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**LESSONS FROM SERVICE
AS A MILITARY OBSERVER IN
EAST TIMOR**



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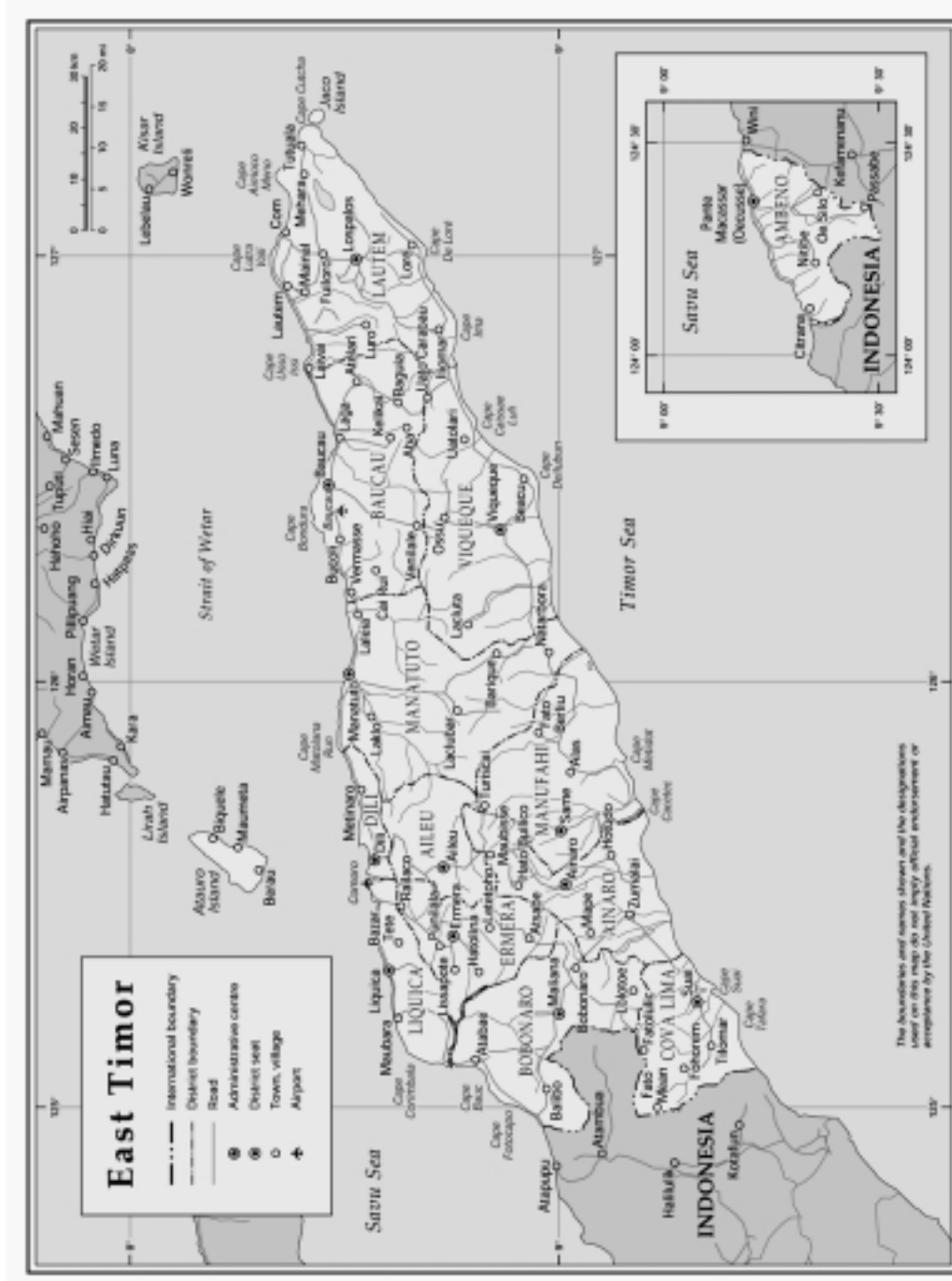
Lessons from Service as a Military Observer in East Timor

Ian Wing

The author is a Lieutenant Colonel in the Australian Army who served with the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) from March to October 2000. During that period, he was the Senior Australian United Nations Military Observer in East Timor. As a United Nations (UN) officer, he initially performed the duties of Senior Regional Military Observer (SRMO) of the Viqueque Region. He was later appointed SRMO of Sector East, which included the regions of Baucau, Viqueque, Manatuto and Los Palos. During his tour of duty with UNTAET, he served in all thirteen regions of East Timor.

