

## Peter Bowring - Mission Timor 2000

5713614 Royal Australian Medical Corps, 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Ambulance Vietnam 22 May 1966 to 25 April 1967

Station Sergeant 848 Federal Police (Ex) Timor Leste

Sergeant I/c Western Australian Police Force (Retired)



Peter served in Vietnam from 1966 to 1967 with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Ambulance attached to Med Evac Chopper Dust off and Engineers Field Medic. He also served with the Western Australian Police Force for 30 years, retiring as I/c Sergeant in 2001.

### Mission Timor

This is Peter's story of his involvement with the first team from the Western Australian Police Force (WAPOL) in its service as Federal Agents and United Nations Police serving under the United Nations Transitional Administration East Timor (UNTAET) as Peace Keepers /Makers.

All those that served and are associated with Timor understand its history, the conflict, violence, killings, destruction and political upheaval involved during its path to independence as Timor Leste.

A team of seven officers from the WAPOL, five serving and two retired, travelled to Canberra in February 2000. Following induction under the guidance of the Federal Police the Team, with its Contingent Commander Terry Clarke, was transported to Timor by RAAF Hercules C130 as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Contingent on 1 March 2000. The mission was for 3 months, although requests were made for the contingent to continue in the country.

The contingent was conveyed to accommodation at The Turismo Hotel in Dili, the prior HQ for Major General Cosgrove of INTERFET. It then attended the UN Dili compound for further induction. Peter said that *"this compound was previously the scene of attacks from gangs of militia on unarmed Peace Keepers and Timorese. On a lighter note, we had to prove that we could speak English and drive motor vehicles prior to being certified."*

Peter's posting was as Station Sergeant on the border post of Maliana. He travelled to Batugade with UN Police convoy en-route to Maliana where his team provided security and support for Border crossing of the Family Reunion operations that involved 3000 East and West Timorese. *"Five such operations were undertaken and involved riots, shots being fired, searching for weapons and illicit arms, flags, alcohol and propaganda. Constant supervision was required with the identification of persons of interest as militia or associates who were taken into custody."*

The UN Maliana compound had previously been a TNI (Indonesian National Military) Parachute Regiment Base and was partly destroyed and burnt. Patrols were conducted in the Bobonaro region where there was significant devastation of local schools, houses and infrastructure. The destruction was comparable to some that Peter experienced in Vietnam.

Peter stated that *"the Commander was a Texan, Donnie Hensley, who provided a strong work ethic and leadership. The rest of the team was made up of Police Officers from Egypt, Bangladesh, Nigeria, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Argentina and Portugal. A 24/7 operational status was a priority in providing a Blue Beret presence through the Region, including in Memo, Balibo, Calico and Bobonaro."*

*This required policing, constant patrols, interaction with locals, and liaison with the military (with my Army background this was well received), while maintaining morale, as well as being aware of threats from the militia and environment.”*



*Peacekeeper Station Compound Maliana*



*Captured militia before interview*

### **Some Incidents**

Soon after arrival at Maliana the Commander was still trying to obtain delivery of firearms, body armour, and riot control equipment which were being delayed. Weapons were becoming a priority as the team was located on the border and information had been received that up to twenty militia were in the area with the intention of breaching the base. *“With no weapons, we broke down the tables to use the legs as clubs and maintained 24/7 stand to. The arrival of an APC from 5 / 7 Battalion was greatly appreciated. Shortly after this Dili issued all of the required protective arms and equipment including 9mm Glocks and Body Armour, replacing those table legs”,* Peter commented.

*“We were summoned to Bobonaro to assist the Pakistan Army. One of the villagers was armed with spears and on the previous day had wounded one of the soldiers. The OC of the soldiers indicated that under Rules of Engagement if the villager resisted, they would have to shoot him. Following a further spear through the doorway on our arrival our negotiations with the villager allowed him to be disarmed and restrictions enforced”.*

### **Sad End**

Segio De Mello the Special Representative for UNTAET was to visit Bobonara and there had been information received that there was to be an attempt on his life. *“We provided Close Person Protection over two days for this impressive man, he spoke many languages and had the interest of the Timorese. Sadly, following Timor he went on to Iraq as the UN representative and was killed by a suicide truck bomb in his office complex.”*

### **Militia**

Peter was involved in dealing with numerous captured Militia by interviewing them regarding crimes committed, and then conveying them to Bachau Prison in Dili. *“We conveyed them to Dili in the back of our 4 x 4 vehicles for the three hour road trip. It appeared through our Interpreters that every time the vehicles slowed or stopped because of road conditions or dodging convoys, the prisoners believed that they were going to be executed. It was food for thought considering the horrendous crimes many had committed. As a result, they were very quiet during the trips.”*

### **Success**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Contingent in Timor during 2000 was a great success and the combination of the Police Peacekeepers and Military provided a stable platform for transition to democratic governance of Timor Leste.