

Commander Field Army Interview Dec 19

[00:00:00] **Wavell Room:** [00:00:00] The Wavell room was started over a cup of coffee and a brew queue in, the joint staff college in Shrivenham. And a common experience for people across the military is queuing to get tea or coffee, whether they're in the army, air force, or Navy. So when you cue up which queue do you join, do you go for tea, or do you get coffee? And then what's the most memorable brew you've had in your time serving

Lieutenant General Ivan Jones: [00:00:28] I was a tea drinker for, for most of my life, until about five years ago when I converted to coffee when I was so fed up with the appalling cups of tea that I got in coffee houses in London that I decided I need to move to, to coffee.

So I, I now drink both, but if I were queuing up, I would probably go for coffee. Now if I were making it myself, it'll be a cup of tea. The most memorable, most memorable would be a brew, a tea, a chai. And for me, that would have [00:01:00] been in early 2002 in, in Afghanistan on the border with Pakistan. And, and I was there with a small team and on this hillside drinking chai, listening to some stories of, of what the Mujahideen were doing with the Russians about 15 years before. And that was, for me, such an evocative moment it, it was everything that I dreamed the army would be when I was a young boy and has stuck with me, I think ever since. So I think that would be my most memorable moment, but I think some of the best moments I have.

As a commander at any level, have been those moments when you've got a brew in your hand, when you're on the vehicle park or you're on the training area and you're chatting to soldiers and you're getting a real sense of what is going on. Because I find out so much more that way than I ever do from a command group as a CO or even as CFA.

Wavell Room: [00:01:57] So lots of our listeners will have read your [00:02:00] bio. They've probably been in staff college or been in the junior staff center and been addressed by you at various talks. There will probably be a fair few people listening who've had to nervously introduce you at points, quickly going through your, your, your back history.

But I think what people would like to know is, is what is it like from your perspective, what is it like to be commander, field, army, and then how do you lead an army? What is it like to command the British army?

Lieutenant General Ivan Jones: [00:02:30] It's, it's, it's a genuine honor and a privilege. It's, it's also in, in some respects, quite daunting.

It's quite daunting because there is nobody else to look at and to blame anymore. It is me looking in the mirror and questioning myself as to whether I've made the right decisions, come to the right conclusions, listen to the, the right advice. But it's also exciting because it's an opportunity for me to give [00:03:00] back something to an organization that has given so much to me, whether that be the individuals that have affected me or influenced me throughout my career from, from, Mick Wallace, my first staff Sergeant, Gaz Battery, Gordy Greenwood, you know who, who, who were early section

giving something back to those characters and, and the others across the army is, is I think a huge opportunity that I have as Commander Field Army.

Wavell Room: [00:03:28] How does it change? How does leadership change between peace and war and do you see yourself leading in a different manner? If the British Army was to go to war.

Lieutenant General Ivan Jones: [00:03:40] I don't think it does. I don't think it does. And I think perhaps some of the challenges we've had, if you look back over conflict. As you see commanders struggling in warfare is that perhaps their command style in barracks is not the right sort of command style in warfare.

I [00:04:00] think if you want to understand great leadership that spans both barracks and battlefield read, Bill Slim's defeat into victory. That is about having the ability to bridge the strategic intent down into the tactical reality of what you are doing on the ground. But to do that with a genuine compassion and insight and an understanding of what that means to your soldiers.

And to do that, you've got to connect physically with strategic leadership, but also connect with the soldiers you command.

Wavell Room: [00:04:31] I think we'll, we'll move on now sir to talk about, we're gonna start by talking about people. So we've had a lot of questions submitted by our, by our listeners, our readers. I'd like to start by talking about retention.

How do we keep the people that we have?

Lieutenant General Ivan Jones: [00:04:46] We've got to create an environment where people want to stay and that sounds really simple, but I, I'm not sure we really understand what that means. And if I [00:05:00] could draw a really simple analogy between ourselves and the reserves. Our reserve commanders have to create an environment within their units where their soldiers come into work at the end of a working day or at the end of a working week or spend their two weeks summer holiday, putting on our uniform.

