

## Chapter Two – Battalion Operations

The purpose of the 4RAR Battalion Group (Battalion Group) deployment to East Timor was to provide security to the people of East Timor so that they could rebuild their country following the scorched earth policy initiated by the militia following the 30 August 1999 referendum. The results of the referendum indicated that 78% of the people of East Timor wanted independence from Indonesia following their occupation over the previous two decades. As a result of the overwhelming success of the referendum pro-Indonesian militias attempted to destroy all buildings and homes in the country, raping and killing anyone that stood in their way. The international community did not stand idly by while this was happening and by September 1999 an International Force deployed to the country to restore peace and calm. In February 2000 the UN took control of the mission in East Timor and Australia have provided a Battalion to assist the UN in maintaining security ever since.

This chapter will provide an overview of the major operations conducted by the 4RAR Battalion Group in which it successfully achieved its objective of providing security to the East Timorese, a success clearly demonstrated by the calm and peaceful conduct of national elections on 30 August 2001.

### 4RAR Battalion Group Area of Operations

The 4RAR Battalion Group was responsible for an Area of Operations (AO) which was 1138 square kilometres in size in the west of East Timor, otherwise referred to as AO Matilda. The district was known as the Bobonaro District, named after one of the most important towns in the area. In addition to the large landmass, the Battalion Group was also responsible for 64km of border with Indonesian West Timor. This was known as the Tactical Co-ordination Line (TCL) as a formalised border had not yet been agreed upon by Indonesia and East Timor. 4RAR maintained four Junction Points (JP) along the TCL including: JP Alpha near Batugade, JP Bravo near Nunura, JP Charlie opposite the West Timor town of Turiskain and JP Memo at the town of Memo.

The AO consists of coastal plains between Batugade and Aidabaleten, two mountain ranges that run north - south through Balibo and Bobonaro respectively and a large rice growing area in the Maliana flood plains. The Battalion AO is divided into four smaller sub-AOs with a Rifle Company (Company) responsible for each. (*See Map 1 next page*)

Alpha Company was based in Batugade and was also responsible for the communications retransmission (retrans) facility in Fatuklaren and JP Alpha. Bravo Company was based in Bobonaro and was responsible for the communications retrans facility on the 1711 feature (otherwise known as Everest). Charlie Company was based in Aidabaleten and Delta Company, based in Maliana, was responsible for JPs Bravo, Charlie, Memo and the Maliana Radio Tower.

The Battalion took official control of AO Matilda at 10:00 am on 25 April 2001, Anzac Day. Of course a service was held and many dignitaries attended including the Governor General, Sir William Dean. By lunch that day the CO of 1RAR had departed the AO and 4RAR was responsible for all that occurred in AO Matilda. It was only a matter of days before the first incident occurred.

### TCL Violations

On 1 May 2001 a routine patrol from Delta Company spotted five men wearing a mixture of TNI uniforms and civilian attire huddled together in a suspicious manner very close to the TCL near JP



**MAP 1**

*The map identifies the 4RAR Battalion Group area of responsibility in East Timor, with key points marked.*

\* Charlie. The AUSBATT patrol led by Corporal Café pursued the group until they crossed into West Timor where they were met by a group of Indonesian soldiers who commenced pointing to the ground, yelling "Indonesia, Indonesia."

A few days later on 5 May a similar incident occurred this time involving 23 young men near the TCL. On this occasion Corporal Whitbread from Delta Company was able to intercept the men who were later identified as Indonesian soldiers (TNI) suspected to be involved in illegal smuggling from West Timor to East Timor. Shortly after being apprehended a fully armed Indonesian Army patrol crossed into East Timor and moved to the site where the suspects had been apprehended. This greatly raised the stakes as TNI had now committed an armed violation of the TCL. 4RAR responded quickly by deploying a Troop of armoured vehicles, additional soldiers from Delta Company, the Battalion Immediate Response Force (IRF) and both the Officer Commanding Delta Company, Major Thomas, and the Commanding Officer of 4RAR, Lieutenant Colonel Sengelman.

The Indonesian soldiers were secured whilst an investigation of the suspect group was conducted. It was revealed that many of the suspect group were indeed Indonesian soldiers involved in smuggling fuel and cigarettes across the TCL. After completing the full investigation the suspect group and the TNI patrol were permitted to return to West Timor.

Finally, on 7 May 2001 the Commanding Officer of the TNI Battalion that operated close to the border in West Timor, decided to view the incident site for himself. He moved to the incident site inside East Timor with an armed security element without informing 4RAR until he had crossed the TCL. This was the third TCL violation in a week and again 4RAR soldiers responded quickly and

effectively to maintain the sovereignty of East Timor. These TCL violations were dealt with at the highest levels between the UN and TNI. After meetings between many senior commanders including CO 4RAR and his counterpart at the TNI 131 Territorial Infantry Battalion, the issue of the need to maintain the integrity of the TCL was agreed and there were no further TCL violations committed by TNI for the remainder of the 4RAR tour.