This working paper provides a background to UNTAET; describes the work performed by the author as a United Nations Military Observer (UNMO); makes some observations derived from this work; and draws lessons from it. Although the working paper represents a personal viewpoint, it reflects the opinions of many other personnel who have served in East Timor.

[The author is grateful for comments provided by Brigadier Lou Gardiner of the New Zealand Army, Mr Ara Nalbandian of the Land Warfare Studies Centre, Major Paul Rosenzweig of the Deployed Force Support Unit - Darwin, and three anonymous reviewers.]



Map no. 4111 Rev. 5 UNITED NATIONS
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BACKGROUND TO THE MISSION

The United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) was established by Security Council Resolution number 1246 on 11 June 1999.¹ Its task was to conduct a 'popular consultation' on whether the East Timorese people accepted or rejected the Indonesian proposal of autonomy for East Timor. The vote was held on 30 August 1999 and 78.5 per cent of the people rejected autonomy, preferring a transition to independence. The staff of UNAMET were evacuated from East Timor following the deterioration in law and order that followed the announcement of this result.

In response to this situation, the Security Council authorised Australia to lead the International Force in East Timor (INTERFET) under Chapter Seven of the UN Charter ('Peace Enforcement').² With the consent of the Indonesian Government, the force intervened in East Timor from September 1999 to February 2000. The success of INTERFET in restoring law and order in the area enabled the Security Council to establish the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) on 25 October 1999.³ UNTAET assumed full responsibility for security within East Timor on 23 February 2000.

A group of fifty unarmed Military Liaison Officers (MLO) formed an element of UNAMET and continued to operate throughout the INTERFET operation. With the transition to UNTAET, the MLO were redesignated as UNMO and the group was retitled the United Nations Military Observer Group (UNMO Group). The first commander of the UNAMET MLO/UNTAET UNMO Group was Brigadier Rezaqul Haider of Bangladesh; the current commander is Brigadier Lou Gardiner of New Zealand. During the INTERFET operation the group rose in strength to 200 officers, but it has since 'downsized' and has numbered 120 from January 2001. The UNMO Group is under the operational control of the UNTAET Peace-Keeping Force (PKF).

The first contingent of Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel joined UNAMET in June 1999.⁴ ADF personnel have since served throughout the UNAMET mission, alongside the INTERFET operation and throughout the UNTAET mission.⁵ The ADF contingents have included officers with the ranks of captain, major and lieutenant colonel (and their naval and air force service equivalents). The number of ADF

military observers has ranged from an initial deployment of six, to a highpoint of seventeen, to the current number of fifteen. ADF military observers are currently deployed for six months; they have served in virtually all command, staff and observer appointments within the UNMO Group.

The current UNMO Group mission is to observe, monitor and report on the military-security situation in East Timor. Its priority of effort is supporting the security of the border regions; liaising with the indigenous resistance army, FALINTIL ('Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor Leste' – Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor); and supporting the security of the remainder of East Timor. Subsidiary tasks deriving from the mission and the priority of effort are support to, and liaison with, the PKF; liaison with the TNI ('Tentara Nasional Indonesia' – the Indonesian Armed Forces); cooperation with the other elements of UNTAET; and cooperation with non-UNTAET agencies, including non-government organisations (NGO). Military observers serve in all thirteen regions of East Timor and within Indonesia, particularly in the border areas of West Timor (the Indonesian province of Nusa Tenggara Timur).

It is planned that during 2001 the people of East Timor will elect their first government and achieve increased independence, although the UNTAET mandate will continue under its present extension until January 2002. These processes are likely to complicate the security environment and provide demanding challenges for UNTAET. It is likely that ADF personnel will continue to serve in East Timor until at least the end of 2002, and probably longer.

SERVICE AS A MILITARY OBSERVER: UN INDUCTION

Prospective ADF military observers are selected from the three services and receive two weeks of pre-deployment training from the Deployed Force Support Unit – Darwin (DFSU-D). The subject-matter experts who instruct the course are drawn from appropriate agencies throughout Australia. Once trained, the prospective military observers are designated as members of the ADF 'UNMO Pool' which is drawn upon as required.

