

1 (2.00 pm)

2 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Good afternoon and welcome.

3 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Thank you.

4 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Opening this session today, we are
5 hearing from Lieutenant General Anthony Palmer and
6 Lieutenant General Sir Alistair Irwin.

7 General Palmer, you were Deputy Chief of Defence
8 Staff and Personnel from 2002-2005. General Irwin, you
9 were Adjutant General from 2003-2005.

10 Now, we heard earlier this week from the
11 DCDS (Personnel) and the Deputy Adjutant General who
12 served during the later period of Operation Telic. As
13 I explained then, timetabling and availability meant it
14 was not possible to arrange the two sessions in
15 chronological sequence. So we are going back in time
16 now.

17 As in that earlier session, our focus will be on
18 military personnel issues, many of which remain of
19 concern to the families of service personnel who died in
20 Iraq or to those who were seriously injured there.

21 We will also, in this session, consider the
22 contribution that the personnel side of the armed forces
23 played in the military planning phase.

24 As the Adjutant General is also responsible for
25 training and development within the army and for

1 promoting the army's values and standards, including for
2 responsibility for the military police and the army
3 legal services, we will also be touching on the question
4 of allegations of ill-treatment of Iraqi civilians.
5 However, we will not be discussing individual cases to
6 avoid prejudicing ongoing litigation.

7 As I say on each occasion, we recognise that
8 witnesses give evidence based on their recollection of
9 events and we, of course, check what we hear against the
10 papers to which we have access and which we are still
11 receiving. I remind every witness on each occasion they
12 will later be asked to sign a transcript of their
13 evidence to the effect that the evidence they have given
14 is truthful, fair and accurate. With those
15 preliminaries done, I will ask Sir Martin Gilbert to
16 open the questions. Martin?

17 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: General Palmer, we heard earlier this
18 week from Vice-Admiral Wilkinson of the role of the
19 Deputy Chief Defence Staff (Personnel). He told us it
20 was to ensure, at the strategic level, that we have the
21 correct personnel policies in place to make sure, as he
22 put it, there are sufficient capable and motivated
23 service personnel available to the Chief of the Defence
24 Staff and government ministers so they can carry out the
25 government's requirements.

1 Does that reflect the nature of the role in your
2 day?

3 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Yes, I think it does. Perhaps
4 I should add in the context of Iraq and the lead-up to
5 it, I thought of myself and my staff as needing to be
6 extremely responsive to issues that arose, both before
7 and during the campaign, in order to develop appropriate
8 policies and that it was very important that those
9 policies should be fair, consistent and enduring.
10 I think that just about sums it up.

11 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: That's very helpful. General Irwin,
12 General Mans, in his meeting with us earlier this week,
13 described the Adjutant General's role as the formulation
14 of personnel policy and ensuring the implementation of
15 that policy.

16 Is that how you saw the role during your time in
17 office?

18 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Yes, it was. The specifics of
19 his role and mine changed over the period of time but,
20 in essence, it was right.

21 Actually, interestingly, when I was thinking about
22 appearing, I looked up, amongst the very small number of
23 personal papers I have, and I found something -- if you
24 will allow me to read it, I think it sort of
25 encapsulates what I thought I was doing and what my

1 people were doing, and I wrote it just as I arrived.

2 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Slow down, please.

3 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: I will try to speak more
4 slowly.

5 I hope it is illuminating. You may think not.

6 I describe my mission and, therefore, my people's
7 mission in these words. If I may read it:

8 "To enhance the operational effectiveness of the
9 British Army's regular reserve and volunteer components
10 by recruiting and training the men and women we need, by
11 carefully managing their careers and by giving sensible
12 and pragmatic policy direction and advice on all
13 personnel issues affecting those who are serving or
14 retiring.

15 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you very much. That's very
16 helpful. Can I ask you, on another issue, what your
17 relationship was with the Defence Medical Services?

18 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Well, in the course of daily
19 business, the relationship was one of liaison and
20 discussing various different kinds of issues, not, of
21 course, all of them, by any means, to do specifically
22 with Iraq. The Director General of Army Medical
23 Services, who was, of course, an army man and all his
24 staff were army people, was under my wing for what you
25 might call administrative and motivational morale

1 purposes and, to some extent at least, they were
2 answerable for their actions to me, but more
3 specifically, they were, in fact, answerable for their
4 actions to the Surgeon General and the defence medical
5 staff and indeed, of course, to the chain of command.

6 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: On another level of relationship, how
7 regularly did you provide advice to ministers and to
8 which particular ministers?

9 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Well, in respect of Iraq,
10 none. At no stage was I asked for advice and at no
11 stage did I feel that there was a need to, because my
12 friend and comrade was sitting there in London and, you
13 know, that was the conduit. That should not be taken to
14 suggest, though, that there was not indirect advice
15 flowing through the normal course of business between me
16 and General Palmer, but also, of course, between our
17 respective staffs.

18 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I will come on to that with regard to
19 General Palmer. So thank you very much.

20 General Palmer, during your time as DCDS (Pers), how
21 did your role and that of the principal personnel
22 officers interact?

23 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Our relationship was a very close
24 one. We discussed all matters of policy. I chaired the
25 Service Personnel Board on which the principal personnel

1 officers sat and, indeed, also the Deputy Chief Defence
2 Staff for Health. So I would say it was regular, close.
3 We didn't always agree, but it was certainly close
4 enough to ensure that the policies that were eventually
5 developed were agreed upon by all three services. There
6 were some major policy issues that were not directly
7 related to Iraq, but certainly tangential.

8 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: With regard to the question I asked
9 General Irwin in terms of your provision of advice to
10 ministers, how did that take place and which particular
11 ministers were you reacting with?

12 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Well, all ministers from the
13 Secretary of State downwards, the Minister for the Armed
14 Forces and Minister for Veterans as well or Minister for
15 Personnel, as he was, I think, at the time.

16 So it was very irregular, and it was quite
17 unpredictable, because issues developed that needed
18 quick responses and ministers need to be briefed on what
19 had occurred and what was going to be the service
20 reaction to that particular occurrence.

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: At what point were you brought into the
22 loop with regard to planning the operation?

23 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Well, right from the beginning.
24 I sat on the Chiefs of Staff Committee which met every
25 single day. So I was intimately involved.

1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Did you have concerns over the time
2 that you had to prepare in terms of the welfare packages
3 and provisions?

4 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Well, yes, because one always
5 wanted to get out a new policy, package or allowance or
6 whatever it was, as quickly as possible, but as I said
7 at the beginning, for me, it was extremely important
8 that the policy we introduced was fair and consistent
9 and enduring, because I think the worst thing for
10 everybody would be for policies to keep having to
11 change.

12 So a considerable amount of intellectual effort from
13 my staff and others, including the principal personnel
14 officers, was involved in trying to be very responsive
15 to what was happening on the ground, but also to ensure,
16 as I said, that we really did give a considerable degree
17 of thought to how we were going to respond
18 appropriately.

19 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I would like to ask about a specific
20 MoD announcement which we have taken evidence on. That
21 was the announcement in March 2003, made on 20 March,
22 that unmarried partners of service personnel killed in
23 operations might be eligible for the equivalent of
24 a widow's pension so long as certain eligibility
25 criteria were met.

1 Can you tell us the background to this rather
2 important change of policy?

3 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Gosh! Well, clearly it has to be
4 seen in the general context of government policy on
5 partners more widely. My own personal view was that we
6 ought to be responding to partnerships in exactly the
7 same way as we should be responding to marriages, and
8 that, of course, eventually became the law.

9 So we were looking for a response which took that
10 into account, and to me, quite clearly, if somebody had
11 been living as a partner, provided it could be proved,
12 and I seem to recall one of the difficulties was to
13 define exactly what a partner was and, as I recollect,
14 it was if there was a joint mortgage on a house or
15 whatever. So, as you can imagine, in the armed forces
16 there are partnerships and partnerships, and some are
17 enduring and really take the place of a marriage and
18 others less so. So this, again, I think is an example
19 of where we had to tread very carefully.

20 Another issue I think was that there was a bit of
21 reluctance within some parts of the armed forces on the
22 partnership issue. It wasn't generally accepted that it
23 was going to be necessarily a good thing to have people
24 who were married and people who were partners, and we
25 are going back eight years now, so obviously the

1 situation has changed since, living on the same married
2 quarter, etc. So there were issues like that.

3 That's why I say that coordination, consultation
4 with the principal personnel officers and, of course,
5 with ministers on this issue, and sometimes other
6 government departments, was extremely important to
7 produce an enduring policy.

8 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Given the actual timing of it, to what
9 extent was it driven by the imminence of the invasion,
10 and to what extent was it a longer element that just
11 happened to come into place on that day?

12 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Well, quite clearly, there were
13 going to be issues that were going to affect people in
14 partnerships, that were going to need to have exactly
15 the same treatment as people in marriage, for instance,
16 in the event of a fatality or whatever.

17 As I said, I was very keen to make sure that these
18 people were treated with the same degree of compassion
19 and sensitivity, because, to me, a partnership, provided
20 it meets the criteria, is every bit as much a commitment
21 as a marriage, that they should be treated exactly the
22 same and that is eventually what happened.

23 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: I have a little titbit to add
24 to that, if that's helpful. I am pretty sure I am right
25 in remembering that the issue of partners' entitlements

1 emerged after the death in action of Bombadier Tinnion
2 in Sierra Leone, during the course of a helicopter
3 assault in the rescuing of some hostages.
4 Bombadier Tinnion's partner -- I think they had a baby.
5 I think they had been planning to get married, but they
6 had not got round to it. The rules at the time clearly
7 were going to be disadvantageous to her, because there
8 was no entitlement to anything of the things she would
9 have had, had she been a wife. There was then -- that,
10 I think, was in 1999, something like that, towards the
11 end of 1999.

12 So from then until -- I don't remember when, but
13 certainly halfway through my time as Adjutant General,
14 this was an issue that was debated, and, you know, as
15 Anthony says, there were a lot of different opinions.
16 Certainly at the beginning of the argument, as
17 Adjutant General, I am afraid I took an old-fashioned
18 view that, you know, commitment means marriage and, if
19 you love somebody enough, you should marry and then --
20 but clearly this is an out-of-date idea now.

21 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you. What else were you able to
22 do in the run-up to the invasion to ensure that all the
23 welfare policies and packages would be in place and
24 would be as up to date as they might be?

25 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Well, there were various areas

1 that we were looking at. The first area was those
2 people who were actually engaged on the operation itself
3 in Iraq. The concern was not during the invasion
4 itself, where I think everybody accepted that there was
5 going to be hardship and it would be very difficult to
6 provide the sort of things to make life more
7 comfortable, but we also appreciated that obviously
8 there was going to be a long period after the invasion
9 where we would need to get things, to make life more
10 comfortable, up to the front line as quickly as
11 possible, because it was extremely uncomfortable. It
12 was extremely hot, very dusty and, initially, food and
13 everything was quite basic, as you can imagine. That's
14 what happens in war and everybody accepts that.

15 So we did and we refined, and I am sure you have
16 already heard about things like the Operational Welfare
17 Package. I think that is quite a good example of
18 something that developed over time, because what I was
19 very concerned to do was to ensure that we got the views
20 from the soldiers on the ground and not just said,
21 "Okay. This is what we are going to give you" and in
22 that regard, the relationship with the Permanent Joint
23 Headquarters was extremely important, because they were
24 obviously controlling what was happening in Iraq, and
25 they were the people who understood what it was that our

1 people wanted on the ground.