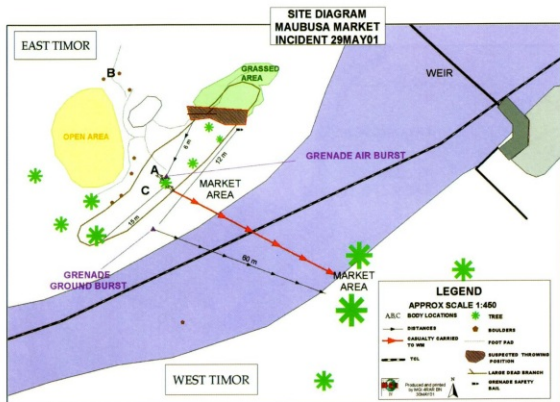


### **Maubusa Markets Grenade Attack 29 May 01**

Apart from the TCL violations by TNI the border area between West Timor and East Timor continued to see large volumes of activity in the form of trade and markets. It was assessed early in the tour that these markets were vulnerable to threat elements that may have intended to use them to infiltrate into and out of East Timor, or as a means to generate income to sustain their activities. Certainly, militia presence at the markets made the locals very nervous and undermined the work of 4RAR in its goal of maintaining a secure environment. The Battalion's worst fears were confirmed when on 29 May 2001 two men approached the Maubusa markets from West Timor throwing grenades into the air.

With over 2500 traders on the border spread out over 64 kilometres it would have been impossible to prevent an attack of this nature but the incident did confirm that threat elements were actively involved in the markets. 4RAR responded very quickly to the incident, despatching the IRF to secure the incident site and providing medical aid that treated over 20 casualties.

It was assessed that there were four – five fatalities and approximately 50 casualties as a result of the incident. Some of the casualties and fatalities were taken to West Timor and therefore cannot be verified; however, this incident did spark TNI into taking more action against threat elements moving to the markets from West Timor.



**MAP 3**

*Diagram of the Maubusa market incident.*

### Op RIVERTON 11 – 12 June 2001

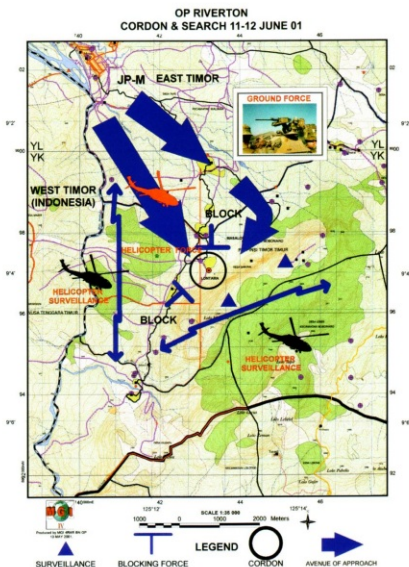
On 11 June 2001 4RAR was informed that a known militia member, Victor Lopez Hornai, had voluntarily given himself over to Civilian Police (CIVPOL) at Maliana. A key figure in the Daduras Merih Putih militia group, Hornai was able to provide 4RAR with information concerning a group of over two hundred refugees, some of whom were former militia members, who had returned to East Timor in the southern part of AO Matilda.

As a result of this information, the Battalion conducted a large block and sweep operation on the town of Lontana in the Saburai area. The blocking elements deployed over the night of 11/12 June and had established an outer cordon by 10am on 12 June. Whilst this was occurring RSI elements were providing overwatch of the town from the Everest Feature, a dominant mountain range to the east of Lontana.

Once the block was established the Military Information Support Team (MIST) was utilised by speaking to the village in Tetum with the assistance of other local village elders. This was done in order to reassure the Lontana villagers that they would be safe as long as they did not interfere with the sweep that was about to commence. With the blocks in position, provided by Delta and Bravo Companies,

heliborne troops from Charlie Company flew into the village by Australian Blackhawk helicopters providing a large number of soldiers in a short time. This approach combined with the outer cordon and the MIST information proved very effective. When the sweep through Lontana commenced 34 militia voluntarily handed themselves over to 4RAR soldiers and 18 of this group were serious category one militia.

Op RIVERTON was a particularly successful operation with the capture of 34 militia in a calm and peaceful manner, without the firing of any shots. This operation had a lasting effect on the return of additional militia members with many more to return as a result of the humane way they were handled in Lontana. There are now over 700 former militia members residing in the AO Matilda.