Following coordination between the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, UN Headquarters in New York, and Strategic Command Division, Australian Defence Headquarters in Canberra, an operations order is issued by Land Headquarters in Sydney (which has been assigned responsibility for this task from Headquarters Australian Theatre, also in Sydney). The operations order identifies the ADF personnel who have been selected to form a contingent of military observers. On the appointed date, they concentrate at DFSU-D to undergo pre-deployment medical and administrative checks. They have also been able to meet and share information with the ADF contingent they are to replace. The contingent is then flown to Dili, the national capital of East Timor, for induction into UNTAET.

UNTAET has three pillars: the Military Pillar, which consists of the PKF of 7886 troops drawn from twenty-five countries (including approximately 1600 ADF personnel) and the 120 personnel of the UNMO Group; the Governance and Public Administration Pillar, including the international civilian police (CivPol) element of 1640 personnel (which contains 100 Australian police officers); and the Humanitarian Assistance and Emergency Rehabilitation Pillar. The non-uniformed staff of UNTAET consists of 888 international personnel and 1767 East Timorese personnel. The East Timorese people are represented politically by a coalition of political parties called the CNRT ('Conselho Nacional de Resistencia Timorenses' – National Council of Timorese Resistance) under the leadership of Xanana Gusmao. They are represented institutionally by the East Timorese Transitional Administration (ETTA) which works alongside UNTAET and is gradually assuming greater governmental responsibility.

Once inducted into the UNMO Group, military observers are posted to either the headquarters in Dili or to a regional group for periods of between three and six months. They are then reposted to other appointments until their term of service – either six or twelve months – expires. Military observers are responsible for arranging their own accommodation and purchasing meals and additional equipment using the UN Mission Subsistence Allowance. This arrangement provides them with greater operational flexibility than the alternative, which would have been to accommodate them in military quarters and feed them in military kitchens and messes.

The author's service in East Timor, which is recounted in this paper, is provided here as an example of the nature of the work that military observers perform within the regional groups and teams. The author also visited and worked alongside military observers posted to UNMO Group Headquarters in Dili, the FALINTIL Liaison Team and the Border-Liaison Teams. This account is broadly divided into four phases, each characterised by its dominant activity.

PHASE ONE: ORIENTATION AND RECONNAISSANCE

The author's first appointment was as SRMO of the Viqueque Region and commander of the regional UNMO Team of seven officers drawn from diverse countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, Denmark, Mozambique, the Philippines and Thailand. The local CivPol contingent comprised fifty officers, and regional security was provided by the PKF – a company of airborne infantry of the Royal Thai Army.

Viqueque is a large and relatively remote region on the south-eastern coast of East Timor. It is accessible by narrow winding roads that connect it to Baucau on the northern coast and from there to Dili, a journey of up to five hours. The region is seventy-six kilometres from east to west and forty kilometres from north to south. It is home to about 65,000 people, many of whom live in villages that are accessible only on foot. The regional capital, Viqueque, is a town of about 10,000 people. It is surrounded by smaller villages based on cash cropping and subsistence farming. The town is a mixture of older Portuguese buildings, newer Indonesian buildings (many of which were destroyed in the lawlessness that followed the Popular Consultation) and traditional timber and thatch huts. The local people are very dignified and they pay great respect to the Catholic Church, which is the most powerful organisation within the Viqueque community. The UNTAET Regional Headquarters is located within the Viqueque township. At the time of the author's arrival, there were very few motor vehicles in Viqueque, apart from UNTAET vehicles (excellent Land Rover Discovery 4x4s, versatile Nissan 4x4 pick-ups and underpowered Tata Sumo 4x4s), and the local people depended on old buses and trucks, motorcycles, bicycles, horses and walking.

The majority of the population in Viqueque speak Tetum, the most widespread of the local languages; the younger people can also speak Bahasa Indonesia, while the older people speak Portuguese, which will be the official language of independent East Timor. English is gaining popularity, particularly as it is the official language of UNTAET.