That requires you to do two things. One, deliver military capability, but to create an environment where those people want to come and serve. I think we can often neglect the latter of those with an overemphasis on the former. So I think it's up to commanders at every level to look at how they balance that ability to deliver world class war fighting capability.

But do it in a way that makes people want to stay. And at the very heart of that is creating an environment where our people do feel included, do feel empowered, where they can be themselves, where [00:06:00] they can challenge, where they can innovate and ultimately fulfill their potential. I think that's what it feels like for me.

So, so that's the lived experience. But if I was to talk about, you know, the hard reality of retention in the army at the moment. Statistically we are within the norms of retention that we've had over the past 25 years. We're towards the upper edge of those norms, but we're,

we're within normal variance. I think the challenge that we face is that recruiting group and, and home command and capita have had such a successful year this year in turning around recruiting I think this year we should hit our full targets of those that we're recruiting. So we're now seeing an up arrow in terms of recruiting. And so because our numbers are still dropping with the army, there was assumption that now the problem, because [00:07:00] we live in a binary world, don't we?

The problem must now be retention. We're losing more people. The reality is that all of the hard work to bring people in, to bring new recruits into the, into the army. Those won't be felt in the field army due to the training pipeline for another year to 18 months. So we won't start to see that leveling out.

and that growth again of the army for another year, I think to 16 to 18 months. So, so there isn't a retention problem, but I'm absolutely not complacent because at the heart of this, for me, far bigger than retention is creating a field army in which people want to serve, in which they want to belong in which they want to remain.

That's the overriding issue for me.

Wavell Room: [00:07:49] We're on the Eve of the new recruiting campaign launching. So talks about how we, keeping people we have, how do we entice the right people

Lieutenant General Ivan Jones: [00:07:58] As we're on [00:08:00] the Eve of the new recruiting campaign I'll, I'll start by just reflecting on, on the last one, because it came in for quite a lot of criticism, from some within, but many that have, have have left.

And I think there was a misunderstanding of what we were trying to do. What we were seeking to do was target that vast array of people outside who perhaps haven't considered the military as a career. It's a really easy job to recruit those that want to join the army. The real challenge and the real opportunity is the many thousands that haven't considered it as a career.

And, and I'm still doing it after 30 years. And I passionately believe that we offer a great opportunity. For social mobility, for social opportunity to help develop and educate people and allow them to feel that the [00:09:00] potential in a way that perhaps they wouldn't in other walks of, in, in other walks of life.

So as I look towards this new recruiting campaign, which I think builds upon the last, campaign, develops it further, I think this idea of confidence of not just a single shot hit. On a game or on a trip or on a visit, something captured on Instagram, but something that gives you experiences for life and most of all confidence and self belief that lasts a lifetime, that takes you into whatever walk of life you want to go into beyond the army, even if you don't wish to stay.

I think for me, it's a really powerful message and one that I certainly believe in.

Wavell Room: [00:09:40] So we'll move on to talking about training. Now. General Carter talks an awful lot about training as surrogate warfare. Does the army do that?

Lieutenant General Ivan Jones: [00:09:49] Traditionally, we haven't. I think traditionally we've been quite parochial, quite insular in the way that we have viewed our training.

I think this idea of, of, [00:10:00] of, of looking at how training in acts as a surrogate in terms of the way it inculcates that feeling of being on operations. Coupled with the way in which you train to have an operational effect is really important. And if I take our recent deployment equipment rotation to Estonia, I think that for me is a great example of what surrogacy in terms of warfare and training can look and feel like what was in effect a kit rotation. for a change of radios. They came a full operation with information operations wrapped around it and the UK demonstrating that from the mainland, from our storage in in ashchurch and in Bulford. We could force project across the channel and across six countries within Europe all the way towards NATO's Eastern flank.

That was an exercise that [00:11:00] had real operational effect. So how do we now start to look at other exercises that we do in the context of the NATO Alliance and other bilateral trilateral relationships, and how we look at those exercises in terms of the effect we have upon our adversary and the value that they have in inculcating that warrior spirit within our soldiers.

