

PART 1.6 – CONVENING AUTHORITY COMMENTS

1. As Convening Authority, I endorse the SI Panel's findings and recommendations in full. Moreover, I am grateful for the honesty and openness with which the accident crew engaged with the Panel. In doing so, they have contributed materially to our efforts to prevent recurrence.
2. It is evident that the accident crew's judgement in their pursuit and execution of the approach and terminal manoeuvre at PB Bahadur was flawed. In the circumstances at the time, their assessment of the need to complete their task at the first attempt was in good faith and is perhaps understandable but, with the benefit of a more measured analysis in retrospect, it can be judged to have been erroneous. There is no compelling evidence that the strength of the imperative to resupply the PB, or the level of threat locally at the time, precluded a little more time being taken in the initial set-up, or breaking off the approach early and either repositioning for a rapid, but more controlled, second attempt, or even re-tasking the resupply for early in the forthcoming night. By electing to continue from the initial approach, despite the late sighting and proximity of the HLS, the crew effectively placed themselves outside the SOP for the USL delivery manoeuvre and beyond their ability to carry out their duties effectively.
3. The HP's own misjudgements were undoubtedly made more likely by the cumulative fatigue he was evidently experiencing as a result of the strain he was under in his first command role in an operational theatre, the tempo of this Chinook detachment's operations, his dual role as a crew commander and the chronic pressure on rest that he and his personnel experienced as a result of inadequate nutrition and repeatedly disrupted sleep patterns. Yet a suitably qualified and experienced supervisory chain that could have identified and mitigated these preconditions was in place. His superior command chain neither identified the effect such factors were having on the HP and his performance, nor acted with sufficient diligence to ensure adequate standards and effectiveness of some of the critical support elements for the activity, such as messing and the MAOT. Moreover, the rest of the crew, who themselves were of course subject to fatigue induced by some of the same pressures, did not effect adequate control of risk by virtue of their unwillingness, or inability, to hold the HP appropriately to account for his actions, as a consequence of his rank, position or reputation, or more likely a combination of all three.
4. However, notwithstanding the crew's actions, the likelihood of the accident occurring was significantly increased by the fact that management of HLSs has been accorded insufficient priority and attention. The rapid increase in HLSs consequential on the troop surge in the TFH AO was not identified and sufficiently well catered for in the planning stage, the MAOT capability was not recognised as a critical enabler and accorded appropriate priority and, despite extant RC(SW) SOPs to the contrary, insufficient attention was given to the management of HLSs in general, and PB Bahadur's in particular. There is no other satisfactory explanation for the fact that a Chinook helicopter was tasked into a Lynx-sized HLS, the dimensions of which had been unilaterally changed and gone unnoticed and the husbandry of which, in terms of dust suppression, was patently inadequate.
5. On a daily basis, UK servicemen and women are exposed to, and place themselves at, significant risk in Afghanistan and elsewhere. The requirement to do so is explicit in their operations and their willingness to do so, repeatedly, brings them richly deserved respect and credit. Nevertheless, notwithstanding operational imperatives, all risks to life must still be evaluated, balanced and mitigated to the maximum extent possible in the circumstances. This is as important for sound military reasons, such as protection, effectiveness, preservation of the force and morale, as for the inescapable duty of care that all of us owe to our subordinates, and each other. The reality in Afghanistan is that more helicopters are seriously damaged by virtue of the operating environment than by direct enemy action, although this is by no means a phenomenon unique to Afghanistan. Therefore, the responsibility to manage risk to life must extend across the

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operating spectrum, is explicit and unequivocal, and can only be jointly and severally shared between servicemen and women themselves and their commanders. Further back in the chain, the risk to helicopter operations in Afghanistan posed by brownout has been highlighted previously and, as this report records, it remains a contemporary threat. Therefore, the continued absence of a technical aid demands confirmation that such mitigation is being pursued with appropriate vigour.

6. Both I and the SI Panel offer our sincerest condolences to Rfn Kulung's family, along with our hopes that this Report might assist them in coming to terms with their great loss. The MAA will actively track implementation of the Report's recommendations to their conclusion.