Viqueque abounds with reminders of its interesting military history, stretching back to its early occupation by the Portuguese in 1566. In most large villages the Portuguese built imposing stone castles, which now stand side-by-side with the concrete bunkers from the Indonesian occupation (1975–99). During its colonial history Viqueque witnessed many conflicts. It was the scene of a serious rebellion against Portuguese rule in 1959 and 100 troops were flown here from Portuguese Goa, restoring law and order only after heavy fighting. Following the Indonesian occupation in 1975, Viqueque was the area of the most intense Indonesian military operations in East Timor during the ‘encirclement’ period of 1975–78. Indonesian A-4 Skyhawks, OV-10F Broncos and BAC Hawks operated against FALINTIL fighters who formed a defensive line around Mount Matebian north of Viqueque township. Following their defeat, FALINTIL used guerilla tactics against the Indonesian Armed Forces until the arrival of UNAMET in June 1999.⁶

After arriving in Viqueque and initial orientation, the author had formal meetings with key personalities (both foreign internationals and indigenous) and conducted reconnaissance patrols throughout the region. The first four weeks were spent in getting to know the area of operations, collecting military information, conducting reconnaissance, and meeting the local political and military leaders. The patrol program relied on Land Rover vehicles and helicopters, although foot patrols were also required to reach remote villages. To increase cooperation and liaison, joint patrols were conducted, which included PKF, CivPol and UNTAET civilian personnel.

Accommodation was provided by a local family, who rented their house to the author and three Australian CivPol deployed to the Viqueque CivPol contingent. Sharing accommodation with the CivPol proved to be highly beneficial as it provided the opportunity, after each day’s work, to compare experiences and the different military and law enforcement perspectives. The house was located opposite the Viqueque Police

Station, which provided extra security. Though spartan, the house was quite comfortable. Its occupants slept on stretcher beds with mosquito nets. Electricity was available during the evenings and there was cold running water for washing.

The military security situation in Viqueque was relatively benign when compared with the border regions, where the PKF have fought occasional short engagements with groups of militia fighters. Challenges to law and order, such as murders and machete attacks, and the potential for political disputation to develop into violence remained serious concerns. Occasional riots had required the calling-out of the PKF to disperse the crowds, and local paramilitary vigilante groups, known as ‘ninjas’, also warranted attention. Unarmed FALINTIL fighters visited the region regularly while on leave from the cantonment in Aileu, south of Dili. Refugees returning in small groups from their exile in West Timor were sometimes confronted by angry villagers who had stayed behind. The military observers cooperated with CivPol and the PKF to manage these security issues.

PHASE TWO: REPAIRING LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The author gained a working knowledge of the area of operations before the onset of the second wet season in early May. Viqueque experiences two annual wet seasons: November–January and May–July. On 11 May 2000, the second wet season commenced with a severe electrical storm that cut all communications and disrupted all electrical supplies. Torrential rain flooded the town, resulting in significant property losses and, most significantly, destroying the only bridge connecting the town with the rest of East Timor. Weeks of heavy rain followed, causing landslides and the destruction of many minor bridges: it was to prove the heaviest wet season for twenty-five years.

The main road in the centre of Viqueque was cut for two days by a huge landslide, and for two months it was virtually impossible to drive to the outlying sub-districts of the region. The disruption to the roads meant that Viqueque’s food supplies began to diminish and the local people were unable to transport their goods for sale. Fortunately, the Deputy Force Commander of the PKF, Major General Mike Smith from Australia, took a personal interest in the matter.

This led to a prompt response from the Bangladeshi Engineer Battalion, which built a thirty-metre Bailey bridge to replace the destroyed bridge. The Viqueque Military Observer Team coordinated this task, which included the movement of the Bailey bridge sections by forty MI-8 helicopter sorties from Baucau. A small team of Australian Army transport personnel were deployed to Baucau and Viqueque to assist in this operation. On 6 June 2000, the new bridge was officially opened at a large public ceremony. The disruption of the road network meant that helicopters assumed great importance to all UNTAET operations. The military observers coordinated hundreds of missions by MI-8, Bell 212, Super Puma, Llama and Alouette helicopters for reconnaissance, medical evacuation, movement of supplies, meetings with local leaders, payment of road repair gangs, and routine transportation. Hard work by UNTAET staff, NGO personnel and the local people enabled the gradual reopening of the roads. The military observers supported this process with detailed reconnaissance and planning assistance. The first patrols into the outlying sub-districts were mounted by the military observers and they were met by crowds of happy villagers – not just the usual waving children calling ‘Hello Mister!’ – but even men and women running to greet the Land Rovers. Apart from having occasional overflights by UN helicopters, these people had been very isolated and they were jubilant that the roads had been reopened.