I think those are absolutely crucial to what we're doing today. And in the immediate future.

Wavell Room: [00:11:24] We get the balance rights between, Live training and simulator training. An awful lot of our training is simulated. Are we missing an opportunity to excise frictions?

Lieutenant General Ivan Jones: [00:11:37] I don't know what the balance looks like. I think there's a, there's a great bit of work here to do that understands the various stimulus that you need at the command level and at the soldier level, at the fighting level and, and how you get that balance between live, virtual and constructive. Right. I don't think we know that. I think where we are [00:12:00] today is just a natural evolution from an army that without simulation, did everything live to one that has grasped gradually over time, more and more simulation. But in terms of the effects that it has on optimizing the war fighting capability of our soldiers. I don't think we know what that, that balance is in terms of the question itself. I think there's, there's always, I think for soldiers, this, this, this natural inclination to revert back to the, the only way to do it is, is live and and I think there, there is a component there that is absolutely right.

But also a component which life does not give you the realities of the, the sort of challenges that simulation perhaps can. Simulation can offer probably far more challenges to a command headquarters at a divisional and brigade level [00:13:00] than you could ever really apply in the field. But that simulation doesn't offer the right effect for our soldiers.

So then we need to operate life for our soldiers. But if you privilege that live, at the command level as we do in batters, that experience for the soldiers sitting in a warrior for eight hours can be quite unfulfilling for 30 minute assault at the end, even less with the link if you happen to be the reserve company within that battle group.

large degree, bringing together some of those complexities at the battle group level, within a brigade context. But I think as we see more and more simulation manifesting itself in the commercial market. I think we can really push the boundaries of what we are able to do. We could move to operating a battle group or brigade level in an [00:14:00] urban environment in a simulated world. And companies like improbable have the ability to demonstrate and deliver some of that capability now.

So I think, I think there are opportunities now going forward through the embracing of, of, of simulation, beyond what we might understand that the command the tactical trainer down in Warminster that I think could fundamentally change the way we think about war-fighting, particularly within the urban environment so more to do

Wavell Room: [00:14:29] Let's move on. Let's move on to warfare development. This is a broad question. So what is the Army for?

Lieutenant General Ivan Jones: [00:14:38] What is the army for? That's an interesting one. I wonder how many of our soldiers and officers are lying in there to staring at the ceiling at night reflecting on what the army is, is for.

Ultimately, it is about defending the nation, I think. I think that's, that's the headline, but if I could, I'll [00:15:00] break it into three, three components. I think it is about protecting our people. That this, I think everybody understands protection of our people at home and overseas, and I think by extension of people, I think UK interests at home and, and overseas.

I think secondly, it's about projecting our influence, our influence as an army. How we support other nations, how we influence our allies and support our allies. But how we project influences a nation. The military lever is a lever of power alongside the economic and the diplomatic leavers. And therefore, how that is used to support political ends is absolutely key.

So projecting our influence, I think is, is, is, is second. And then thirdly, how we promote prosperity. And by the promotion of prosperity, I, I don't just mean our ability to [00:16:00] sell Ajax overseas. I mean, how do we as an army through the way we innovate and adapt, connect better with. The defense and tech sectors within the UK and start to drive technology forward in support, in support of the army, but also mean in terms of prosperity.

Yeah. How we continue to do the sorts of things we're doing. And supportive the United nations and other national objectives overseas at the moment, promoting prosperity by delivering stability to parts of the world, whether that be in South Sudan as we're doing at the moment or soon to be Mali next year, or the various defense engagement tasks that we're, we're doing around the world to help develop the, the sort of security architecture and the the, the defense capability of, of, of nations that need our support. So I think when I say promoting prosperity, I'm talking about that not just in terms of sales, but in terms of delivering [00:17:00] stability around the world.

Wavell Room: [00:17:01] Innovating and that driving change forward because that's something that's probably easier for the army to, or there would be more examples of an army pushing change forward during the war. Say look at all of

during the second world war technology being pushed forward. Do you think it's possible to do that during peace time? Is that is the drive we need that to come up with those changes to come up with those new bits of technology that seems to be there when we haven't had to start to fight against. But when we don't, it's easy to slip into a what we've got will work.