2 So over time, we produced, I think, a very good
3 Operational Welfare Package. That's one point.

4 The next issue that I knew was going to come up was
5 the business of pay and whether or not you pay people
6 for doing what they joined the service to do. Again,
7 there was quite a lot of debate as to whether there
8 should be extra allowances, even the debate on whether
9 people should pay tax, whether they should pay council
10 tax, when they were not occupying, and all these issues.

11 We were also mindful that we had been putting our
12 people under a lot of pressure for some time in terms of
13 tour intervals, which were already not up to the
14 guideline. I am sure you have heard about the 24-month
15 tour interval, which I can talk about later. So that
16 they continued to feel valued and there were people who
17 were attending to their basic standard of living when
18 they were in an environment like Iraq.

19 I think we were relatively successful. Of course,
20 as time went on, organisations like the Armed Forces Pay
21 Review Body went out and looked at the conditions and
22 were able to assess things like the X factor, the basic
23 extra pay that soldiers get to take account of military
24 life.

25 Again, I want to stress that there was a lot of

1 consultation. This was with PJHQ and with the single
2 services. I am afraid it was also, obviously, in the
3 context of resources, because there was just not enough
4 money to go round. So we had to be very careful to make
5 sure that what we were doing was targeted very
6 specifically at the people who needed it.

7 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you.

8 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Well, I agree with that
9 entirely. Of course, one of my jobs and those of my
10 people was to feed in the army view into all this
11 process, but I might just add as a sort of general
12 comment -- it is a very important thought, I think --
13 that in the question of pay, but more specifically in
14 the question of Operational Welfare Package or, indeed,
15 any of the other human interactions -- no doubt, we will
16 get on to the reporting of casualties and that sort of
17 thing -- it is a question of managing expectations that
18 continue to arise.

19 You know, you reach a level which people, yesterday,
20 think satisfactory, today is sort of okay, tomorrow is
21 unsatisfactory. You know, when I think back to the
22 so-called Operational Welfare Package in
23 Northern Ireland 40 years ago, you know, we would all
24 laugh it out of court now as being incompetent, but then
25 it was very much welcomed.

1 So I would be horrified if someone told me that the
2 Operational Welfare Package that we were both, as it
3 were, involved with in 2003 had in no way changed.
4 I know it has not. You know, it is part of a process of
5 continually getting better and better, one hopes.

6 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you very much. My last question
7 is a general question which has been raised by quite
8 a number of our witnesses and I very much value your
9 respective thoughts on it.

10 That is the argument that we are told existed and
11 took place that the general morale of the army might be
12 affected adversely if the operation didn't take place.
13 As the planning and preparation were going on at
14 a certain point, a morale question came into this.

15 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Gracious! I would be
16 astonished to think we went to war simply to keep up the
17 army's morale.

18 May I turn it round the other way and say that going
19 to war did not by any means deflate the army's morale.
20 In fact, you know, you are a professional soldier, you
21 have spent your life training for something, the
22 opportunity comes, so your morale, in fact, goes up.
23 That's what I certainly found in all my visits and so
24 on.

25 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Yes, I mean, I go along with that.

1 The whole argument applies to the other two services as
2 well.

3 There was an issue, though, about the popularity of
4 the war within the general population, which we were
5 very aware of and the idea that we were going to -- our
6 service people were going to take part in an operation
7 that didn't have general public support was something
8 that we gave a lot of thought to and, therefore, you
9 know, the education process of explaining what we were
10 doing and why we were going was very important to ensure
11 that the service people understood that they were doing
12 something that was useful.

13 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Are you satisfied you were able to
14 convey that?

15 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Well, insofar as morale was
16 uniformly high throughout this period, as Alistair has
17 just said, I think demonstrates that we did get the
18 message over.

19 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you very much. That's very
20 helpful.

21 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I would like to hand the questioning over
22 to Baroness Prashar.

23 BARONESS PRASHAR: Thank you very much. General Irwin, we
24 understand that the armed forces legal and police
25 services followed in your purview. Is that right?

1 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Yes. In the same sort of way
2 as the medical services, they were, as it were, under
3 command for administrative and general wellbeing
4 purposes but, in other respects, they were under someone
5 else's command, as I would put it.

6 BARONESS PRASHAR: Uh-huh. But this was the first time
7 since the Second World War that the UK had contemplated
8 military action which would result in it becoming
9 an occupying power in another jurisdiction with all the
10 responsibilities that this entails under the Geneva
11 Convention and the Hague Regulations.

12 What advice did you offer about what the armed
13 forces would be required to do to fulfil the UK's
14 responsibilities as an occupying power for maintaining
15 law and order?

16 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: I hope this doesn't sound as
17 though it was, you know, somebody else's responsibility,
18 but the job of the Adjutant General and, indeed, the
19 army legal services was to provide the necessary
20 guidance and advice to the chain of command and to the
21 training operation, and perhaps, in parenthesis, I might
22 say that, although I agreed that I was in charge of
23 training, that was basic, initial training, not
24 operational and continuation training, which was, of
25 course, the business of the field army.

1 So the field army was responsible for making sure
2 that its people, when they went off to war, knew the
3 laws of war, knew the conditions under which they would
4 have to operate, and they were then, of course,
5 answerable to the chain of command for their actions.

6 I don't remember anybody suggesting to me that they
7 needed extra advice on the subject. I don't remember
8 any great debates as to, you know, whether we were
9 getting the message over or not. I think people
10 understood as much as they needed to understand what
11 they had to do in order to stay within the law,
12 international law.

13 BARONESS PRASHAR: So you are not aware of any specific
14 discussions taking place about the responsibilities that
15 would entail of becoming an occupying power. Is that
16 what you are saying?

17 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Well, I don't remember -- but
18 it was, you know, a year or two ago -- any kind of
19 debates about the implications or otherwise of us being
20 an occupying power. So, as my recollection is, it was
21 not a subject that came up specifically. Perhaps one
22 might say that, generally speaking, the army, as it
23 were, sets out to operate within the law, and whether or
24 not it is the law of occupation or international law or
25 local national law, the fundamentals all remain the

1 same, that one does not murder people, one does not
2 torture people, one does not do things to them that are
3 not sanctioned.

4 BARONESS PRASHAR: Fine. So I take it from that there was
5 nothing specifically discussed about that.

6 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Well, not to my recollection
7 and certainly not by me.

8 BARONESS PRASHAR: Can I move on to -- I mean, what role did
9 you understand that the military police, particularly
10 the Royal Military Police, would play in maintaining law
11 and order in Iraq?

12 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Well, that was the vehicle
13 both in terms of, as it were, the uniformed Royal
14 Military Police and the Special Investigation Branch,
15 the CID equivalent. That was the organisation that was
16 used to maintain discipline and to investigate any cases
17 where it was alleged that laws/rules had been broken.

18 The Royal Military Police themselves were, of
19 course, under the command of the local field commander.
20 The SIB was a more independent organisation, although,
21 obviously, being military people, they couldn't simply
22 be in Iraq without being under somebody's command. So
23 again, for administrative purposes, they would have been
24 under the command of the local field commander.

25 BARONESS PRASHAR: What were the assumptions about the

1 personnel required and so on? Were there any
2 assumptions made about the level of personnel that would
3 be required in order to maintain --

4 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: You mean in terms of numbers?

5 BARONESS PRASHAR: Yes.

6 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: I don't honestly know whether
7 we quite got it right to start with, but clearly there
8 was a stark appreciation -- I don't remember the
9 details -- in terms of the entire force level, about how
10 many of everything you would need, and in that
11 appreciation will have been included the need for Royal
12 Military Police.

13 These were in the days, and still are the days, of
14 course, when numbers of troops deployed on operations
15 are sort of capped at a top level. So there is always
16 a squeezing of numbers to get into the level that's
17 dictated.

18 So there would have been an assessment as to how
19 many people were needed but, as the operation developed,
20 it began to be something that came to my attention and,
21 therefore, could be regarded as a possible problem, that
22 the Royal Military Police were not there in sufficient
23 numbers to do everything that was required of them in
24 a completely timely fashion.

25 Now, of course, when you are trying to investigate

1 incidents when there is shooting going on, there is
2 always going to be a delay that would not occur in the
3 normal circumstance, but nevertheless I began to get
4 a feeling that maybe there were not enough military
5 police in Iraq and maybe also that, extrapolating from
6 that, there were not enough military policemen, full
7 stop, in the British Army.

8 So I spent -- I would not say every day, but quite
9 regularly I used to speak to the Provost Marshall (Army)
10 and ask him the direct question, looking at him in the
11 eye, "Have we got an issue here? Are your people
12 bearing up to the strain? Are they going over too often
13 with too short tour intervals? Do you want me to try to
14 find some other way of reinforcing you, like doing
15 something which the bureaucracy sometimes calls 'novel
16 and contentious', which was to get civilian police to
17 sort of come along and help?"

18 The answer was always, "We are a bit stretched, but
19 we are fine". My people and I just took that at, not
20 exactly face value, but kept our eyes on it and at no
21 stage did we ever have to do anything that was "novel
22 and contentious".

23 BARONESS PRASHAR: From what you said earlier, am I right in
24 assuming that you were not consulted when they
25 drafted -- they looked at the implications of the

1 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1483?

2 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: When who drafted?

3 BARONESS PRASHAR: This was the Security Council Resolution
4 about UK and US incoming occupying powers. Were you
5 consulted about its drafting?

6 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Absolutely not at all.

7 BARONESS PRASHAR: Thank you.

8 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Can I pick up a few points about the
9 practical support that was provided during the course of
10 the operation, both during the invasion and afterwards,
11 in supporting the armed forces, particularly their links
12 with family and home?

13 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Yes.

14 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: We have heard mixed reports about this
15 from families, as you would expect, and from military
16 personnel.

17 Starting with the first point, which you have
18 already both touched on, which is the R&R package,
19 Air Marshall Pocock told us earlier in the week that, as
20 far as he could see, it was a package that had evolved.
21 It was not one where there had been a careful policy
22 analysis and discussion setting a new basis for
23 a policy, but, rather, a continuing evolutionary
24 process. Is that a correct understanding, do you think?

25 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Well, again, honestly, I can't

1 remember the exact detail of this, but I do remember
2 that, initially, the view was that, because of
3 distances, et cetera, that any rest and recuperation
4 should be taken in theatre, and that as things --
5 although one can never say they became normal, as things
6 were regularised, and we had been in Iraq for some time,
7 and, of course, there was concern about separation from
8 families, it was decided that it would be a good thing
9 to introduce some form of R&R package, taking people
10 home.

11 So I don't think that it would be fair to say that
12 this was done on a whim. It was a result of, as I have
13 said before, trying to respond to the needs of families
14 and also of soldiers who had been in extremely
15 uncomfortable circumstances and in danger for a long
16 time.

17 Of course, there is a limit to how far you can
18 relax, if you are in Iraq. I mean, where is the front
19 line? You can send people to Kuwait or wherever, but
20 then you might as well send them back to the United
21 Kingdom. So I think, as I recollect, that's how the
22 policy developed.

