

## **Chapter 4 – Alpha Company**

### **Officer Commanding – Major Mick Frewen**

The deployment of A Company on Operation TANAGER will remain a significant highlight in the lives of all those that served in and with A Company. It was the first experience of operations for many, and in our troubled region will most likely not be the last. It will be significant because we were involved in history, and we helped a young country to gain security and independence through free elections. Our deployment placed great demands on our families that stayed behind, and to them we owe much for the opportunity we have had. You have all proudly served in the best traditions of the Australian soldier. Personally, I will not forget the dedication and long hours you have worked in achieving our mission, nor will I forget the characters and stories that have emerged. For this support I thank you, and I wish all good soldiering for the future.

**ONWARD!**

### **Company Sergeant Major – Warrant Officer Class 2 Alan Lynch**

Our time as a Company has been a short one since we were re-raised, but one to which we have packed a lot in. The training prior to our deployment was intense and hard. Those weeks spent at Singleton, Canungra and Shoalwater Bay had paid dividends, once we arrived in country. Under the guiding leadership of Platoon Commanders and Sergeants, the platoons quickly adapted to their new surroundings, and from the point of landing at Fort Batugade, everybody was well aware that we were no longer training. As history will show this operational deployment has been the first for Alpha Company 4 RAR since 1966.

I would like to say that the performances of all members of the Company have been excellent. Apart from the usual ups and downs associated with Army life, everybody did their job and did it well. For a relatively young Company the soldiers adapted well to the environment and got on with the job. This was no more evident than the skill and professionalism shown by Corporal Campbell's section during their contact. I have no doubt whatsoever, that had it been another one of our sections, then they would have performed in the same manner, which is a testament to the calibre of our Junior Non Commissioned Officers (JNCO) and soldiers.

In closing I would just like to say that it has been an honour and a privilege to have served as your Company Sergeant Major (CSM), well done and good luck to you all in the future.

### **Alpha Company Headquarters (CHQ)**

Alpha Company CHQ has had an enjoyable and fruitful experience during its six month deployment to East Timor. The headquarters was kept busy through its Command Post responsibilities, conducting vehicle patrols, several foot patrols, and providing extra security to Civil Military Affairs (CMA) and Force Protection Element (FPE) members when required. After many delays the Company was finally able to get the Zodiac water-craft on the water, with our seafaring Officer Commanding (OC) Major Frewen sticking his hand high when water trucks were on.

The Company Quarter Master Sergeant (CQMS) WO2 Smith with his small group of hard men, known as 'The Clydesdales', would often be seen slipping away each afternoon, to put themselves through some of the hardest and most physical training sessions ever seen. The cries of pain could often be heard coming from Charlie and 'Boxcar' Ridler as the CQMS cracked his whip. Meanwhile,

Company Second in Command (2IC) Captain Stehouwer, and Signallers Garbin and Scott frustrated cries of "Where's my iron power ... how am I expected to get buff for the summer?!!" rang out for all to hear. There were others (SMURF) though, who I'm sure could tell you exactly how many squares there are in a 1ft by 1ft piece of mossie net.

It could be safely said that all members of A Company CHQ have enjoyed the experiences that they have gained in East Timor, and will be looking forward to heading home to spend time with their families.

## 1 Platoon

On arriving in sunny East Timor, the men of 1 Platoon kept up a steady, hard working pace. The first point of call was the famous Junction Point Alpha (JP-A). For many months we had been hearing of this place and finally we were able to see it. Our first impressions were certainly mixed! After living on ration packs and sleeping in the great outdoors through the build up training, we were quite surprised at seeing showers, toilets, televisions, fridges, electricity and decent accommodation areas.

We attacked it with gusto and every person was suspected of being dodgy. This initial phase changed as we quickly realized who the main players were and started to use these people to our benefit.

Our time in Patrols Platoon saw us conducting a wide range of tasks. These involved blue vehicle patrols into the outlying villages as well as blue foot patrols. The individual sections were then tasked to conduct patrols down near the Tactical Co-Ordination Line (TCL) for varying periods of time. In the meantime, Platoon Headquarters learned to master Nintendo game boys and dodge elements of CHQ.

The remainder of the trip was relatively quiet yet still challenging. All members of the Platoon had their Recreation Out of Country Leave (ROCL) and all came to the same conclusion that it was excellent, but short. The Platoon was involved in the Juliana Dosantos reunion, which after a lot of effort and political involvement by Xanana Gusmao's wife, saw the young girl wanting to stay in West Timor. The Platoon did spend a period of time as the Battalion Quick Reaction Force (QRF) and some members managed to get on overnight trips to Dili.