Lieutenant General Ivan Jones: [00:17:35] Of course, it's possible. I think that the premise of your question is right and that is when there is an imperative to change. You change. And when there is not. You're happy carrying on with the status quo. And it's, it's interesting seeing how, you know, not just through the military, but how strategic economic shocks change business change industry [00:18:00] and it's interesting that as we saw that economic shock, commencing in around 2009 and the fundamental changes that brought around in business. We, as an army continued as we were. It didn't affect us in the same way. So we have to work out how we create those stimuluses for the army. How do we drive that, that innovation, and I think for me, that comes from the two ends of our organization.

It's got to come from me from the top down. I've got to create an environment where people feel that they have the freedom to innovate. They have the resources to innovate. and it also has to come, I think from the bottom. That's where our, our youngest most innovative, soldiers are. They. They, they're not affected by a learned behavior that great institutions sort of impose gradually over time upon people.

So I, as I go around the army, I'm seeing some, some great [00:19:00] innovation, just, you know, just in Scotland recently walking into a battle group headquarters and chatting to the brigade commander, the CO and all of his senior staff. And at the end of this queue was a young corporal. Who was the only one to brief me and brief me brilliantly on the work that he was leading on behalf of 3 SCOTS to drive forward infrastructure, communications and power for light role infantry.

To see that innovation happening at that lower level for me is, is really exciting. So it's, it's how I create the environment in terms of culture and in terms of resources and and I know that the innovation fund that we've set up that allocates every commanding officer 15,000 pounds to spend as they see fit on innovation, has already started to drive some of that and, and I think as of now, this [00:20:00] year, we've spent a million of what was a, a 3 million pot, and that was with only part of the year so far completed. And what I see when I go around and visit the units is some really excellent use of that money. So, so it's, it's about what I do from the top down and then how I connect that to the bottom up.

Perhaps the challenge, and perhaps here's the challenge to some of the listeners to this podcast is, is are the blockers in the middle? Is it those people that are comfortable with the institution that have got to where they've gotten to. Because of the nature of our organization, because of the status quo. Are they the blockers? If they are, I think they need to look up and down. If they're not, then they need to help us join things forward because that innovative culture will be absolutely crucial when we go to war. Because I guarantee as in every conflict that we've ever taken part in. [00:21:00] we will not quite

defining our success. That requires people who are comfortable with innovating and experimenting and thinking.

Wavell Room: [00:21:18] So some of our potential adversaries have significant deep capabilities.

We also have those, how do we synchronize those? How does the army synchronize those two best effect?

Lieutenant General Ivan Jones: [00:21:34] We do have those capabilities. But all are under invested and were outgunned and out range. That's, that's a harsh reality and I don't think we should shy away from that. but it's, it's not just about an underinvestment in equipment. I think we've under invested in terms of training as well. I don't think we have truly exercised our deep capability, whether that be kinetic [00:22:00] or non-kinetic.

We, we, if I take artillery, we penny packet that into batteries and sized groupings to support battle group level exercises. Yet we would never employ artillery in that way and if, if the deep fight is the first fight that we will have with a peer adversary at the moment, we're privileging everything the second fight, which is likely to be the close one, I think we've got to rebalance that.

So next year we will have a large regimental exercise on Salisbury plane, which will build to an artillery exercise in Canada in 2021 and I'm looking now to build that beyond just an offensive support group in terms of artillery fires to one that brings in a broader array of fires, but then starts to wrap in some of the softer, deep non-kinetic effects such as cyber, electronic warfare, and perhaps even specialised infantry as well.

So, so [00:23:00] the next couple of years, I think we will see a rebalancing to help us understand how we can better use our deep capability in it's, it's broadest sense. That would be unfair of me to imply that we are doing nothing. And if you look at the warfighter exercises over recent years, which the third division has led on, we have seen what is now sixth division providing a divisional information maneuver group, which provides all of the intelligence, counter intelligence, cyber, electronic warfare, information operations support.