23 Of course, being expensive, not only in money terms
24 but obviously in airlift, et cetera, and, most
25 importantly, in terms of removing operational men and

1 women from their tasks for a significant period, and
2 sometimes having that extended, because flights did not
3 fly or whatever, and there were some quite well-known
4 deficiencies in the Royal Air Force Transport Command,
5 there were risks involved, but, as ever, it was a risk
6 and reward issue, and the view was taken that it was
7 important to get people home to see their families.

8 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Given the differing considerations -- and
9 I know you have been giving us a suitably compressed
10 account of the factors involved, but you have the
11 fragility of the air bridge. We have had evidence on
12 that. You have the operational implications of troops
13 being held back from their units when they are needed.

14 On the one hand -- something, again, you both
15 referred to -- you have rising expectations, both from
16 families as well as from soldiers themselves, but on the
17 other side, severe practical limits on how far you can
18 meet those rising expectations.

19 It would be useful to us to know how all those
20 considerations are brought together and how they are
21 then decided? Is it decided within the personnel area
22 or is it Chiefs of Staff level? How does it work?

23 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Shall I have a go at that, to
24 start with?

25 The first ideas, of course, bubble up from the

1 bottom. People begin -- either you go and visit and say
2 to people "What's bothering you?", "Not enough R&R" or
3 you read the continuous attitude surveys and get reports
4 there that "We would like more R&R" and so on. So you
5 start to get the germ of an idea that there is something
6 there that might well be needed.

7 Then the three service personnel staffs with the
8 defence personnel staff get together and chew it over,
9 see what the implications are, and then, of course, it
10 has to be fed through it to the wider system to answer
11 the very questions, Chairman, you have suggested, you
12 know, the air bridge, the availability of troops on the
13 ground and so on. There then has to be a balance. Of
14 course, again, as part of the evolution, the change from
15 R&R, when it was first sort of thought of in the
16 Northern Ireland days, when it was, I think, a mere
17 three days to two weeks, you know, it demonstrates the
18 evolution.

19 But the only thing I would like to add on that is
20 there was a particular bugbear about the R&R connected,
21 I suppose, with the air bridge. It wasn't the length of
22 time that was allocated, it was the length of time in
23 that allocation spent in travelling to and fro.

24 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: We have heard also one other factor that
25 I imagine you needed to weigh, which was the effect of

1 a very short R&R -- relatively very short R&R in the
2 course of a long and very arduous combat tour and how
3 troops actually felt and behaved in those few days they
4 got at home.

5 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Quite.

6 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Could you say something on that?

7 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: You see, there is
8 an interesting -- I defer to the historians, but there
9 is an interesting parallel, it seems to me, from which
10 we can sort of draw some inferences, I think, which is
11 from, say, the First World War when troops came away
12 from the western front home for some leave and then went
13 back to the western front, and I think that well, you
14 know, the histories tell us that some people managed to
15 cope with this very well and some did not.

16 The same as now, that some people, you know, relish
17 the prospect of seeing their wives and children again
18 or, if not married, the inside of a British pub, and
19 accommodate it all quite nicely. Others find it deeply
20 upsetting. Soldiers find it unsettling. So, too, do
21 their families.

22 That sort of reaction inspires the thought that
23 maybe it is better just to go off and do your six or
24 seven months in a oner, get the thing done with and then
25 come home. You know, it is a balance and, at the

1 moment, the balance -- and was then -- was that people
2 should be allowed to take a break.

3 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Uh-huh. There are two other particular
4 factors about communications between Iraq and the United
5 Kingdom for troops and their families.

6 The first is that -- and I know there are practical
7 considerations, not only of costs, but of bandwidth,
8 about the telephone allowance. I think the decision was
9 taken at some point in the course of the campaign that
10 that should be increased.

11 Was it increased because the pressure of demand was
12 very evident and the capability to meet it grew? Is
13 that how it went?

14 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Yes.

15 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Absolutely. One of the
16 constant complaints was not enough access to a telephone
17 for long enough. You know, again, that has been
18 an issue ever since telephones became available to be
19 used in this sort of area.

20 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Yes, sure.

21 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: The other issue was the time of
22 day. We kept trying to put more telephones into
23 theatres so people with young children could talk to
24 them. It was not always easy to manage that, but
25 certainly we were very keen to do as much as we could to

1 enhance communications between the UK and Iraq, whether
2 that was telephones, the so-called blueys, electronic
3 letters.

4 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Do you include the free parcel service in
5 that.

6 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Free parcels, 2 kilograms,
7 engraved on my heart. The debates we had about that.
8 Again, as you were saying earlier, this was a debate
9 about how far we could stretch the logistic operation.
10 I mean, delivering 2 kilograms of parcels to everybody
11 in theatre over distances with lack of helicopter -- not
12 enough helicopters for operations, let alone for
13 administration, was a real issue, but it was critical
14 for the families back in the UK that they could send to
15 their loved ones sort of things that would remind them
16 of home.

17 I have to say that as NAAFI services -- and I would
18 like to pay great tribute to the NAAFI, how quickly it
19 got on the ground and started to provide for some of
20 these, you know, sweets and other things, that,
21 therefore, the need for these parcels became less, but
22 it was always an issue, and it was particularly
23 an issue -- and I remember being in the Minister's
24 office several times on this -- about Christmas and
25 Christmas parcels. Somebody came up with the idea they

1 were going to give free parcels. Could everybody send
2 a parcel to Iraq? That caused immense problems
3 logistically and meant that a lot of stuff arrived in
4 Iraq that had been waiting to travel because of the
5 sheer logistics of the airlift.

6 What I think I am saying is nothing is ever simple.
7 It may sound it but, actually, when you get down to it,
8 it is complicated.

9 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I suppose a last question and both
10 Vice-Admiral Wilkinson the other day and now you,
11 yourselves, have spoken of rising expectations, but how
12 far is it reasonable to regard the evolving R&R package
13 for Iraq as specific to that theatre and that operation
14 rather than something that represents a general increase
15 in service expectations and the standards of meeting
16 them.

17 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Well, I don't know for sure,
18 but I believe that the arrangements for R&R in Iraq have
19 been translated to the Afghanistan situation and now
20 that it has been set at two weeks, I think we can be
21 sure that future operations will at least start at two
22 weeks and may increase, or whatever, according to how
23 people think.

24 So, you know, a new norm has been set and that will
25 be the baseline for the next time round.

1 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: I think it started in
2 Northern Ireland. So the expectation was already there.
3 I think it is important to say that, had we decided not
4 to do it, there would have been morale implications,
5 certainly from the families as well as in theatre as
6 well.

7 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you very much. I will turn the
8 questioning back to Sir Martin Gilbert now. Martin?

9 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: I would like to move now to post-tour
10 support, including rehabilitation for the injured.

11 Previous witnesses have told us that the provision
12 of support for troops returning from Iraq was highly
13 dependent on the individual's unit and particularly
14 acute for those who were deployed in small numbers; for
15 example, in corps, or individually in the case of some
16 reservists.

17 Were you aware of problems of an inconsistent level
18 of support and what were their primary causes and what
19 were you able to do to address them?

20 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: The answer to the first
21 question is, yes, we were aware that there were varying
22 standards in how these matters were attended to. That
23 was obviously a worry because, where the standard was
24 good, that was fine. Where the standard was not good,
25 then something clearly needed to be done about it.

1 So there was a constant interchange between my
2 people, who were producing the advice, the guidance, the
3 policy, and the people who were actually delivering
4 these things, which were, of course -- was, of course,
5 the field army and the chain of command.

6 I know there was a sort of sense of humanity about
7 this, an institutional humanity, if you like, where
8 there was, amongst us all collectively, a desire to
9 deliver as good a product as we could for those who
10 needed it but, when it boils down to it, when you have
11 a complex machine that consists of over 100,000
12 individual people, you can be absolutely certain, no
13 matter what it is that you do, that there will be people
14 who one way or another don't live up to the standard
15 required.

16 So much to the regret of all of us involved, there
17 were unquestionably people who weren't looked after as
18 well as they should have been. There is no doubt about
19 that and each one of them represents, in some degree or
20 another, failure.

21 I hope, though, that I am also right, without in any
22 way wanting to sound complacent about it, that that
23 number was probably relatively small. As you rightly
24 suggest in your question, they are probably mostly to be
25 found amongst, for example, reservists returning to

1 civilian life with no, as it were, obvious military
2 circle round them or, indeed, to families who were
3 living away from barracks, as often they do for personal
4 reasons, and who were, therefore, isolated from the
5 unit's embracing arms.

6 I have to say that my experience of -- of course,
7 I did not know every single unit welfare officer in the
8 British Army, far from it. But me and my team, we
9 formed the view that, by and large, the unit welfare
10 officers were very dedicated, very good people, but we
11 also knew there were one or two, through no particular
12 fault of their own, who just didn't quite get it right.

13 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Perhaps I could add, as far as the
14 Operational Welfare Package was concerned, we actually
15 extended this to families so that there would be
16 an opportunity in the UK for these excellent welfare
17 officers to be able to buy things that were going to
18 make the quality of life of the families a lot better,
19 and we also introduced packages to make sure that, where
20 soldiers returned home having been injured, then
21 families and friends could visit at public expense.

22 So again, this evolved according to need, but we
23 were very conscious of the need, as Alistair says, to
24 support families as best we possibly could, and I think
25 they generally felt well-supported.

1 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: What support was available to
2 individuals, not just reservists who actually left the
3 army after their deployment in Iraq?

4 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: That is a very good question, and
5 I think it is still, if I can say so, an ongoing issue,
6 the issue of, when people leave, what responsibility has
7 government or whatever to continue to look after them?

8 Certainly, as far as the Ministry of Defence was
9 concerned, the opportunity was given to them to -- if,
10 for instance, they felt that they had got a problem when
11 they left, to be able to report back to their unit that
12 they had got a problem. If that was a problem with
13 flashbacks or whatever, then there was a -- but I don't
14 even begin to think that that actually dealt effectively
15 with quite a lot of people who, some time after leaving
16 the service, had a problem, by which time they had
17 forgotten who to contact, et cetera.

18 This is an ongoing issue, because basically the
19 policy in the MoD is, once you leave, you become the
20 responsibility of the NHS or whatever, and I think you
21 can understand why that policy is in place.

22 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Were there any changes at all with
23 regard to this that you were able to put into effect
24 during your time?

25 A. I think what we tried to do was brief, particularly

1 reservists, where they could go for help if they felt
2 they needed it. Basically, the place they could go was
3 the unit from which they had come, so their local TA
4 unit. Despite the fact they had left, they could go
5 back and seek help that way.

6 How many did, I have no idea, but I do know that
7 a lot, sort of two, three years downstream from leaving,
8 have still got issues and problems that the charity
9 sector, obviously, and the welfare sector of the NHS are
10 still dealing with, and how big the problem is nobody
11 quite knows, but there is certainly a problem.

12 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Well, it is an enormously
13 wide-ranging subject, this, and I am very interested in
14 it now, and I see it from a different perspective and
15 an interestingly different perspective with my
16 connections with the veterans community in Scotland.

17 To see it from the other end of the telescope is
18 very interesting. Anthony is quite right that this is
19 an ongoing problem but, like so much else we have talked
20 about, things are not what they used to be, but they
21 still have a long way to go.