PHASE THREE: REORGANISATION

Following the reorganisation of the UNMO Group in early August, the author was appointed to the new post of SRMO of UNMO Group Sector East, with responsibility for all UNMO operations in the regions of Baucau, Viqueque, Los Palos and Manatuto. The four regions constitute approximately half of East Timor’s land area and include the city of Baucau, the second-largest concentration of population in the country. The Area of Military Operations included PKF Headquarters Sector East; three PKF Battalion Groups (from Thailand, the Philippines and the Republic of Korea); a company-sized CivPol paramilitary Rapid Reaction Unit (from Jordan); and a non-aligned FALINTIL group under their leader, Commander Elle Sette. These command-and-control changes were implemented to streamline UNMO Group operations and improve its relationship with the

PKF. The new command comprised twenty military observers (drawn from eleven countries), and the author’s operational plan created a mobile headquarters in Baucau and smaller UNMO teams in each of the regional capitals.⁷

As part of the reorganisation, the author relocated to Baucau, a beautiful city that is very Portuguese in style. It is built on a plateau above the sea and fortunately was largely spared from destruction by the militia. The city is about twice the size of Viqueque with two markets, many shops, a hotel and several restaurants. In the East Timorese context, Baucau is second only to Dili in its political importance. For this reason the military observers decided to monitor political developments as closely as we did the military situation.

Once the new headquarters was established, the highest priority was given to reconnaissance and patrolling throughout the large area of operations. Each military observer spent at least half of their time on patrol, away from base. The author’s policy was for all of the Sector East military observers to emphasise patrolling and the collection of information over office work. Liaison with the PKF and FALINTIL continued to receive high priority.

Viqueque was the initial focal point for the patrol program. This focus was due to several reports of militia sightings in the area east of Ossu. The people of the tiny and remote villages were generally extremely fearful of the prospect of armed militia units infiltrating from the border far to the west. Several young children reported to their village chiefs that they had met small groups of armed and masked men, and within days rumours were circulating that a militia group was active in the area. Each report was thoroughly investigated by the military observers assisted by FALINTIL officers. Using the military information gained during the investigations, the PKF responded with search-and-sweep operations and civil-cooperation programs. Although the PKF were efficient and effective, the militia fighters were not found. It is possible that the local people had created an elaborate ruse, with the aim of increasing PKF security patrols in the area. The theory seemed unlikely because the young children were such convincing witnesses and they provided very detailed responses to repeated tactical questioning. This mystery was not resolved, but the investigation was beneficial because

it demonstrated to the local people that UNTAET would ensure their security.

PHASE FOUR: LONG-RANGE PATROLS

About two hours drive along very good roads to the north-east of Baucau is the town of Los Palos, the regional capital of Lautem. The town is in the centre of this beautiful region, which includes the easternmost tip of East Timor – the uninhabited and picturesque Jaco Island. Much of the region remains inaccessible to vehicles; helicopters were therefore used to patrol this area. Unfortunately, discarded Indonesian ammunition claimed the lives of several local people in this region. The Lautem Military Observer Team assisted in the clearance of these munitions.

Manatuto is half way between Baucau and Dili, and is situated on a narrow coastal plain. Apart from Los Palos, Manatuto is the only region that stretches across the island from the northern coast to the southern coast, and its roads are particularly dangerous. Manatuto is a harsh and mountainous region. Its inhabitants are hardy and resourceful people. Although the towns of Los Palos and Manatuto were both extensively damaged by the violence in September 1999, the local people are steadily rebuilding their homes and their lives. Throughout August, the reconnaissance of the four regions of Sector East was conducted by long-range patrols using two, three or four Land Rovers. The patrols lasted between three and five days.

During September, long-range patrols were mounted from Sector East further afield into the central and border regions of East Timor. These patrols facilitated liaison between the different UNMO commands and their PKF colleagues, and enabled each military observer team to benefit from the experiences of others. The well-equipped and mobile patrols also enabled the rapid reinforcement of areas of high security interest, for example, during the militia insurgency and PKF sweep operations in south-central East Timor in August–September.