1 Platoon did not have a starring role in any single major incident or operation, but kept its consistent hard working pace up for the duration of the tour. We had supporting roles that have enabled other Platoons to conduct highly successful operations whilst still contributing to the overall mission.

## 1 Section

Our time in East Timor has been punctuated by endless piquets. Most of the time has been spent at Batugade down near the border. It was from JP-A that we conducted our first patrol. Whilst walking into the lantana, some of the blokes were carrying the heaviest loads they have experienced on their backs. We later learned to drop all but the necessities.

Since then we have spent time at Fatukalaren, Balibo, Fort Batugade and Fort Marko. The Section has come a long way since Canungra, Jimna and the Mission Rehearsal Exercise.

The Section has been busy doing village patrols, road route clearances, green patrols and patrolling roads in the Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs). Other tasks have included the security to engineering crews whilst they created B vehicle roads.

In all our time here, it has been an experience few of us will forget. To the men of 1 Section, Christian Adams, Ian Prudham, Corey Dickson, Mick O'Leary, Stuart McCormack and Ryan Morris, let fortune shine on the brave.

## 2 Section

Having spent our time providing protection to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) at the transit centre near JP-A, it was during one of these days that Private Bryce Fegan spotted a pistol in a market. When further enquiries were made, it was a replica 9mm pistol.

Soon after, 11B conducted its first patrol into Area of Operations (AO) OYSTER. The various creeklines and tracks showed no recent sign yet several signal fires were observed. Amusement was

provided by way of the TNI (Indonesian Army) post nearby playing endless songs by 'ABBA' and the 'VENGABOYS', until sunrise the next morning.

Our most challenging task has been the final day of a patrol in AO Foxley. The return route from the TCL was up some cliffs, waterfalls and escarpments. It proved quite a challenge for our mountaineering skills and tested our mettle on many occasions. Thank God for that useless 10m of nylon tape we were all carrying!

### 3 Section

Callsign 11C has enjoyed the stay in East Timor. They have completed their fair share of work in all of the tasks allocated to 1Pl.

Occasionally the leash was released for the section to conduct its own patrols or as part of a platoon formation. We have enjoyed the variations in both foot and vehicle mounted patrolling. Places visited by 11C have been AOs PARIS, LONDON, ABALONE, BAT 6, HARRIER and LEGHORN. Yet the most memorable moment has been the Aero-Medical Evacuation (AME) of the Section 2IC, Lance Corporal Caplick for what ended up being a sore finger!

### 2 Platoon

Raised in July 2000, the platoon was commanded by Lieutenant Bradley McNamara. The platoon sergeant, Sergeant 'Guns' Hayes, arrived soon after and his impact, particularly on physical training, was felt almost immediately. Completing platoon headquarters was Private 'Jimba the Hut' Seaford who rose to his position as Pronto through his desire to run off cliffs at Fatukalaren during stand-to alerts. He replaced Private Bryan Strangman who had been looking to escape platoon headquarters since arriving in East Timor.

The Section Commanders consisted of Corporal Bambi Campbell, the primary producer who won the award for most things sent home during the tour. Lance Corporal Dave Pool and Lance Corporal Danny Marsland, the two policemen, teamed up to lead Five Section and 'Strike Swiftly' at the heart of the militia. Corporal John 'Seething' Wells ruled 6 Section like a Nazi. Lance Corporal Pete Dymond was a late arrival from Bravo Company.

Cool nights, brilliant sunsets, long picquets, views to the distant militia stronghold of Haekesak, and accommodation in native huts met us at Fatukalaren – the location of Retrans-2. From there it was on to JP-A where 2 platoon built the detainee area. The platoon's final task in the rotation was as patrolling platoon.

During a certain platoon minus patrol, the platoon was given the mission of conducting a mounted patrol along the TCL. This is considered the deepest part of the Mota Talau River which divides East and West Timor. The exact location of the deepest part is in some areas unclear, but Two Platoon managed to find it with the help of Uniform 31, our armoured companions, after we managed to sink an APC. Four section bailed out of the sinking APC. Some would consider this an invasion, but the TNI patrol who soon arrived did nothing but say 'smoking', 'aqua', and ask to trade knives and other military equipment.

