networked Army' (HNA) and 'Enhanced Land Force'(ELF) initiatives are having a significant impact across Land Command as the Army is required to grow by 20 per cent by 2016. Both initiatives promise to deliver new capability and a larger, harder-hitting Land Force. However, introducing these new capabilities and ensuring that the raising of new units and trialling of new equipment, tactics, techniques and procedures occurs smoothly, without compromising the already busy force generation cycles within Land Command formations, is a significant challenge. But it is a great challenge to have. The new capabilities currently being realised within Land Command include:

- raising 2/14<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment (Queensland Mounted Infantry) (2/14 LHR) as a second cavalry regiment;
- M1 A1 Abrams main battle tank (MBT);
- raising two additional infantry battalions – 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Battalions, Royal Australian Regiment;
- tactical unarmed aerial vehicle;
- Tiger armed reconnaissance helicopters (ARH);
- multi-role helicopters; and
- increased nuclear and chemical warfare capabilities.

These capabilities are critical to Army's future success on the modern battlefield and they will shape the way we fight for the next half century. While the additional rifle companies and cavalry squadrons will improve our ability to deploy a force that is sustainable, the addition of the high-end warfighting capabilities, such as the MBT and ARH, will significantly boost the combat power of any given battle group and increase the force protection available to our soldiers. The challenge for me is to ensure these capabilities are integrated correctly so the full capability of these weapon systems is realised and that they can be 'force generated' as a complete capability when required.

The deployment of 2/14 LHR to Southern Iraq as our last Overwatch Battle Group from November 2007 to June 2008, exemplifies the success Land Command has had in raising a capability and deploying it on operations and is a notable achievement of the HNA initiative.

## Conclusion

It remains a challenging but exciting time to be the Land Commander. If you consider the enduring operational tempo, and the demands of the HNA and ELF initiatives, you will appreciate the activity levels within the Command. That Land Command can continue to deliver its key responsibility of force generation throughout this period is due to the efforts of all personnel within Army's largest functional command, but especially my subordinate commanders. Army's capacity to be able to respond so effectively to the spike in operational commitments since early 2006 is due to Land Command being the single point of contact for the force generation of all conventional land forces.

Our soldiers remain a constant source of inspiration to me as Land Commander and their performance on operations has been remarkable. They are serving under extreme climatic conditions in a high threat environment and are confronted routinely by an adaptive enemy and hostile situations. However, I am continually impressed by their ability to make the right decisions and capacity to act with aggression when required, but also with great compassion. Our achievements are mostly a reflection of our soldiers'

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character, competence and discipline. These traits have been acquired and refined through rigorous individual and collective training. It remains my task to ensure that the training and force preparation as part of Land Command's force generation cycle continues to evolve to ensure our ongoing success.

**The Author:** Major General Mark Kelly, Land Commander since July 2005, graduated from the Royal Military College in 1978 into the Royal Australian Infantry Corps. He has commanded at every level in the Australian Army, including 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment; 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade; 1<sup>st</sup> Division; and Land Command; in addition to completing a range of regimental, training and staff appointments. His operational service includes: Commonwealth Monitoring Force in Zimbabwe/Rhodesia, 1979/80; Chief of Staff, International Force in East Timor, 1999/2000; and planning staff, United States Central Command, Middle East, 2003/04. He was elevated to Officer in the Military Division of the Order of Australia in 2008, having previously been appointed a Member of the Order; and was awarded the United States Legion of Merit (Degree of Officer) in 2004.