22 In our day, there were things like -- I forget what
23 they exactly called it, but I think something like
24 a cross-governmental group that was discussing issues
25 like medical and dentistry availability, housing

1 availability, schooling availability for military
2 families leaving the service and going back to their --
3 wherever they wanted to be.

4 It was, to start with, very rudimentary. There was
5 a lot of talk, not a great deal of action. I have to
6 say, slightly smugly, as far as Scotland is concerned,
7 that it is quite good in Scotland now. We are a much
8 smaller case, as it were. It is also getting better in
9 the rest of the United Kingdom as well, by and large,
10 I think. This idea that, somehow or other, you are not
11 just thrown on to the civilian pile, as it were, and
12 left to get on with it. The civilian local authorities,
13 NHS Trusts, and so on, they are all now at least
14 supposed to be engaged in the process of seeing to
15 a family that has left, but, as I say, there is a long,
16 long way to go yet, and it applies across the board of
17 the human experience.

18 The word I have not mentioned is employment. In our
19 day, there was a very good system called career
20 transition where, depending on how long you had served,
21 you had a series of courses and other advice and
22 guidance about how to prepare for and how to apply for
23 work and, in the normal scheme of things, you know,
24 there were people who found it easy to get work and
25 other people who didn't.

1 That was fine if you were physically and mentally
2 sound, "fine" if you got work. Much more difficult, of
3 course, and I was going to say intractable -- I hope it
4 is not intractable -- but a really, really big issue at
5 the moment, it seems to me -- and it is one the
6 veterans' community is very engaged in at the moment --
7 is how you look after, in employment terms, men and
8 women who have been physically and mentally damaged by
9 their experiences in war. There is a long way to go on
10 that as well. The solution hasn't been found to any of
11 these problems finally yet, but there is progress.

12 SIR MARTIN GILBERT: Thank you very much.

13 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Could I just ask -- you have mentioned
14 your post retirement engagement. I think you have both
15 taken an interest.

16 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Absolutely. I am Chairman of
17 a charity that is trying to help homeless ex-service
18 people, particularly those with PTSD, and working with
19 the King's Academic Centre for Defence Mental Health
20 which, of course, was founded by the Ministry of Defence
21 in around about, I think, 2000, or maybe a little later
22 but certainly before the Iraq war.

23 I think it is important to say that, as a result of
24 work done by Simon Wessely, who works there, we are able
25 to monitor -- I think the cohort was 20,000 before they

1 went to Iraq, while they were in Iraq, and every six
2 months since and, actually, one of the issues -- and
3 I was talking to Simon about this only the other day --
4 is trying to keep track of these people. They get lost
5 out there, even those that need help, they get lost and
6 they don't know where to go and this is probably one of
7 the biggest issues that is being looked at and is being
8 dealt with within the charity sector -- and I am quite
9 involved in this -- but signposting where to go to get
10 help once you have left.

11 Of course, the typical person has been -- I think,
12 if you ask combat soldiers, they will say he's served
13 for 14 years and has been out for 14 years. So there is
14 a big, big gap.

15 The other area I think it is worth mentioning, worth
16 saying, is that about just over 20,000 soldiers leave
17 every year, which is an enormous number, of which the
18 majority are fine and they do get jobs -- I mean,
19 depending on the recession -- if there is a problem
20 there, but by and large they carry on, but there are
21 a lot who don't.

22 There is also another lot of people who leave before
23 they have completed their full service, which allows
24 their resettlement time, and that numbers about 8,000
25 a year, who could have served anything from six weeks to

1 six months or two years, who don't qualify for the full
2 resettlement package quite understandably.

3 That's an area where we really do need to focus more
4 effort, because that's the area where a lot of the
5 problems comes from.

6 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. That was very helpful to hear
7 from both of you.

8 We have to turn now, clearly, to the tragic cases
9 where soldiers are killed in action or in theatre.

10 I will ask Baroness Prashar to take this up.

11 BARONESS PRASHAR: As the Chairman said, I would like to
12 look at some of the immediate difficulties that bereaved
13 families face as a result of losses in Iraq.

14 Can you just tell me what planning had been done in
15 advice to ensure that the MoD and other relevant
16 services like the coroners were ready to cope with the
17 inevitable fatalities?

18 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Shall I begin?

19 BARONESS PRASHAR: Yes.

20 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: I can't answer about the
21 planning for coroners and that sort of thing. That was
22 not my concern.

23 In terms of planning for dealing with casualties as
24 they occurred in theatre, the army and, indeed, the
25 other services, in those days, all had their own

1 separate arrangements for dealing with these matters: it
2 is now, as I am sure you know, a joint affair.

3 Certainly the army's scheme was a well-tried one.
4 It had been in place for years and years and years, and
5 dealt, not just with war casualties, but with ordinary
6 natural death causes when people were serving somewhere,
7 but just happened to die. So it was a well-practised
8 scheme.

9 I do remember very shortly after I took up my post
10 as Adjutant General, which was more or less about the
11 time the decision was made to go in, I remember asking
12 to be given a proper brief and a demonstration of how
13 our system worked. So I was taken to what was called
14 the CasComp Centre, Casualty and Compassionate Case
15 Centre I think it was called, CasComp for short. I was
16 shown the scheme, and I was immensely impressed by the
17 people who were there. I was immensely impressed by the
18 procedures. I was immensely impressed by being reminded
19 of the system as it worked down through the chain of
20 command to end up with somebody being told the bad news.

21 There was one, I think, thing that was not quite
22 right, and we put it right very quickly, and that was
23 that no serious account had been taken of how we would
24 deal with mass casualties. Much to my relief, although
25 it is a big enough number in all consciousness, but

1 during my time as Adjutant General I think there were
2 57 army deaths in Iraq, but I asked the question, "What
3 happens if Saddam Hussein really has got one of these
4 wretched weapons and really does dump one on top of
5 a battle group? We are not going to have tens of
6 casualties. We are going to have hundreds of
7 casualties. Can our system work?".

8 Well, it couldn't actually, when I asked the
9 question. It could have done after I asked the
10 question, but thank heavens it was never put to the
11 test.

12 BARONESS PRASHAR: So you were not prepared for the scale of
13 casualties. Is that what you are saying?

14 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: No, we were not, but
15 fortunately, we had time between the order to go and the
16 deployment and the invasion of Iraq to put it right.

17 BARONESS PRASHAR: Anything you want to add to that,
18 General Palmer?

19 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Yes. It was obviously something
20 that -- I mean, we realised there were going to be
21 casualties and we also realised there could have been
22 chemical and biological casualties. We gave a lot of
23 thought in advance of the invasion as to how we were
24 going to treat these if the worst comes to the worst,
25 because there are all sorts of rules and regulations

1 about dealing with casualties who have been contaminated
2 and how you repatriate them, et cetera, et cetera. So
3 there was quite a lot of planning.

4 There was also planning that went into who should
5 attend a repatriation ceremony. That became, quite
6 quickly, a big issue, from the Royal Family -- everybody
7 was concerned. Everybody wanted to be there, to show
8 support.

9 I think what we realised early on was that this was
10 going to be ongoing. Unfortunately, casualties were
11 going to keep coming. We could not have everybody
12 rushing to Brize Norton, as it was then, Lyneham, as it
13 is now, every time there was a casualty. So we
14 developed, I think, an extremely good policy, which
15 I think has worked very well, about how repatriations
16 are done.

17 I just want to say one final thing, and that is,
18 with ministers and everybody in the Ministry of Defence
19 the absolute key thing was to try to be as responsive
20 and sensitive to the families as we possibly could at
21 this enormously difficult moment for them.

22 Of course, the major first casualty was the
23 helicopters, which immediately brought into question how
24 you inform next of kin when you --

25 BARONESS PRASHAR: That was my next question. Carry on.

1 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: How you inform when you have mass
2 casualties from different services and sometimes
3 different countries. I laid down absolutely, right from
4 the start, that the most important thing was to get the
5 information correct rather than get it out quickly.

6 Now there was enormous pressure to release the news
7 quickly, not least because, of course, there was
8 a report in the media that helicopters had gone down.
9 So everybody naturally thought it was their son or
10 daughter who was in that. So you wanted desperately to
11 reassure people who were not involved, but at the same
12 time, we had to not only get absolute clarity on who it
13 was, for understandable reasons, but their next of kin
14 as well.

15 Although great efforts were made in advance to get
16 next of kin forms correct, like "Who is your next of
17 kin?" there were quite a number of complications, like
18 parents had got divorced and remarried. How do you --
19 then other issues or partners, for instance.

20 So there was a whole raft of things that had to
21 happen before the next of kin could be informed. It was
22 vitally important to coordinate that. Actually, there
23 was a cell in PJHQ who were the releasing authority when
24 it was made known. I think by and large it worked very
25 well.

1 In the initial stages there were some very
2 irresponsible press who rushed immediately to a unit
3 before an announcement to try to get interviews. That
4 was very quickly sorted out and the vast majority were
5 very responsible. We had talk and brief editors about
6 their responsibilities to making sure their people
7 didn't become intrusive in the obvious grief of the
8 families.

9 BARONESS PRASHAR: MoD has been dealing with this issue of
10 notification for a long time.

11 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Yes.

12 BARONESS PRASHAR: Why did problems arise on this occasion?

13 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: As Alistair was saying, it had
14 been a single service issue. We very quickly brought in
15 a completely new, tri-service casualty coordination cell
16 which I think started in -- was up and running in
17 April 2005, which is quite a long time, I admit, but
18 there are an awful lot of things that have to happen to
19 make that work properly, including a lot of training.

20 BARONESS PRASHAR: With hindsight, do you think something
21 could have been done to respond to problems quicker on
22 notification --

23 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Actually, I would never say we
24 couldn't have done it quicker but, as Alistair again
25 says, we have been doing this for some time. It wasn't

1 as though we didn't have casualties in Northern Ireland,
2 et cetera, and sometimes major ones. If you can
3 remember, Warrenpoint, et cetera.

4 So we had had a certain amount of experience in
5 dealing with this. Without wishing to sound complacent,
6 the policy did evolve pretty quickly. I don't think
7 that, as far as the next of kin informing and the
8 repatriation, that actually there were really major
9 difficulties with that. We may go on to talk about
10 visiting officers -- I don't know -- later on, in the
11 context of Boards of Inquiry and things like that, but
12 I think it was well done, although I suppose we could
13 have got there quicker.

14 BARONESS PRASHAR: You were saying initially you were giving
15 more time to getting it accurate rather than speedily --

16 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Yes, yes, absolutely.

17 BARONESS PRASHAR: -- and that may have caused delays.

18 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Absolutely, but I think it is
19 still -- I would still say it was more important.

20 BARONESS PRASHAR: Of course.

21 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: You can imagine the problems
22 caused by telling somebody or giving people incorrect
23 information about their loved ones, so it was the golden
24 rule until everything is in place -- what I am saying --
25 I mean, we are talking 24 hours here to do, you know,

1 a hell of a lot of homework to make sure the right
2 people are going to be informed, and then it was passed
3 down to the single service who had responsibility for
4 the task of doing the information, giving the
5 information to the families.

6 BARONESS PRASHAR: Do you want to add anything,
7 General Irwin?

8 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: No. Not anything different,
9 simply in support of what Anthony said, I would use the
10 word "complication" rather than "problem".

