

TCCC, Teamwork and Calm Thinking Saves Lives After a Complex Attack Against a Coalition Base in Afghanistan

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Abstract

Introduction: A Forward Operating Base (FOB) in Afghanistan suffered a complex attack by insurgents, what followed was a fire fight, 4 insurgents dead, 1 coalition dead, 8 Afghan security staff dead with a total of 38 casualties. As the Senior Medic, I provided leadership, clinical interventions based on Tactical Combat Casualty Care (TCCC) and experienced the physiological effects commonly seen in stressful situations.

Case Description: In August 2015 at 2210hrs a FOB in Afghanistan suffered a complex attack by insurgents. A Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) detonated, followed by 3 insurgents with small arms fire, RPG'S, grenades and suicide vests. I awoke to the explosion and gun fire; I immediately made my way to the Role 1 facility and fortuitously chose the right exit as a suicide bomber detonated himself outside the other exit. On arrival the Role 1 was unserviceable and we created a Casualty Clearing Position (CCP) in a passageway. There was minimal light, thick dust, the ceiling collapsed, lights and wires hung from the roof and there was an eerie but surreal feeling as the fire fight continued outside. The Command Surgeon sustained injuries and was eventually medevac'd. I was the Senior Medic, and having been in country for just over 1 week, took control and managed the CCP.

The injury types were penetrating trauma from small arms fire and fragments, over pressure injuries from the blast and mainly Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) from building damage as the ceiling collapsed on personnel. Treatment of casualties was based on TCCC principles; rapid haemorrhage control, airway control with nasopharyngeal airways, chest seals for chest trauma and needle decompressions for suspected tension pneumothoraxes. TXA was used on two patients meeting criteria, normotensive resuscitation was followed and ketamine was only used once after most patients had cleared the CCP. A strong emphasis was placed on the basics of treatment with bystanders assisting. 9 Liners were sent and all critical patients were Medevac'd to Role 2 and Role 3 facilities in less than 3 hours. After all casualties were cleared the CCP was reset

in anticipation for future attacks, here litters were prepared, equipment scrounged from the Role 1, and ad-hoc teams arranged and briefed.

Discussion: This attack saw combat medicine based on the TCCC principles with very little definitive care being rendered at the scene it was rapid TCCC and AME. The scenario was emotionally provoking for most at the scene, treating patients, and trying to remain calm while not knowing many facts about the situation outside. During the scene I relied on tools to remain calm and not get cognitively overloaded. I offloaded simple tasks to bystanders, used heuristics for rapid treatment, voiced laymen mental models for treatment plans, and I was personal speaking with all patients and reassured them with humour. These and other simple tools combined with an excellent team work approach resulted in an overwhelming success. This presentation will concentrate on how human factors influence performance and how these can be mitigated with training.

Biography

Joined the RAN 2000, became a Clinical Manager Medic in 2006, promoted to Chief Petty Officer in 2013. Spent over 7 years at sea, operationally deployed on Operations Resolute, Anode, Relex, Relex II, Slipper, and most recently Highroad 2015/16. I have served on HMA Ships Manoora, Success, Leeuwin, Melville, and Newcastle as well as embarked on HMA Ships Choules and Canberra while part of the Maritime Operational Health Unit. I Completed the NSW Flight Paramedic Induction Course 2014 and hold a Bachelors of Clinical Practice (BClinPrac) from Charles Sturt University 2011.

Awarded the following honours and awards:

- Australian Defence Medal,
- Afghanistan Medal,
- Australian Active Service Medal Clasp ICAT,
- Australian Operational Service Medal – Border Protection,
- Australian Operational Service Medal – Greater Middle East Operation
- NATO Non Article 5 Medal with Clasp Afghanistan
- Commander Australian Navy Systems Command Commendation – Silver
- Navy Commendation – Bronze
- United States Combat Action Badge

I have been married to Bianca for over 10 years and have two children, Dean aged 5 and Alyssa aged 2. I am currently posted to Fleet Health Division as the Fleet Clinical Manager Medic.