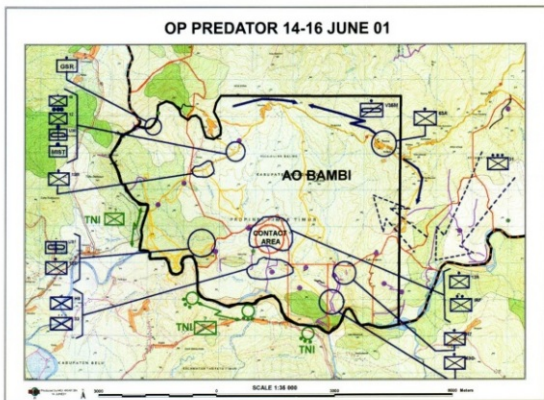
#### **RIVERTON**

*The block and sweep operation which captured 34 Militia members in Lontana.*

### Op PREDATOR 1 June 2001

At 1230 hours on 1 June, a patrol from Alpha Company led by Corporal Campbell was fired upon by a group of five men dressed in civilian attire approximately eight kilometres south west of Balibo. The five-man group were all carrying rifles, except possibly for the first person in their group, and fired upon the Australians after being challenged by the lead scout of the patrol. The 4RAR soldiers pursued the threat group who broke contact using military style break contact tactics withdrawing through thick lantana. At this point the Section Commander halted the pursuit and reorganised his section on a small feature. Approximately 10 minutes later the patrol re-engaged threat elements that were moving back towards their location. There were unconfirmed reports that one of the threat elements was wounded in the firefight.

Immediately after the contact 4RAR elements quickly deployed into the area surrounding the contact site in order to intercept the threat group as they attempted to move away from the contact site. It was assessed that the threat group withdrew into West Timor within 30 – 45 minutes after the contact, crossing the TCL in close proximity to a TNI patrol. The contact confirmed that threat elements were still active in AO Matilda and that the requirement for a professional and vigilant Peace Keeping Force was vital.



### OP PREDATOR BATTLE MAP

*The first contact with suspected Militia elements occurred on 1 June 2001.*

**Op PENGUIN 1 – 6 Jun 01**

Prior to the Maubusa market attack and the contact involving the Alpha Company patrol, 4RAR had identified the local markets on the TCL as a potential security concern. As a result a battle lab was planned involving elements from Bravo, Charlie and Delta Companies to conduct security patrols and searches at one of the most well known markets along the TCL, the JP Memo markets. In addition, Australian reconnaissance Kiowa helicopters were involved in providing overwatch whilst the MIST and Civil Military Affairs (CMA) elements from 4RAR kept the local traders informed of the purpose of the Battalion operation.

The operation provided invaluable information of the traders' reaction to the arrival of a large security force. The locals, used to extortion and harassment by TNI and militia groups at their markets, initially were nervous with the arrival of the large 4RAR force and quickly attempted to move to other locations. This confirmed the need for active involvement by the Battalion's CMA and MIST elements to ensure that the population knew that they were not being targeted but that rather, 4RAR was only interested in threat elements at these markets.

**Op ALBATROSS 12- 20 June 2001**

Following the lessons learnt from Op PENGUIN, Op ALBATROSS was designed to investigate and secure all market locations along the 64 km TCL. The Maubusa markets attack and Op PREDATOR confirmed that threat elements were active in the 4RAR AO and that they were also involved with the markets. As a result Op ALBATROSS' objective was to deny these elements from participation in the markets. The operation was conducted over three phases: the information gathering phase, the public awareness phase and the conduct of aggressive market patrols and searches.

Phase one identified that there were five main market locations along the TCL. At each of these markets there were up to 500 locals involved on any given day. Consequently, there could easily be over 2500 locals trading on the TCL each day. The trade basically involved cigarettes and fuel, both being heavily subsidised in Indonesia, and therefore much cheaper than the retail price in East Timor, making it very profitable to smuggle into East Timor.

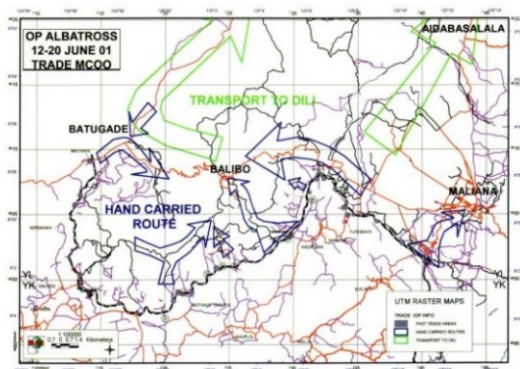
Phase two sought to ensure that the locals were aware that the 4RAR operation in vicinity of the markets was not aimed at preventing the locals from going about their daily business of trade, but rather to prevent threat elements from also being involved. 4RAR worked hard to develop the confidence of the locals so that they would provide the Battalion with information of any threat group operating near the TCL or at the markets.