11 There were certainly, right at the beginning, some
12 very complicated cases. A helicopter crash with
13 multi-service, multi-national casualties in the dark,
14 you know, it takes quite a bit of time for the people in
15 theatre to work out who is involved, who is dead, who is
16 not. The information comes back to PJHQ. It is
17 filtered through to the CasComp centre. You then maybe
18 find that, one of the casualties, the next of kin can't
19 be located, so the other ones possibly can't be told
20 until ...

21 It was not, as it were, a problem that might have
22 been resolved by having had a different system. It was
23 a complication provided by certain sets of
24 circumstances, and there was another one that we may or
25 may not -- that may or may not come out of my mind

1 later, according to how the conversation goes.

2 BARONESS PRASHAR: There is another area, which is the
3 military housing. I mean, the policy changed in 2005
4 they could stay longer. What was the background to the
5 change of this policy? What brought about that change?

6 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: As far as I recollect, it was
7 a rather unfortunate and unnecessarily bureaucratic
8 letter that was sent to a bereaved wife telling her that
9 she had six months or whatever to vacate the quarter.
10 As far as I remember, that's what it was. Obviously,
11 she rightly thought this was insensitive, et cetera, and
12 very quickly it became a cause celebre in the press,
13 understandably so, and we moved then very quickly to
14 introduce a new policy, but the policy had to be, again,
15 very, very carefully thought through, because actually
16 allowing wives or husbands to stay in married quarters
17 after a bereavement is not necessarily the right thing
18 for them. People, you know ...

19 I remember one of the reasons was, if you wanted to
20 go on the local housing list, you had to be given
21 a notice of termination of your married quarter. I may
22 be wrong, but I think that was the reason for the
23 letter. It was so she could get on the housing list
24 quickly, because there was a big wait and all that
25 stuff. Anyway, we did change the policy in consultation

1 again with the PPOs. The policy now is -- and again,
2 the Secretary of State, as in all these -- was very
3 closely involved in this. I think we said two years and
4 then you could apply to continue and the Secretary of
5 State I remember saying to me personally, "You wanted to
6 be informed if there was any other example". Actually,
7 I don't think there was. I think it was a one-off.

8 BARONESS PRASHAR: Very briefly, looking back, do you think
9 you could have anticipated some of these problems
10 earlier and done something to mitigate those, rather
11 than wait until the problems arose?

12 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: I suppose the answer again must be
13 yes, but there are a sort of an infinite number of
14 variables that could happen. Iraq was not -- I don't
15 want to sound sort of complacent, but Iraq was not the
16 first time we had been to war. We have been having
17 casualties and dealing with families for many, many
18 years and, as I said before, Warrenpoint and -- and like
19 that. So it was not as though we were starting from
20 scratch. We were building on our experience of past
21 conflicts, what we had done then, but we were also,
22 I hope, very responsive and adaptable when something
23 changed.

24 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: But in answer to your
25 question, there is always room for anticipation, of

1 course, but there is nothing that I know of in the world
2 that will stop certain individuals behaving like
3 nincompoops. One of the things that I tried to generate
4 in my people -- and it wasn't difficult because they all
5 had a sympathy with this -- was that rules and
6 regulations should be applied with large dollops of
7 common sense and humanity.

8 In this particular case, if it is the same one that
9 Anthony has referred to -- and I sort of remember it,
10 although I don't remember who it was or what the exact
11 circumstances were -- in this case it was clear that the
12 officer concerned was certainly not applying any common
13 sense and his sense of humanity had temporarily evaded
14 him and, by goodness, he got to know about people's
15 displeasure on the subject.

16 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I think in about ten or fifteen minutes
17 we will take a break but, before we do, I will turn to
18 Sir Roderic Lyne.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Following through with the same theme,
20 when there is a casualty, it becomes the role of the
21 individual's unit then to deal with it, as I understand,
22 to deal with the grief of the family.

23 Can you say how that is done?

24 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Yes. It is the hope and
25 expectation that those involved will be from the unit,

1 but sometimes, particularly if it was an individual
2 elsewhere, it had to be done by somebody else. You are
3 right. The general principle was that it should be
4 based on the family entity, the military family entity.

5 Once the casualty has been identified beyond
6 peradventure and all the details are correct, the
7 notification is then made to somebody called the
8 casualty notification officer, the CNO, who may or may
9 not necessarily be part of the person's unit, but, as
10 I said, we would like it to have been, who has the
11 unenviable task of knocking on the door and presenting
12 the bad news.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: And is trained for it.

14 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: And is trained for it and,
15 incidentally, in parenthesis, I sort of worried a bit
16 about whether everybody was -- whether people were
17 simply going to be told "You are the designated CNO" and
18 expected to get on with it. There was training for it
19 I think there is no doubt about it that the training is
20 better now, the preparation is better now, but there was
21 training which I judged, as it were, to be adequate.

22 So that person then stays with the family until the
23 notified casualty visiting officer appears. The CNO,
24 the one who has broken the bad news, then departs the
25 scene and the CVO then remains with the family -- not,

1 I don't mean, every hour of the day indefinitely -- as
2 long as the family feels the need for them. There are
3 some people who still have very close contacts and
4 visits from their CVOs even now.

5 SIR RODERIC LYNE: CVO being the casualty visiting officer?

6 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Yes, the CVO, casualty
7 visiting officer. These people were trained again to
8 hold the family's hand through the awful aftermath of
9 this. First of all, the realisation that it has
10 happened, then the business of going to the repatriation
11 ceremonies, then, in many cases, going through the whole
12 of the coroner's process, then the funerals, and then
13 the gradual trying to piece together life again. Some
14 families, of course, needed their CVOs only briefly;
15 others needed them, as I have suggested, for really
16 quite a long time.

17 Now, that was the system, and it, generally
18 speaking, I think worked very well, but unquestionably,
19 again, because we are dealing with human beings, because
20 there is an immensely wide range of factors playing into
21 this, the mental state of the -- actually of the
22 notification officer, the visiting officer -- you know,
23 this is something that a lot of them found, and continue
24 to find, quite difficult. I know one person who, for
25 example, still -- took a very long time of getting over

1 the business of breaking the bad news to a particular
2 family.

3 So there are their characteristics, it is the way
4 they interplay with the thing. There is the family's as
5 well. For utterly understandable reasons, they range
6 from reactions from, you know, the all -- the dignified
7 gratitude for being told to the equally understandable
8 just not being able to cope at all.

9 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Now, CVOs are presumably not specialists.
10 They are officers of the line --

11 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Yes.

12 SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- who are asked to do this in addition
13 to their regular duties --

14 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Yes, yes.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- and are selected because they are
16 thought suitable and then trained in what they have to
17 do. Would that be right?

18 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: That's right.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Then there is a certain point in the
20 nature of things, they get posted elsewhere, and then
21 you lose continuity. So one family, if there is a need
22 for contact over an extended period, might find itself
23 dealing with more than one CVO.

24 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: They might indeed, and not
25 just because one or other party had moved on physically,

1 but a lot of that issue, certainly in those parts of the
2 army which recruit regionally, a lot of that issue is
3 removed because the CNOs and CVOs, being part of that
4 regiment, are also static, people like the staff in
5 regimental headquarters back in the home base, people
6 like longstanding officers who are on the retired list
7 who are still working for the army but are retired
8 officers, that sort of thing, and NCOs, very senior NCOs
9 who are on what used to be called -- I don't think it
10 exists anymore -- the so-called 'Special List', who serve
11 much longer than normal. These people tend to be much
12 more static and so there is more continuity. You are
13 quite right. It would certainly be an issue from time
14 to time when families move on.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: What feedback did you get from families,
16 bereaved families, about the way they had been handled?

17 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: As in the nature of things,
18 really, unless one happened to bump into a family -- and
19 I did from time to time -- who had been through the
20 process and I asked them, "How did it go?" when -- more
21 often than not, I am glad to say, people were satisfied,
22 but when I was not actually asking the question by the
23 nature of things the things I got to hear about, the
24 feedback, in other words, was the feedback from people
25 who had found the system to be unsatisfactory.

1 I can't, I am afraid, put a figure on it at this
2 range in time, but I mentioned earlier that there were
3 57 -- I think 57 army casualties during my time from
4 Iraq, and I would think, looking back on it, that I may
5 have heard about issues in the notification process, and
6 by "issues" I mean either delays in doing it or calling
7 on the wrong person, or the wrong sort of words being
8 said at the wrong sort of time, I think maybe I had
9 cases of that kind maybe between six and ten, so
10 something of that order.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did you sense there was a need to make
12 changes or improvements or ...

13 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Oh, yes. I mean, if you hear
14 about this, if you look at it in a sort of statistical
15 sense, it may not be all that significant, but as
16 an individual, that family, it was nothing in the world
17 was more significant. So we had to keep asking
18 ourselves, "Are we doing this right?"

19 I had a particularly good staff officer. Am I
20 allowed to name him? Colonel Max Mariner, who was
21 something called Colonel PS4, who was absolutely engaged
22 in all this. It was from his particular part of my
23 operation, from which all the policy guidance and so on
24 emanated. He spent quite an astonishing amount of his
25 time honing the system, talking to families. I mean,

1 I wouldn't say it was beyond the call of duty because,
2 actually, it wasn't. It was his duty, but he devoted
3 himself very well to that.

4 So as each issue developed, we tried to close it
5 off, but even after all this time and even with the
6 establishment of the new joint system, with the new
7 central training, even then, I am afraid I can guarantee
8 that, in the future, there will be people who have a bad
9 experience with this for one reason or another, and it
10 is because we are all human beings.

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Can I move from the direct interface with
12 the family to another issue that has been raised with us
13 by quite a number of families? You said earlier that
14 you weren't responsible for coroners' inquests.

15 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Yes.

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: With whom did the responsibility lie at
17 senior level in the army?

18 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Simply no idea. It wasn't
19 anybody in the army's responsibility, as far as I know.
20 It was a civil legal process.

21 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The impact of coroners' inquests on
22 bereaved families and, indeed, of Boards of Inquiry is
23 an issue for bereaved military families and, therefore,
24 it is an issue for the Ministry of Defence.

25 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Yes, we didn't have

1 responsibility for it, but we did have the
2 responsibility for conveying the results of it, as it
3 were. Having said which, the issue seems to have become
4 a much bigger one -- I hesitate to say this -- after
5 I left, not because it was anything to do with me, but
6 because the contentious cases where there was delay or
7 where there were contentious circumstances that were
8 aired, these, I think, by and large, came to the surface
9 after I was no longer in the service, but I do remember,
10 even in my day, that there was discomfort about in some
11 cases the length of time an inquest took to conclude its
12 business.

13 That was definitely unsettling and it was definitely
14 something that my staff and I would have been feeding
15 up -- I could not give you chapter and verse -- but we
16 would certainly have been feeding it up to Anthony and
17 his people, who, in any event, would have been aware of
18 it as something that needed to be done -- something
19 needed to be done about it, although I believe there
20 must have been a sort of difficulty because the
21 Ministry of Defence had no particular hold over the way
22 the coroners' courts worked.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Perhaps you would like to comment,
24 because the Ministry of Defence --

25 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Yes, certainly.