While leading the long-range patrols, the author visited all of the other regions of East Timor and the border areas of West Timor. Liaison visits were made to Headquarters Sector West in Suai, in Cova Lima Region; Headquarters 6th Battalion Royal Australian

Regiment Group in Balibo, in Bobonaro Region; and PKF units throughout the other regions. As the Senior Australian Military Observer, the author visited and spent time with all of the other Australian military observers, who were without exception working very hard and achieving excellent results, often in very arduous conditions.

At the end of the six-month tour of duty the author was reunited with the other members of his ADF contingent, and they departed from Dili and UNTAET. On arrival in Darwin they underwent a debriefing process facilitated by DFSU-D which included medical checks, psychological interviews and stores returns. They were able to meet with their ADF replacements to provide them with briefings and impressions immediately before their deployment.⁸ The author's contingent then returned to their home unit locations.

LESSONS

Before discussing the key lessons from this service in East Timor, it is instructive to point out that the UNTAET military observers possess four characteristics that set them apart from the PKF. First, they are all commissioned officers (although they often work very closely with the PKF, which includes officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers).⁹ Second, they are all unarmed, enabling them to win the trust of those who have been traumatised by armed conflict, but at the same time leaving the observers very vulnerable. Third, they live among the local people instead of segregating themselves in military bases. Such living arrangements allow close contact with locals, providing improved access and relationships. And fourth, the military observers are relatively independent of the formal military hierarchy. This independence enhances their impartiality, giving them a strategic importance that far outweighs their small numbers.

During the author's service as a military observer, seven valuable lessons were learned:

The first lesson was that the officers provided by the armed forces of the international community to the UNMO Group are of an almost universally high standard. All have been specially selected for their military, interpersonal and linguistic skills. The

common military background, ethos and way of life of commissioned officers around the world means that the officers from many nations can quickly form effective teams and achieve useful results. Commissioned officers also bring the best effective team-building tool of all – leadership – and they are able to contribute their leadership skills to the other elements of UNTAET in adverse conditions.

At times it is necessary for Australian military observers to adjust the pace and vigour of their approach to their work in order to avoid friction with military observers from other nations.¹⁰ For many of the Australians, this six-month tour of duty is their first experience of operational service, while officers from other countries are engaged for twelve months and are often on their second or even third UN mission. Some of the national cultures of the military observers also emphasise the need for rest after meals and regular prayers, neither of which are part of the ADF culture. Mutual respect is generally sufficient to overcome any national differences. Interpersonal strategies such as listening intently, speaking slowly and smiling frequently, contribute to the winning of trust.

The second lesson learned by the author was that his military training had been well-directed and useful. His faith in his training was reinforced as he dealt with difficult and unexpected situations, by relying on the sound principles of a military education. Particularly valuable skills were the collection and exploitation of information; organisation and planning; military security and field-craft; negotiation; first aid; navigation; liaison; communications; military engineering; cross-country driving; and helicopter operations. Above all, a sound knowledge of the skills involved in military operations, including the tactics of land warfare and military staff duties, is an essential requirement.

The third lesson was drawn directly from the UNMO mission of ‘... observing, monitoring and reporting on the military security situation’. In this work the military observers had no access to covert, technical or classified intelligence collection or processing but instead relied on the exploitation of openly available information. This information was derived from good planning; overt patrolling in vehicles, on foot and in helicopters; interviews with local leaders and on-scene witnesses; village meetings; detailed reconnaissance and surveillance; and rigorous analysis. The author’s

experience in collecting, processing and disseminating information demonstrated that ‘open-source information’ can meet the majority of the needs of decision makers at all levels. Of course, more traditional intelligence operations will retain an important role, particularly against secretive targets, but open-source information is rapidly becoming the dominant source of military intelligence.

The fourth lesson involved the doctrine of peace operations. The status of command of the UNTAET UNMO Group is unusual because military observers have generally played a completely impartial role between two opposing forces. Having been placed under the operational control of the PKF, the UNMO Group provides information and liaison services to it while simultaneously serving as an independent observer. The UNMO Group facilitates the working relationship between the PKF and the TNI on the border. The close working relationship that the UNMO Group enjoys with the TNI has occasionally caused tension between PKF officers and military observers.¹¹ The military observers must strive to remain even-handed in their dealings with both forces, but they are far from being merely neutral onlookers, with their ultimate loyalty being to UNTAET. Sensitivity is required of all participants to ensure the continued success of this command relationship.