Other jobs undertaken while on patrols platoon include a QRF task to the village of Sassa which had the platoon searching for an elusive man called Armindo. He had apparently fired a pistol at the TNI, was armed with a grenade and lived in Sassa. After nil result over two days, the platoon was extracted. Election period security also took up much of the platoon's time, and its success is testimony to the platoon's hard work.

Overall, the platoon became a close group of soldiers who were rewarded not only with medals, but with friendships and the memories of smiling Timorese faces that are sure to last a lifetime. Although the platoon has disbanded, the memories of a distant East Timor, the land of 'Bon Dia', bon-bon, MIST product and aqua, will remain forever.

#### 4 Section

Operation TANAGER kicked off on 28 April for 4 Section. In the first week in country Scott Sherwin got left on piquet for 5 hrs in the middle of the night and Bambi was having 'Larium' dreams which consisted of a high pitched yelling, "Stand to" and "People to stop". These calls were experienced throughout the night. We then went on our first operational patrol in AO Foxley East. Daniel Symons got a priority one Casualty Evacuation (casevac) for a bee sting and was extracted by helo. Cycling through the rotation, we made it back to patrols platoon and were involved in an incident on the TCL, when the APC we were travelling in sunk and our Platoon became beached on the banks of West Timor. Our next mission was in AO Oyster-West, when not three hours into it we got in the first contact that 4 RAR has had since Vietnam.

#### 5 Section

Of our three main operational taskings, five Section found being right on the border facing an Indonesian TNI army post at JP-A the most interesting. Seeing the variety of people who came through there everyday including business people, traders, foreign tourists and backpackers, ensured there never was a dull day. Working alongside the Brazilian Military Police was very entertaining due to their nature and they were quite colourful characters to say the least. It was at JP-A that the section was first involved in something other than guard duty. The guys on the tower had spotted someone moving around between the Junction Point and the TCL in what we call 'no man's land'. Four members of the section patrolled down to where the person was spotted, and we found what turned out to be some poor local that had been on the run and not eaten for six days. We took him down to the Junction Point and asked him some basic questions, but he was reluctant to answer, as he wouldn't even open his mouth. Later he was handed over to Company Headquarters.

The section's first patrol was an Observation Post (OP) overlooking the TCL. This lasted a total of six days and was found to be a good way of evaluating section members and working out Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) which would serve us well in the months ahead.

#### 6 Section

The mighty 12C came to East Timor expecting World War Three but discovered 'peace keeping'. The section adjusted quickly to this new role with its variety of different tasks such as Observation Posts, patrolling and key point security. Being the last section to go on leave, the section coped well with not having a break in five months apart from a day trip to the capital Dili for a quick tour and a purchase of assorted DVD's and pizza. The section was one of the only sections to receive a task in every area of the Australian Battalion AO as well as in the New Zealand AO.

12C became very adept at acquiring things the platoon or section needed.

Overall, the section performed to the best of its ability with morale always high even with the lack of Militia activity.

#### 3 Platoon

East Timor is mountain goat country. Throughout 3 Platoon's travels within A Company AO, both on foot and vehicle patrols, we have remained either on an incline or a decline.

As expected, the Dry season was beginning its cycle when the main body of 3 Platoon arrived in country. Every so often though, the heat and humidity was broken by a sudden down pour. In addition to the relief the rain brings, a watered ground inhibits dust. This fact was highlighted the day touring RSL members from Australia, transported by helicopter, paid a visit to 3 Platoon at JP-A. The newly constructed Landing Zone (LZ), built by 8 Section, Corporal Attila 'Georgo' Georgeson, was used. The backwash from the Black Hawk's rotors spread debris across all freshly cleaned surfaces as well as the VIPs. Despite the dust storm Bruce Ruxton managed to collect some footage of the Junction Point.

However, despite the militia threat, the main danger for the soldiers was occupational hazards away from the battlefield. Private Travis 'Dough Boy' Hahn was very fortunate to receive only minor burns and scarring from an incident. Private Steve 'Chopper' Love played a major part in treating Private Hahn, minimising the long-term damage through his quick actions.

Company tasks caused the platoons, and even sections within platoons, to be separated for long periods of time. The isolation of LZ SPARROW and Retrans-2 has meant that everyone 'lived in each others pockets' for weeks on end. The men's tolerance of one another was a commendable attribute. Humour was a cure for the monotony, and Lance Corporal Matt 'Echo' Scott was never short of a witty remark, at one time postulating that by wearing an alfoil hat the visiting 'psychs' would be unable to read his thoughts.