1 SIR RODERIC LYNE: -- clearly had an interest, even if it
2 didn't control the inquests, in reducing these delays.

3 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Absolutely. If I could separate
4 Boards of Inquiry from inquests, because obviously they
5 are two very different things, there is absolutely no
6 doubt that families were very exercised by the quantity
7 and quality of information coming to them about the
8 progress of Boards of Inquiry, and I have actually
9 looked out a letter I wrote to the Secretary of State in
10 June 2004, so quite early in the possess. It might be
11 helpful if I just quote the first -- it is all on the
12 record, this:

13 "It is clear that we are failing to meet some
14 families' expectations in respect of the quality and
15 quantity of information we are providing to them. We
16 are tackling this issue from a number of directions, but
17 key to success is the introduction of the post of senior
18 co-ordinator."

19 That was an officer from each service at 1-star
20 level, and he was responsible for the progress of Boards
21 of Inquiry. If there were delays, why were there delays
22 and what should be done about it, and keeping, most
23 importantly, the families informed through the visiting
24 officers as to what was going on.

25 We put that in place relatively quickly.

1 Now that did not immediately speed up the Boards of
2 Inquiry, because some of them were quite complicated.

3 We have already alluded to a shortage of military
4 police investigators who were involved in some of this.
5 Some of them were very complicated, because they
6 involved foreign governments, but the emphasis --
7 because I think this is what the grievance was -- was
8 lack of information. The families felt they were
9 excluded from the process.

10 I personally believe, once we put this in place, in
11 other words, a regular briefing for families about where
12 their particular Board of Inquiry had got to, they were
13 less exercised, but there is absolutely no doubt that,
14 at the start, we did not live up to the expectations of
15 families as to how we should be keeping them informed,
16 but I think we learned that lesson quite quickly and we
17 put in place this senior coordinating officer.

18 Indeed, the Secretary of State himself was
19 personally briefed every two months by me as to exactly
20 which Board of Inquiry was delayed, or rather the
21 findings were delayed, why they were delayed, what the
22 reasons for the delay was. Could we do anything to
23 speed up the process, and how are the families reacting
24 to this?

25 So we took it extremely seriously, because it was

1 a major cause of grievance of the families.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: When is a Board of Inquiry held? What
3 are the circumstances that trigger a board?

4 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Well, a Board of Inquiry is
5 basically held after any event -- it doesn't have to be
6 loss of life; it could be loss of equipment or
7 whatever -- where you need to learn the lessons as
8 quickly as possible. So it is inquisitorial by nature,
9 and it doesn't seek to allocate blame.

10 If there is -- if it looks as though somebody might
11 be a subject of criminal proceedings as a result of
12 negligence or whatever, the Board of Inquiry has to stop
13 for the service investigation to take place.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: So it is an event that's not
15 a straightforward casualty, and certainly any question
16 of friendly fire would automatically trigger that?

17 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Absolutely. Any fatality would
18 automatically trigger a Board of Inquiry.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Now, I mean, the concern that has been
20 put to us very strongly by some families was, indeed,
21 that they did not feel that the Ministry of Defence was
22 being transparent with information about the
23 circumstances in which their relative had died. In some
24 cases they felt that information was deliberately
25 withheld or information only came out at a coroner's

1 inquest that clearly had been known to the Ministry, but
2 not to the family, for some considerable time
3 beforehand.

4 Does the new system that you are describing and is
5 presumably -- you left the post in 2005, so it is not
6 that new now -- has this corrected that?

7 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Really, I find it very difficult
8 to answer that question. I think when I wrote this
9 note, we had already got the procedures in place. That
10 was June 2004 -- for keeping the families better
11 informed.

12 As an issue, it did not disappear off my radar
13 screen, but it certainly assumed a far lesser degree of
14 importance than it had when it was a very major issue
15 for me and, indeed, for the Secretary of State, because
16 it was causing grief to the families.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: If I can just now turn briefly to
18 coroners' inquests, what action did the
19 Ministry of Defence take to try to speed up the holding
20 of coroners' inquests?

21 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Again, a lot of this occurred
22 after my time. Certainly -- I am not sure whether I am
23 reporting something I read in the paper or actually was
24 involved in, but obviously the aircraft lands in
25 a particular place and then the coroner's inquest -- the

1 coroner himself in that area, the Wiltshire coroner, is
2 responsible for the inquest. So there is one person
3 doing it. Clearly that was not enough in terms of
4 trying to move these things on as quickly as possible,
5 but again, just as with Boards of Inquiry, there were
6 quite a lot of complications, especially if it was
7 friendly fire, or if it was friendly fire from an
8 American aircraft or whatever. So there were a lot of
9 complications.

10 I believe -- and I think this was after my time --
11 there were quite a lot of discussions between the
12 Secretary of State and whatever it was called then, the
13 Ministry of Justice, about how more resources could be
14 available to increase the number of coroners or
15 assistant coroners who could conduct inquests, but, as
16 I understand it, it was an issue of resource. There
17 were neither enough coroners nor enough money to pay for
18 more, but I think it was resolved.

19 SIR RODERIC LYNE: The question of whether the
20 Ministry of Defence was able to help with the
21 resource --

22 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: The coroners' inquests were not
23 an issue during my time. Boards of Inquiry very
24 definitely were.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Final question from me. In Boards of

1 Inquiry and sometimes in coroners' inquests obviously
2 lessons are learned. What is the system in place for
3 ensuring that those lessons are then applied?

4 If I can give you one specific example, there was
5 a case that has been brought to our notice in which
6 somebody had died apparently as a result of not having
7 the right protective clothing, I think helmet rather
8 than body armour. A recommendation was made, but
9 another case came up, I think three years later, in very
10 similar circumstances and both families concerned
11 understandably felt very aggrieved about this.

12 Is that a failure of the system or the absence of
13 a system?

14 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Well, I can't comment on those two
15 cases because that's the first time I have --

16 SIR RODERIC LYNE: No, but I'm asking about the system.

17 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: -- heard about them, but in
18 general, the purpose of the Board of Inquiry is to learn
19 the immediate lesson.

20 So if, for instance, it is a piece of equipment
21 that's at fault, let's say, that has caused an accident,
22 has caused a death, then all those vehicles, or
23 whatever, involved would be grounded while the basis of
24 the fault was looked into.

25 Similarly, if it was an incident with a steel helmet

1 and somebody was not wearing it, then certainly the
2 policy would be reviewed as to why the person was not
3 wearing a steel helmet, but people cannot wear steel
4 helmets for a variety of reasons.

5 You know, I remember from my experience in
6 Northern Ireland, people preferred to wear berets.
7 Sometimes they did, and we had to have a policy, "You
8 will wear a steel helmet", but still people didn't.

9 I don't know what the particulars are. All I want
10 to stress is the Board of Inquiry is specifically there
11 to learn the immediate lesson and the lesson is
12 promulgated with a policy for the future. That's how it
13 works.

14 SIR RODERIC LYNE: There are people responsible for
15 promulgating the policy?

16 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Absolutely. In the case of Iraq,
17 it would be definitely be the Permanent Joint
18 Headquarters, if it is an operational policy, and they
19 would be talking absolutely on a minute-by-minute basis
20 after the incident to set up the Board of Inquiry and to
21 learn the immediate lesson. I mean, that is absolutely
22 standard procedure.

23 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you.

24 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I think we will break now for about
25 fifteen minutes, unless, General, you wanted to add to

1 what has just been said?

2 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: I was going to add just one
3 sentence, which is, in respect of an institution, the
4 only lessons that are learned and put into effect are
5 the ones that are put into effect immediately, because
6 the nature of an institution, with the individuals in it
7 passing in and out and changing jobs and so on, is that
8 unless the lesson is applied immediately, it will never
9 be remembered. That's one of the real difficulties
10 about lessons learned.

11 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you.

12 (3.25 pm)

13 (A short break)

14 (3.40 pm)

15 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Welcome back. It is back to
16 Sir Roderic Lyne, but on a different topic.

17 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Another difficult topic, I am afraid, one
18 we discussed with your successors the other day.

19 In 2004 and 2005, a number of allegations of abuse
20 and serious offences were made against British
21 servicemen in Iraq and given extensive coverage in
22 worldwide media.

23 We don't want to discuss the details of these
24 allegations, and some of them are the subject of other
25 Inquiries, and we have yet to decide how and to what

1 extent they may need to be covered by this Inquiry.

2 I would just like to ask you a couple of general
3 questions about them, firstly, about the impact which
4 both of you, in the jobs you were in at the time, felt
5 these allegations were having on the reputation of the
6 British Armed Forces, on their standing and respect for
7 them, and also on their morale.

8 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Shall I begin, since most of
9 the cases, if not all of them, are to do with the army
10 specifically?

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Please.

12 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: In terms of the standing of
13 the British Army, one can't deny the fact that, when
14 there is bad news of that kind, it has a damaging effect
15 on the reputation of the army, and those of us -- and
16 I would say it is 99% -- those of us who loved the army
17 and cared about it found those allegations, and where
18 they were found to be proven, those deeds, to have been
19 really, really upsetting, not simply because of the
20 reputational damage it did in the wider world, but
21 because of what it did to us.

22 That actually was the effect on the vast majority of
23 soldiers too, whether they were deployed in Iraq or
24 whether they were here back home. If you ever talked to
25 a soldier about it, and I often did when I went visiting

1 units and so on, the subject would often come out,
2 sometimes from them, sometimes from me, and the
3 universal was always "These people shouldn't be in the
4 army. These people have kicked us in the guts and let
5 us all down".

6 If that is an indication of a lowering of morale, it
7 is a matter of opinion. I don't think it was
8 an indication of a lowering of morale. I think it was
9 an indication of the general strength of understanding
10 that the British Army had standards that we were all
11 expected to follow and, when somebody let us down, they
12 were not going to be popular.

13 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Why did the RMP's investigations of these
14 investigations in some cases appear to take an extremely
15 long time to complete?

16 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: I have sort of alluded to part
17 of the answer, at any rate, before, and that was the, as
18 it were, battlefield conditions. Very difficult to
19 investigate a case in the way you would expect it to be
20 done properly if there is busy fighting going on and so
21 on, partly, as I alluded to, that I was constantly
22 worried about the numbers involved, particularly the
23 SIB, and partly because, and as I had not mentioned
24 previously, partly because many, if not all, of the
25 cases were extremely complicated.

1 One complication that I remember particularly was
2 where investigations were involving someone who had
3 apparently been murdered or killed, the Arab cultural
4 business of burying the body immediately and not
5 permitting exhumation.

6 That's just, I suppose, the most dramatic of the
7 various problems associated with investigating something
8 that happens in a battlefield condition.

9 I don't say that's an excuse for all the delays. It
10 is a reason, and it would clearly have been a great deal
11 better if we could have produced really good
12 investigative reports more quickly, but I think that, in
13 many cases, it was not idleness. It was not casual
14 attitudes to it. It was circumstance.

15 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Did you get the resentment that, at
16 a time when people were very stretched, trying to fight
17 in a very difficult situation, that resources were being
18 necessarily being taken away into these investigations?
19 Was there any kind of a backlash within the army against
20 the process of investigating this?

21 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: I think "backlash" is too
22 strong a word, but there was certainly a body of opinion
23 that said, "Hang on. We are fighting for our lives here
24 and here we have all these people with notebooks and
25 pencils asking us questions as if we have been in

1 a brawl in Costa Garrison".