The final phase of the operation involved elements from each of the four rifle companies, MIST, CMA, CIVPOL and the United Nations Military Observers (UNMOs) conducting simultaneous patrols of each location in which markets were active. In addition, all traders were searched as they moved to and from the markets. Whilst no threat elements were identified throughout Op ALBATROSS the operation was very successful in re-establishing the locals trust in 4RAR, a vital element in any counter insurgent operation.

**Op CHALLENGER 14 July 2001**

Op CHALLENGER was the first of a number of shaping operations which had the goal of reassuring the locals in the ability of 4RAR to provide security whilst deterring threat elements from campaigning against the 4RAR Peacekeeping Force. The operation involved a platoon from Charlie Company mounted in a Troop of armoured vehicles from 2/14<sup>th</sup> Queensland Mounted Infantry (2<sup>nd</sup> / 14<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Regiment (QMI)) and from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment. The armoured group established an open display in the largest of population centres in AO Matilda, Maliana. At this display the locals were able to view most of the sophisticated equipment of the Battalion including weapons, body armour, radars and night fighting equipment with the intent of impressing the locals on the capability of the Battalion. The objective of this activity was to confirm the locals confidence in the Battalion as being a professional organisation, quite capable of providing them with security.





#### OP ALBATROSS

*Op ALBATROSS was a three phased operation involving significant Battalion assets.*

### Op TITAN I, II and III

Following the successful trial of Op CHALLENGER the Op TITAN series was instigated on a larger scale but with the same intent, to reassure friendly East Timorese of the 4RAR capability and to deter any potential threat elements. As opposed to the Mounted Platoon that was used in Op CHALLENGER, each of the Titan operations involved most of the Battalion in one form or another.

The three serials of this operation involved a mounted Company, a heliborne Company and several vehicle mounted patrols operating in close proximity to the TCL from JP Alpha to the southern boundary with the NZ Battalion near the town of Atus. The operations were purposefully designed to be overt incorporating the widespread use of white light, normally considered tactically unsound, the use of flares and illumination each night and the movement of 4RAR armoured vehicles and soldiers in a very clear and obvious fashion. In many cases patrols were inserted by helicopter or armoured vehicle only to be extracted shortly after and re-inserted thus giving the impression of a larger force than that actually committed to the operation.

The first two serials were conducted prior to the elections during the period 19 – 22 July and then 2 – 4 August. On these two occasions Charlie and Bravo Companies conducted the bulk of the manoeuvre in the vicinity of the TCL with Charlie Company mounted in APCs and Bravo Company heliborne. On the second serial Delta Company added to the overall effect by conducting a Block and Sweep in the vicinity of JP Charlie, therefore resulting in three of the four Rifle companies being intimately involved.

The heavy commitment of the Rifle Companies could not have been achieved without additional support. Both the Battalion Logistic Support Company and the 4<sup>th</sup> Combat Service Support Team, provided soldiers to maintain security at the Rifle Company bases.



The final serial of the Op TITAN series occurred during the period 30 September – 4 October. In this case Alpha and Delta Companies conducted the bulk of the manoeuvre whilst Charlie and Bravo Companies provided elements to maintain the static security posts. During the final serial of Op TITAN, Alpha Company was mounted in APCs and Delta Company was principally heliborne. Again the focus remained on the TCL where most incidents had previously occurred and where the maximum impression could be created by any potential threat elements.



#### OP TITAN

*Op TITAN was a show of force conducted throughout the deployment period.*

#### Op PAVEWAY 18- 26 August 2001

In the final lead up to the 30 August elections it was assessed that several different threat elements could attempt to disrupt the electoral process. These elements ranged from hard line militia elements who remained disenfranchised by the 1999 referendum results to internal political groups who might attempt to commit politically motivated violence in order to gain the ascendancy in the final stages of the election campaigning process.

As a result 4RAR committed itself to an extremely high tempo area domination of AO Matilda. This domination commenced in the rear of the AO with Charlie Company and Bravo Company operations through the more remote villages and gradually moved forward to the TCL where markets were searched and the TCL secured. All major traffic routes were secured with numerous Vehicle Check Points (VCPs) and all likely militia infiltration routes aggressively patrolled. During this operation 4RAR was reinforced by a platoon from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment, serving to the south of 4RAR along the TCL. This platoon was deployed to Aidabasalala maximising 4RAR forces deployed on Op PAVEWAY.

Similar to the Op TITAN series, the logistic support elements 'back – filled' several of the key static posts such as the communication retrans facilities and Company operating bases at Aidabaleten and