The fifth lesson concerned the importance of the sensitive relationships that must be established and maintained by the UNMO Group. The most important relationship is with FALINTIL, the highly disciplined guerrilla army that opposed the TNI throughout the Indonesian occupation and is currently being reshaped into a conventional defence force.¹² In the years to come, FALINTIL will eventually replace the PKF in the vital roles of guarding the borders of East Timor and suppressing the militia. The second crucial relationship is with the TNI, which operates along the border. The TNI is responsible for the suppression of the militia and the security of UNTAET personnel within West Timor, but it is yet to extinguish the militia, who remain a threat to UNTAET personnel. Other important relationships were needed with the PKF, CivPol, UNTAET civilians and the East Timorese people, particularly with political and church leaders. To facilitate these relationships, military observers require excellent interpersonal and liaison skills. Language skills in Tetum, Bahasa Indonesia and Portuguese are very useful, although they are not

essential as locally engaged language assistants provide very good support. The language assistants often became highly-trusted members of each UNMO team. Above all, cultural sensitivity is essential for officers to be able to deal not only with the diverse national backgrounds of the UNTAET UNMO Group but with those of the PKF, the TNI, and the local people.

The sixth lesson is directly related to the need for force protection. Threats to the wellbeing of the military observers are four-fold: first, direct attack by the militia (although fortunately no such attacks against military observers have occurred); second, involvement in other acts of political or criminal violence, either directly or indirectly; third, the serious health risks of malaria and dengue fever; and fourth, the risk of injury in motor vehicle or other accidents. Other stresses are placed on the military observers in varied and unexpected situations such as stand-offs and confrontations; the exhumation of mass graves; calling for aero-medical evacuation of seriously injured people; and delivering babies. During a typical tour of duty in the regions of East Timor, many military observers were confronted with situations involving life and death. General military training and situational awareness training provided by DFSU-D are the best preparation for dealing with such circumstances. In order to reduce the possible onset of post-traumatic stress disorder, psychological support is provided before, during and after the tour of duty.

The security situation was generally benign, but the military observers were aware that dangerous situations could develop very quickly. They were operating within a potentially dangerous military environment, in a combatant uniform, while unarmed and often in remote locations that were isolated from other elements of UNTAET. Australian military observers were careful to avoid becoming confused with Australian combatant PKF troops. Both groups wore the same style of camouflage uniform and UN berets or caps, but the military observers emphasised the differences between them by not carrying military-style equipment and rolling up their shirt sleeves. All of the military observers performed their duties in this demanding environment with distinction.

The seventh lesson was the most profound. It concerned the range and diversity of the types of tasks that military observers perform, often with little or no warning. Examples of such tasks are: assisting the

PKF and CivPol in dispersing and arresting rioters; negotiating with crowds of angry men; collecting large quantities of abandoned rusty ammunition; briefing international visitors; escorting East Timorese leaders such as Xanana Gusmao; addressing public meetings; participating in meetings of UNTAET and CNRT leaders; distributing donated clothing and other supplies; engaging teams of local people as labour gangs; and attending religious parades, funerals and ceremonies. As each day begins, a military observer has no idea what it will bring, and no two days are ever the same.

These are just a few of the more important lessons. The overarching lesson is that military forces can serve the cause of peace and that military personnel can make a great difference by helping to improve the lives of ordinary people who are the victims of violence and cruelty.

CONCLUSION

The outlook for the UNTAET operation in East Timor is promising. Despite its bureaucratic organisation, the multinational origins of its personnel, and its mixed record in previous peace operations, the UN can conduct complex peace operations successfully.

This paper has dealt mainly with the military observers and the PKF, but the work of CivPol is also important. Despite working in an unfamiliar environment that is very different from their normal workplace, CivPol are doing their best to contribute to East Timorese law and order. CivPol personnel often work alongside the military observers, and their similarities and differences are instructive. The different police backgrounds of its personnel and the slow development of an indigenous legal system render the task of CivPol more difficult. At times the multinational character of CivPol and the lack of a common police culture make life particularly challenging for CivPol personnel.¹³ Yet the individual efforts of many of the CivPol members are impressive. Perhaps future UN operations could follow the successful example of the PKF and deploy formed units of CivPol drawn from a single country, rather than attempting to create homogenous police units using personnel from many countries. This strategy would have proven impractical in East Timor because of the small size of some national contingents.