One aspect of deployment to East Timor that was warmly received was the exposure to a new culture and a different way of life. The Platoon Sergeant, Sergeant Russell 'Russ' Brown, took every opportunity to embark on 'Bon Bon' patrols. Part of the culture that we were instructed not to participate in was 'Chicken Boxing' and Beetle nut (a native form of mild stimulant).

Out of all the tasks that were assigned to 3 Platoon JP-A was a particular favourite. It gave the men an opportunity to workout consistently with the on-site *ad hoc* gym equipment.

Peace Keeping Operations ensures variety. The men of 3 Platoon performed to a standard beyond their experience.

## 7 Section

Where do you begin to explain to those at home what you have done for the last few months? You could sum it up by saying, "Well we did security picquets at Retransmission Station 2, vehicle and foot patrols throughout AO MATILDA, and manned the border checkpoint at JP-A. You could then expand on this when you were given a blank look by saying we helped prevent the militia from crossing back into East Timor and aided returning refugees in starting a new life. We helped the people of East Timor go from a country at war to one with a chance at lasting peace. I still doubt, though, that most of those will understand what they had to do.

When on patrol we spent a lot of time interacting with the locals – being invited to a village chief's house to share coffee is a real highlight, especially when you understand the Timorese people have so little to give. That they would go out of their way to help you was a humbling experience and made us proud that we were contributing to a worthwhile cause and not just 'showing the flag'.

Other highlights included learning enough of the local language to ask "Are there any problems?" and being told "None, since you guys have been around."

Being able to do the job you have trained long and hard for in a potentially dangerous environment has been a positively rewarding experience.

Even though our small contributions may be overshadowed by other events, we at least have the satisfaction of knowing our efforts have been worthwhile – the friendly waves from the elderly villages and the smiles on the kids' faces make it so.

## 8 Section

Our initial thoughts about what we were about to encounter were far from that which we actually experienced. Most of our time was spent at static locations conducting security picquets for the three main installations in our AO. There were never enough 'Green' patrols to satisfy us, "Just a few more" as the men of Callsign 13B would keep saying. But, all in all, several things stood out for all of us, but most of all the amount of time we spent together. The way we all changed on the inside, how some as young as 19 years grew up so quickly, and how we take so many things at home for granted.

## 9 Section

Callsign 13C arrived on the shores of East Timor aboard a 'J'-model C130 Hercules aircraft. Some of the members were eager to get started and some just stood and stared with the knowledge that it was going to be a long six months.

First impressions were varied; from the instant impact of the all-encompassing heat, to the realisation that this could have been Bali twenty years ago.

The Section was soon put to work, at the beachside resort known as 'Club Batugade', as the Company Ready Reaction Force (RRF). There we learnt that call-outs and rehearsals were to be the norm in East Timor.

13C soon found its stride as patrol platoon, where they became the experts at chopping through lantana and spinning yarns to the local population – to the enjoyment of both parties. APCs, Light Armoured Vehicle's (LAVs), BlackHawks, Interim Infantry Mobility Vehicles (IIMVs), and Hueys were not just words to the blokes in Nine Section, but a means of insertion into our own AO, or into that of the New Zealand Battalion or, more importantly, a means of extraction.

Through the endless picquets and static positions you would still see a smile on the faces of the men in 13C, as the time drew to an end and brought them closer to filling out their 'Incoming Passenger' cards on their return flight to Australia.

## Direct Fire Support Weapons (DPSW)

The role of DPSW is to provide direct fire support to the Infantry Battalion in all phases of war. As we at DPSW in A Company found out during our tour in East Timor, our role encompassed not only all of the above but, being mounted in Surveillance Reconnaissance Vehicles (SRV), we became the integral Company mobility asset. Our ability to move rapidly around the AO meant that we were, in most cases, the OC's first choice in the RRF role. Also, we performed insertions, extractions, resupplies and casevacs to support foot patrols, hearts and minds tasks, playing football with the kids, meeting and greeting the locals, and repairing minor injuries. We also showed the United Nations (UN) presence by constant vehicle patrols and conducting Vehicle Check Points to ensure the local population was aware that the Peace Keeping Force was out there looking after them. A long, but enjoyable tour.



### 1 SECTION

(L to R): BACK ROW: Privates Ryan Morris, Mick O'Leary, Christian Adams, Stuart McCormack.  
FRONT ROW: Lance Corporal Mick Taplin, Privates Ian Prudham, Sasha Trajceviski-Uzman, Lance Corporal Corey Dickson