2 I think that's a sort of understandable, soldierly
3 reaction to the fellow who comes to ask you questions
4 when you have just been through hell and all you want to
5 do is lie down and have a sleep.

6 However, once it became clear that there was this
7 sort of feeling, everybody, the chain of command, all of
8 us in the Adjutant General's area, we set off on
9 an expedition to try to explain to everybody back home
10 and in theatre why these things were necessary, and why
11 was it necessary, we said? Well, in a nutshell, one was
12 to make sure the reputation and standing of the army was
13 protected, which, in my view, was the most important
14 reason, but second of all, coming very close, was the
15 protection of the individuals concerned, because, as we
16 now see in the press, with more accusations coming
17 forward from Iraqis of ill-treatment, you know, unless
18 you close the thing down definitively and clearly,
19 responsibly and properly, there is the opportunity for
20 individuals subsequently to be had a go at, when they
21 had long since forgotten that they had even had
22 an event. So it was also for the individual protection.

23 I think that, on the whole, people reluctantly
24 understood the message.

25 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Thank you. General Palmer, is there

1 anything you want to add on this?

2 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: No, but, I mean, going back to the
3 point you were making just before the break, the
4 learning account from this was, you know, "Have we got
5 the training right? Do people understand about the
6 Geneva Convention?", et cetera.

7 So immediately this had happened, there was a view
8 that maybe people didn't understand what was expected of
9 them and that this needed to be articulated better and
10 people should have better training in it, but that is
11 just an example of how a lesson is learned.

12 I remember distinctly looking at the training
13 procedure for people going and what it said about this
14 sort of thing and indeed what it said about the Geneva
15 Convention laws of armed conflict, which was part of the
16 training.

17 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: I will turn now to Sir Lawrence Freedman.

18 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Questions about difficult
19 investigations but in an area we have already touched
20 upon. Again, it goes back to the conversations we have
21 had with families, particularly those who have either
22 got someone in a friendly fire or blue-on-blue incident.
23 There is clearly a feeling that these sorts of incidents
24 are not investigated or sometimes even acknowledged by
25 the armed forces with the rigour that they should be.

1 I just want to get your sense of -- are you aware of
2 that general concern and to what extent do you think it
3 may even have been justified?

4 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Certainly aware of the
5 concern. It is manifest in the press, after all, every
6 time there is such an incident. I, myself, have no
7 evidence whatsoever, and I would be horrified if I had
8 it, to suggest that these incidents were either not
9 properly investigated or that, having done so, important
10 information was in some way or other withheld with
11 a view to in some way or other taking the heat off
12 an individual who made a mistake.

13 However, there is another angle to this, and I hope
14 it does not sound -- will not sound sort of contentious,
15 but I think that there is a disconnect between the
16 public's expectation of what is possible in war and what
17 actually happens in war. War is chaotic. From my
18 studies of military history and from my own very modest
19 experience in Northern Ireland, I don't think that there
20 has ever been a period of time when at some stage or
21 another, because of the chaos of war, there have been
22 these so-called blue-on-blues.

23 I think that there is a gap in expectation between
24 the professional military man and the member of the
25 civilian population and, therefore, because there is

1 a gap in the expectation, there may be a difficulty in
2 explaining these things in a way that's understandable.

3 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think to be fair to the people
4 certainly I was talking to, it wasn't that they didn't
5 understand the blue-on-blue happened. I mean, they were
6 well aware of that in the chaos of war. It was more
7 that, in these particular circumstances, the information
8 seemed to come slower, be less full, be more reluctantly
9 given, that there was a difficulty in acknowledging and
10 their frustration was it didn't feel that the army --
11 mainly the army -- was being clean with them.

12 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Well, I can but repeat my
13 earlier thought that, you know, I would be horrified to
14 think that there had been any deliberate delay or
15 obfuscation simply because it had been a blue-on-blue.

16 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: I think I would agree with that,
17 but I do remember imperfectly a question of an American
18 aircraft which had shot up a British unit. I think
19 there were real complications as to how the Board of
20 Inquiry and the whole investigation -- there were
21 a greater number of sensitivities, but I had not heard,
22 I have to say, of a blue-on-blue which was UK forces on
23 UK forces, that there was any attempt either to cover it
24 up or not to take it incredibly seriously, because
25 clearly the learning lesson you need to have from

1 a blue-on-blue is, if you like, something that you may
2 be able to stop it happening in the future, although
3 I agree with Alistair that the nature of war is that you
4 will always get this.

5 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Do you think that the relatives were
6 kept sufficiently informed of these? I think possibly
7 the suggestion, again, isn't that there weren't internal
8 investigations, but somehow this was not shared with
9 them.

10 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: I haven't heard that.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Okay. Thank you.

12 A different issue, but related. The armed forces at
13 2006 did not receive Royal Assent until you had left
14 office, but the work on it had been underway for various
15 years. This harmonised previously separate service
16 discipline acts and provided for important changes in
17 the power of the commanding officer in respect of
18 serious offences such as murder or manslaughter.

19 Did this, in fact, reflect an acknowledgment that
20 there was a need for increased independence in the
21 investigation of allegations against service personnel?

22 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Do you want to answer that?

23 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Well, my answer to that is
24 this: that there was a case that materialised which
25 I think resulted in the reduction of commanding

1 officers' powers so they could not, in fact, address the
2 question of an accusation of rape or murder -- I
3 forget -- or maybe treason. I forget what the other one
4 was.

5 Actually, there was a tremendous logic in doing that
6 and there would have been logic whether or not there had
7 been a case that had inspired it, because it is not
8 logical, at least not to me, that somebody should be
9 allowed to dismiss a case of a particular accusation,
10 but not be allowed to try it, if he found there was
11 a case to answer.

12 Actually, when you are dealing with really serious
13 crime, it is quite unfair to ask a Commanding officer,
14 who is not usually a trained lawyer, even though he has
15 legal advice, it is quite unkind to ask him to make
16 really important decisions of that kind.

17 So, you know, on balance, I mean, I think the
18 catalyst was an incident in Iraq, but it may well have
19 happened anyway.

20 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: General Palmer?

21 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: I think, yes. I mean, I was
22 obviously involved in the Armed Forces Bill throughout
23 my time, as it was my department who was putting it
24 together. At the same time as we were doing this, there
25 was a lot of legislation coming out of the European

1 Court of Human Rights, et cetera, and this was all about
2 whether or not the court martial system or, indeed, the
3 system of justice within the military was compliant,
4 insofar as it looks that we were sort of judge, jury and
5 executioner and all that.

6 I was extremely concerned to ensure that we
7 maintained the view that our system was geared to not
8 only ensuring justice, but ensuring that the people who
9 were in charge of administering it did in all cases
10 understand the nature of the environment within which
11 the incident happened.

12 So, in other words, our view -- and I think it was
13 common throughout the Ministry of Defence -- was that
14 the court martial system must be preserved because,
15 otherwise, we would be failing in our duty to our
16 soldiers to ensure that they were fairly treated.

17 At no stage, was there any view that they should not
18 be subject to the law of the land and shouldn't be
19 brought to account if they offended against it. That
20 point has already been referred to by Alistair, but the
21 importance of making sure that they felt they were being
22 fairly dealt with, because the people dealing with them
23 were conversant with the nature of the battlefield, was
24 extremely important, especially as Iraq was going on at
25 the same time.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Just to sort of close off this area
2 of questioning, again it is putting to you something
3 that has been put to us, this time from a junior
4 officer, a very committed young man.

5 His point was that he felt that, as a nation, and
6 even as an army, the British are slow to hold up our
7 hands and admit we got something wrong. Instead, we
8 invest time and effort defending the indefensible
9 instead of focusing on finding a solution. This is not
10 directed at you two but, institutionally, I just wonder
11 whether you think there is something in that, that there
12 are barriers which sometimes present us with difficult
13 campaigns which are controversial, that there is
14 an inclination not to be as explicit and as candid as we
15 should be when difficulties appear.

16 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: That's --

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It is a big question.

18 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: It is a big question. Perhaps
19 I could try to answer it like this. I think that this
20 is a lesson that has not been learned by government,
21 because I think there are far too many -- I can't list
22 them, because I can't immediately, off the top of my
23 head, think of them, but it seems to me there have been
24 far too many cases of precisely that, defending the
25 indefensible, taking a position and then being forced

1 off it one way or another by press, by families,
2 whatever it happens to be, and then having to eat humble
3 pie.

4 I don't know why this lesson can't be learned. It
5 seems to me to be dead straightforward: come out in the
6 open, say "I'm sorry we got that wrong" and do something
7 about it.

8 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: It sounds like good advice. Would
9 you like to add anything?

10 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: I think that's true.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I think we will take that and move
12 on.

13 Harmony guidelines? Again, we have taken quite
14 a bit of evidence on this and the whole question of
15 stretch. I think we now understand the nature of these
16 guidelines, where they come from and the fact that they
17 often seem to be honoured more in the breach than in the
18 observance, but given that, given that these guidelines
19 did exist and they were proving difficult to meet, what
20 was the impact of that on the lives of service personnel
21 and their families?

22 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Do you want me to start? Okay.
23 We might come back to the purpose of Harmony guidelines
24 later, because most people view Harmony guidelines in
25 the context of assessing the level of commitment being

1 suffered by other people, but actually they have a much
2 wider purpose than that, which I might come back to.

3 As far as Iraq specifically was concerned, and
4 bearing in mind that Harmony guidelines are different
5 for each service, but basically they are just that, they
6 are guidelines, there is no doubt that in some areas we
7 were feeling the pressure in some specialist skills, but
8 overall, if one takes an overall look at the invasion,
9 self-evidently we had enough people to do it.

10 We did not need to sustain that level of commitment
11 much past the invasion itself. So the first thing
12 I want to say is that, although we were pushing up
13 against the Harmony guidelines in some cases already,
14 the whole emphasis after the invasion was to reduce
15 force levels quickly. I was very concerned with this.
16 in fact, I would say it was one of my major
17 preoccupations. We got it down, I think, from about
18 50,000, which represented 60% of the army, to about
19 10,000 within --

20 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: General, could you be a bit slower?

21 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Sorry. We did reduce the number
22 of soldiers in Iraq very quickly after the invasion, but
23 it was quite clear to me that just using Harmony
24 guidelines was not giving us an accurate view as to the
25 level of individual over-commitment.

1 So we then introduced this "nights out of bed" way
2 of looking at individuals to see how much time they were
3 spending with their families, et cetera.

4 Although I am certainly not complacent about Iraq,
5 I think we managed, on the whole, to deliver the result
6 without putting too much pressure on the armed forces as
7 a whole.

8 To come back to the point I made at the beginning,
9 Harmony guidelines are not just about level of
10 individual commitment, they are actually related to
11 defence planning assumptions, and I think this is a very
12 important point, which doesn't necessarily come out from
13 normal debate about them.

14 First of all, before Iraq, we were committed to
15 providing either a division or two brigades, one for six
16 months and another one indefinitely. So it was
17 an either/or. Obviously, we used the divisional level
18 in -- both Op Telic -- on both invasions of Iraq. So we
19 could do it.

20 The reason we could do it was because the people
21 concerned had had the requisite amount of training, both
22 individual sub-unit, unit and formation.

23 The reason they had that amount of training was
24 because the intervals between their tours was 24 months
25 or thereabouts. So there was sufficient time to train

1 them to be able to undertake that level of commitment
2 that the MoD had signed up to, given the resources that
3 it had.