During 2001, the East Timorese Police Service will assume responsibility for law and order, and they will implement much-needed programs of community policing.

The commitment and determination of many of the international volunteer personnel of UNTAET and the NGOs is impressive. These men and women are working in difficult circumstances for relatively low levels of financial reward. While PKF, CivPol and UNMO personnel generally serve in East Timor for a maximum of twelve months, some of the international volunteers serve there for much longer. Their leadership, nation-building work and humanitarianism have won the respect and friendship of the East Timorese people.

The constructive and beneficial work of the military observers and the PKF demonstrates the utility of military personnel in conducting complex peace operations. Disciplined military forces can provide excellent and cost-effective support to low-level security operations and nation-building. This role is highly suitable for the Australian Army, and it should

be completely accepted as a valid role for Australia's land forces. This acceptance will also strengthen the Army case when future difficult decisions have to be made about the allocation of the limited resources of the ADF.

As the months pass, the situation that confronts each incoming military observer in East Timor is improving rapidly. The changes are most notable in Dili, which was a shattered burnt-out shell of a city in early 2000 but which is now being quickly rebuilt into a small, bustling Asian city. The East Timorese people have returned to their homes and are working hard to rebuild their lives. If this rate of change can be maintained, and stability and security are ensured, East Timor has a bright future. The new nation will continue to require support from the international community, but it has the potential to develop a viable economy based on tourism, agriculture, oil and gas.

Despite the progress that is being made, it is likely that military observers will continue to face diverse and difficult challenges in East Timor for years to come.

NOTES

- ¹ UN Security Council Resolution 1246 adopted 11 June 1999, 'by which the Council decided to establish until 31 August 1999 the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) to organize and conduct a popular consultation', <http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/1999/99sc1246.htm>.
- ² UN Security Council Resolution 1264, adopted 15 September 1999, 'by which the Council authorized the establishment of a multinational force', <http://www.un.org/peace/etimor/docs/9926481E.htm>.
- ³ UN Security Council Resolution 1272, adopted 22 October 1999, by which the Council '[established] the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor', <http://www.un.org/peace/etimor/docs/9931277E.htm>.
- ⁴ Under ADF *Operation Faber*.
- ⁵ Under ADF *Operation Tanager*.
- ⁶ For the history of East Timor see: M. Turner, *Telling East Timor: Personal Testimonies 1942–1992* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1995); J. Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed* (Sydney: ABC Books, 1996); J. G. Taylor, *East Timor: The Price of Freedom* (Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press, 1999); *Out of the Ashes: Destruction and Reconstruction of East Timor*, ed. J.J. Fox, and D. Soares, (Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, 2000); and X. Gusmao, *To Resist is to Win!: The Autobiography of Xanana Gusmao* (Richmond, Vic: Aurora Books, 2000).
- ⁷ The officers of UNMO Group Sector East at that time were from Australia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Egypt, Malaysia, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand.
- ⁸ The handover briefings between the ADF contingents now occur at UNMO Group Headquarters in Dili.
- ⁹ Occasionally, ADF warrant officers have deployed as military observers holding a temporary commission with the rank of captain.
- ¹⁰ Military observers are provided by Australia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Denmark, Egypt, the Republic of Ireland, Jordan, Malaysia, Mozambique, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Uruguay.
- ¹¹ The PKF consists of formed units and individual military personnel. Troop contributing nations are Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Egypt, Fiji, France, Ireland, Jordan, Kenya, Malaysia, Nepal, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.
- ¹² FALINTIL was formerly the military wing of FRETILIN ('Frente Revolucionaria de Timor Leste Independente': Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor). With the support of Portugal and Australia, FALINTIL is currently being reshaped into the FDTL ('Forças Defesa Timor Loro'sae': East Timorese Defence Force).
- ¹³ CivPol personnel are provided by Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Denmark, Egypt, Fiji, France, Ghana, Ireland, Jordan, Kenya, Malaysia, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Samoa, Senegal, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Zambia and Zimbabwe.