To the division and that has been building up over the past three years, our insights, our understandings of what that can bring to the divisional level of warfare, and also as we raise it up in support of the ARRC, the core level of, of warfare. What is fascinating as the US start to talk about multi-domain operations is that they don't have anything that looks like our sixth division.

[00:24:00] And so they're looking very closely at how we're conducting our warfare development in the sort of soft and non-kinetic deep and how we blend that together in a more comprehensive way. So I think in terms of warfare, this part of our capability, I think we're, we're leading the way.

Wavell Room: [00:24:18] And what about assets such as the strike experimentation group? How, how do they fit into that? How do you see those fitting into that.

Lieutenant General Ivan Jones: [00:24:28] The, I mean, the like experimentation group, it's, it's one brigade, it's James Martin and, and his brigade. And what James has done and what Zac did before him, I think is really exciting because it's not just taken this idea of a strike brigade and how it fits into a division forward.

It's also started to help us think about how we might operate in a more dispersed way on future battlefields, whether that be in the rural [00:25:00] or in the urban environment and as I look forward to the year ahead, we will be exercising the strike concept as a deeper asset in support of US deep fires capability.

Because again, this is something that the US don't have. So I think, I think, yes, we have this initial idea of strike, the ability to have a maneuver formation that can disperse to provide protection and come together to deliver mass and, and effect. But I think it's really opening our eyes to what what, what a brigade might do to fight on a disperse battlefield in the, in the, in the, the urban and the rural.

And, and I say the urban, because we, we, we, we tend to look at how we fight in a very contiguous way. We might talk about the multidimensionality above ground and above floors. But I'm talking about really separated lines of communication where our focus is less so on geography and more so on the enemy and the effects we're [00:26:00] trying to achieve amongst the population & that's coming from some of the experimentation that they're doing.

So beyond that little, that, beyond that idea of strike, I think we're thinking very differently about dispersed warfare as well.

Wavell Room: [00:26:14] Another organization you have that say is used to operating beyond the normal ground lines of communication with your air maneuver assets, 16 brigade specifically, do you see those working together?

Do you see those working in the deep together or do you see those as very different parts?

Lieutenant General Ivan Jones: [00:26:33] I think you've done well to wait this long as a parachute regiment officer to get to a question on 16 air assault brigade. So I commend you on that.

Wavell Room: [00:26:40] I thought it was going to sneak in and without but I stumbled on that.

Lieutenant General Ivan Jones: [00:26:45] I was expecting it to come just after the, what's your, what's your favorite brew, I think, I think we've, we've got to look at, as with. I think all of our capability, the breadth of utility the tip brings, so [00:27:00] from the soft effects that they're providing in support of, let's say. And the quick reaction forces in, in Jordan and the superb work they've done there over the past three years to help to develop that capability through to the global response force that they provide nationally for us unilaterally or alongside the US the 82nd airborne or as part of the, the combined joint expeditionary force with the French, or how it docks into a larger divisional or

divisional corps context. How will it fight to give depth and multidimensionality to the way a commander will fight?

Wavell Room: [00:27:48] Sir, thank you very much for your time today and for answering these questions is there anything you'd like to say?

Lieutenant General Ivan Jones: [00:27:53] No just thank you, to the, to the Wavell room and, and to the listeners. [00:28:00] And perhaps you're not the ones I should be talking to. So please pass this on to those that don't listen to these sorts of podcasts just to thank you for what the wave room is doing, it's, I think an important part of the professional military education, providing an environment where people can exchange ideas and thoughts in an open and challenging way. I think that's really crucial to us as an organization, but more broadly the importance of continued professional military education. There is a danger that we can become quite lazy individually and as an institution and I think the only way you will genuinely prevail not just embarrassed, but also on the battlefield, is to continue to develop yourself professionally.

And not just in terms of reading books about the military and of, of, of alpha males and heroes of, of, of yesterday, but also thinking differently about the world in which we live.

So open your, open your mind, think differently, read different things and challenge yourself. So it's, it's been a great opportunity. Thank you very [00:29:00] much indeed.