4 The problem of reducing tour interval is not just
5 about personnel overstretch, but it is about a myriad of
6 other things, the most important of which is the ability
7 to train yourselves to be able to undertake a divisional
8 operation and, generally speaking, it meant that you had
9 to have a brigade that was clear of commitments for
10 about a year to undertake that level of training, which
11 would eventually lead them to be able to conduct brigade
12 operations.

13 The extent to which you keep reducing tour interval
14 is the extent to which you are unable to deliver on that
15 capability. My concern was not only for the
16 individuals -- that was the prime concern -- but it was
17 that we were not able to undertake the collective
18 training. We were not able to do a lot of the things
19 that we should have been doing in barracks, a lot of the
20 rather boring administrative things that battalions need
21 to do in order to be able to deliver capability, and
22 that, therefore, it was more serious in terms of
23 delivering capability than just individual commitment.

24 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So it is a question of time for
25 recuperation, but also for preparation for future

1 deployment.

2 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Absolutely, and seeing families,
3 of course, on the individual side and all that, but that
4 was only one, and that tends to be the area that's
5 always emphasised, where I think there is a much more
6 profound implication of a reduction in tour interval.

7 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: I would like to follow that through.
8 What were you doing -- what could you do to ease this
9 problem then?

10 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Well, first of all, one would try
11 to reduce the force levels in Iraq as quickly as
12 possible.

13 The second thing was to try to make sure that the
14 front line, the people who were operating in Iraq, were
15 as up to strength as possible, if necessary by reducing
16 the support in other areas of the army.

17 So one instance would be outsourcing some of the
18 training that happened within the training establishment
19 and, in a previous incarnation, I was running the army
20 training recruiting organisation, and we contracted
21 outsourcing actually to military people who had left the
22 service, some of them -- I don't want to use "mundane"
23 in a pejorative sense -- but basically, driver training
24 and things like that, so you can actually transfer more
25 people into the front line. So those are two things you

1 can do with force levels.

2 The second and very important thing you can do,
3 because individuals definitely felt stretched themselves
4 as individuals, is to put in place welfare packages,
5 et cetera, et cetera, to make them -- and money, and, of
6 course, the separate service allowance, the operational
7 bonus and all this.

8 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Slower.

9 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Slower.

10 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Sorry, yes.

11 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Was there a risk, though, given what
12 you say, in moving the -- getting people out of Iraq
13 that that actually may have been too many coming out too
14 quickly, so that, for those who were still in Iraq, the
15 stress of the operation became greater?

16 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: No, but that -- sorry. What I was
17 trying to say was we were trying to put more people into
18 Iraq from the United Kingdom by reducing some of the
19 more administrative jobs there and transferring them
20 into the operational front line.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: The first thing you said was you did
22 try to get the numbers down.

23 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: We did, but that was always in
24 consultation with PJHQ and it was never at operational
25 risk.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Can I just ask you one more question
2 on this, which flows from what you were saying? The
3 final decision about Afghanistan was taken after you
4 left office, but the possibility of increased commitment
5 was being discussed certainly at the start of 2005.

6 So what advice did you offer them about the impact
7 that the extra commitment could have on the armed
8 forces' capacity to service operations in Iraq on
9 a continual basis?

10 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: Well, from what I have said, you
11 will gather that I was quite concerned that we were
12 going to be, not only breaching Harmony guidelines, but
13 also defence planning assumptions by sending two
14 brigades at the same time on permanent commitments. The
15 idea that one could actually do that because Iraq was
16 likely to wind down early I thought was taking too big
17 a risk.

18 So both from the perspective of individuals and from
19 the perspective of being able to meet overall defence
20 planning assumptions, I thought it was risky.

21 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: You expressed these concerns?

22 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: I most certainly did, but then
23 I left. Something must have happened between when
24 I left and when they deployed to change the situation.

25 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: That's often the case. Thank you.

1 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Roderic, over to you.

2 SIR RODERIC LYNE: Let me boil this down to one question in
3 two parts.

4 Did Iraq make recruitment to the army more or less
5 difficult? First part.

6 Second part, retention: what challenges did you face
7 during this, as it turned out, increasingly long
8 operation in retaining forces, particularly specialists,
9 and how did you meet them?

10 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Well, in terms of recruiting
11 during those first two years, after which I cleared
12 off -- during those first two years, there was
13 a recruitment problem into the army. We were below
14 establishment when we went to war and we remained below
15 establishment for those first two years, until, I would
16 say, somewhere around about October/November, but, you
17 know -- 2004, but I am sort of guessing, but towards the
18 end of that two-year period there began to be some
19 evidence that the Iraq factor was deterring people from
20 joining.

21 Very often, that evidence suggested that it wasn't
22 the young men or women who were themselves being
23 deterred but it was their parents and careers advisers
24 who were themselves deterring them because of the public
25 attitude to the Iraq war, but it wasn't a significant

1 effect.

2 What was much more significant in the recruiting of
3 the army was the economic environment, which was
4 booming. This is a classic example of the British armed
5 forces experience: when things are good, it is difficult
6 to get men to come into uniform; when things are bad, as
7 we see now, it is easy or easier to bring them in.

8 Social attitudes are always changing and there is --
9 there are fewer people who instinctively think they want
10 to come into the allegedly harsh, disciplined world of
11 the army when they have been so leniently treated by
12 their parents and schoolteachers. You know, I am being
13 a little trivial, but there are societal attitudes
14 towards service in the military which were
15 a contributory factor to that.

16 So the short answer is Iraq had a bit of effect on
17 depressing recruitment, but not much, and that applied
18 both to the trades as well as to the infantrymen and the
19 armoured corps man.

20 As to retention, there was, of course, and remains,
21 a mechanism to stop people leaving. You know, you are
22 called out on operations and so you can't go, and very
23 often that block resulted in the person, in fact,
24 wanting to stay after the tour was over, because he had
25 found that he had, in fact, found some professional

1 fulfilment and thought that he wouldn't mind some more
2 of it.

3 Retention at the moment is very good, again because
4 of the economic climate, but as a very distant observer
5 from the north of Scotland, you know, the prediction is
6 that, when we come out of the current economic gloom,
7 there is quite likely to be a speed-up of exit for
8 people looking for jobs outside the army.

9 I don't know. Has that sort of answered the
10 question?

11 SIR RODERIC LYNE: I think you have put it in a very neat
12 nutshell, and I think the only answer to that is to
13 appoint a teddybear as Adjutant General with wads of
14 pound notes in his hand.

15 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Let me pass the questioning on. A last
16 question from Sir Lawrence.

17 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: One question covering quite a large
18 issue, but it deals with the reserves. There were a lot
19 of problems in England, as we know, with the initial
20 call-up and the experience of the reservists for
21 Telic 1. I just wondered what lessons were learned from
22 that experience and how well they were implemented?

23 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: As I said earlier, before the
24 break, lessons that are not applied immediately probably
25 don't get learned or don't get implemented.

1 So my answer is that the lessons that could be
2 applied were applied then and we then found a new set of
3 circumstances, but just as a little anecdote, which
4 I hope is not too frivolous, I remember there had been
5 a glossy book produced by the military called "Lessons
6 learned from Op Granby" and, when I arrived as
7 Adjutant General, I asked a few of my staff officers
8 what lessons they had derived from re-reading the book.
9 It took us some time to find it.

10 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: And the reserves?

11 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Oh, I am so sorry. Yes. The
12 reserves had become a much bigger issue by the time --
13 I mean, the Balkans had taken in a lot of reserves and
14 of course Iraq did and now Afghanistan does. It had
15 become a completely different situation from that
16 earlier session, because then they had not been needed
17 in anything like the same numbers. We were learning
18 a whole new environment.

19 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: I think there were big changes
20 between Telic 1 and Telic 2 insofar as the Territorial
21 Army had been reduced quite substantially and people
22 joined it on the basis that they were going to have to
23 deploy operationally.

24 We put in place a mounting centre at Chilwell, in
25 order to try to administer them better, because there

1 were issues definitely about inadequacies in handling
2 reserve mobilisation to do with their pay, to do with
3 their jobs, and we were very involved in trying to make
4 sure -- and the legislation was put in place -- to make
5 sure they could get their jobs back. Actually, I think
6 we did have to resort to law on a couple of occasions.

7 We also made sure that they had access to the same
8 packages as the regulars and obviously the same
9 training, but I did take a number of criticisms from
10 reservists who did not feel they had been properly
11 looked after administratively or, indeed, in a training
12 sense, but generally speaking, they performed
13 magnificently during the operation, and we simply could
14 not have done without them.

15 There is, incidentally, some evidence now that, if
16 PTSD is an issue, it is more of an issue with the
17 reserves than it is with the regulars and that's
18 a continuing cause of concern.

19 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Yes, we have already heard some
20 evidence about that.

21 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: Can I offer you an apology?
22 My last answer, I completely misheard the question.
23 I thought it had been about the comparison about the
24 first Gulf War and the next one. I'm sorry. Probably
25 what I had to say was, you know, completely irrelevant.

1 SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: Your point about lessons learned
2 from Operation Granby was well-taken.

3 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: I answered the wrong question.

4 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Any final reflections from either of you
5 that have not come out this afternoon or in previous
6 sessions, indeed, on the impact of the Iraq campaign
7 taken as a whole?

8 General Irwin first, perhaps.

9 LT. GEN. SIR ALISTAIR IRWIN: I think -- in terms of the
10 impact, I think that it, on balance -- if you are
11 looking at it from an army point of view, on balance it
12 was a very good experience, because it reintroduced into
13 the army another experience of professionally dealing
14 with a war and, frankly, armies that don't get used are
15 armies that quickly atrophy.

16 That's not, of course, an excuse for using them, but
17 I think that, in that sense, it was a good impact,
18 because it was something that was good for the army as
19 a professional body, but otherwise I think the lesson is
20 that one has to prepare for the worst in every possible
21 kind of case. I am not sure that in all dimensions of
22 the preparation and conduct of Iraq, worst case planning
23 was in place. That, again, does seem to be a slight
24 disease of the modern era.

25 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Thank you. General Palmer?

1 LT. GEN. ANTHONY PALMER: The general question about people,
2 I think it actually -- as I have been in civilian life
3 now for a few years, it applies equally there. There is
4 a lot of talk about people being our most important
5 resource. Everybody says it all the time. Words comes
6 very cheap in this area, but actually, when it comes
7 down to it, very often the resources that people require
8 are given a lesser priority than they should do.
9 Certainly I have found -- and I think actually I have to
10 say, and I do pay tribute to my teams in the Ministry Of
11 Defence, both to civil servants and military officers,
12 to the way they responded to the challenges that were
13 presented and, actually, we did manage to get the
14 resources from the Treasury, and that meant making very
15 good cases and having good policies, which was
16 essential.

17 SIR JOHN CHILCOT: Well, our thanks to both our witnesses
18 this afternoon. Thank you very much indeed. I will
19 close the session now.

20 Our next session will start at 4.30 pm and the
21 witness then will be Carolyn Miller, who was responsible
22 in DFID, between 2001 and 2004, for Europe, the Middle
23 East, and the Americas and, hence, for Iraq. Thank you.

24 (4.15pm)

25 (The session concluded)

