

Bobonaro. This enabled the highest number of combat forces to be deployed, enhancing 4RAR's ability to dominate the AO.

Delta Company successfully located and confiscated a home made pistol from traders crossing the TCL at JP Charlie while the overall affect of the operation was to provide a very stabilising influence on the nervous AO in the final days prior to the national elections. Importantly, throughout the operation the locals were kept informed of what was occurring and encouraged to raise security concerns directly with 4RAR. The Battalion MIST elements continued the themes of Op TITAN, that 4RAR was a very capable force not to be tested, that violence had no part in the elections and that PKF was impartial in the electoral process.

## OP PAVEWAY 18-26 AUG 2001



### OP PAVEWAY

*Op PAVEWAY, a high tempo show of force leading up to the election period.*

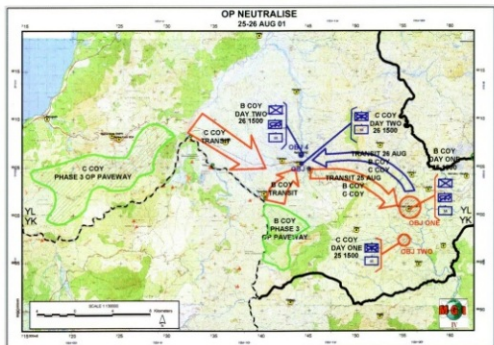
### Op NEUTRALISE 25 – 26 August 2001

The final operation conducted by the 4RAR Battalion Group prior to the 30 August election incorporated a series of block and sweep operations in the Bobonaro and Maliana area on 25 and 26 August. This operation was designed to neutralise any potential, internal, politically motivated violence either just prior to, during or shortly after the elections. The operation was conducted by Charlie and Bravo Companies with Charlie Company mounted in APCs and Bravo Company heliborne for the block and sweep on 26 August.

Mazop, Odelgomo and Bobonaro were targeted by 4RAR on 25 August, and Ritabou and the market area of Maliana on 26 August. This was because these areas contained a number of different

political groups which had threatened violence during the election period. In addition, there had been reports of hidden weapons in these areas.

In the Maliana markets sweep a 'stage act' involving the apprehension of a suspicious person by AUSBATT members who deployed into the markets by Blackhawk helicopter proved to be a very explicit illustration of the potential speed of a 4RAR response. Although Op NEUTRALISE did not identify any hidden weapons throughout the operation the Battalion did achieve its goal of overtly demonstrating the speed and strength of 4RAR should an incident arise. The soldiers involved in the operation wore limited Population Control Equipment (PCE) including helmets, visors, knee, elbow and shin guards adding to the overall effect. This was the only occasion in which 4RAR wore this equipment. It is now commonly recognised that the combination of all of the highly visible shaping operations including the Op TITAN series, Op PAVEWAY and Op NEUTRALISE significantly shaped the battlefield resulting in the conduct of calm and peaceful elections four days later on 30 August.



#### **OP NEUTRALISE**

*A show of force prior to the elections, conducted in the vicinity of the Maliana markets.*

#### **Op FULLBACK 27 August – 9 September 2001**

Op FULLBACK was the Battalion wide operation conducted over the period of the national elections. This was considered the period of highest threat as these groups had no better opportunity to influence the development of East Timor at such a critical time. As a result all elements of the 4RAR Battalion Group were either pre-positioned in strategic locations or were on standby to react.

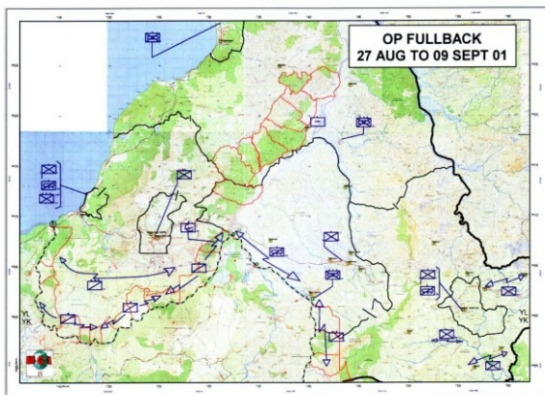
The four pillars of this operation included: the close co-operation between the 4RAR Battalion Group and the Civilian Police coordinated through the establishment of the District Operations Centre; the pre-positioning of 4RAR elements in key areas of potential unrest, particularly in surrounding villages near Bobonaro; the establishment of a layered response capability; and finally, the establishment of an extensive reconnaissance and surveillance screen along the TCL.

Once again logistic elements were required to forego their routine tasks and instead adopted security tasks at static locations. In addition, AUSBATT members provided several crisis assessment teams that were trained to move to any potential hotspot quickly to provide the CO with an accurate assessment on the situation so that an appropriate reaction could be made.

Bravo and Charlie Companies were issued with limited PCE as a worst case precaution and several flights were made by the Australian Kiowas throughout this period. At the same time 4RAR strongly maintained the requirement for CIVPOL primacy in dealing with any domestic unrest whilst remaining postured to support the police, or take the lead on a major disturbance, should it eventuate.

4RAR were directed to remain over 100m away from each of the polling booths in order to maintain impartiality. Nonetheless, limited logistics support was given to the International Electoral Commission in the movement of ballot papers to and from the polling booths in the remoter parts of the AO. CMA was crucial in dealing with the many organisations present during this period ranging from media, to international government observers, the UN and the IEC.

The election was a great success with over 95% of the registered electorate voting on election day. There was not a single security concern throughout the day in AO Matilda, a great reflection of the operational effort conducted by the 4RAR Battalion Group in the lead up to the elections. Significantly, the announcement of the district result on 1 September again proceeded without incident, the locals understanding that violence had no part to play in politics.



**OP FULLBACK**  
*Operation FULLBACK*

## **Returnees**

Apart from securing JP Alpha and conducting numerous security patrols Alpha Company was also responsible for the processing of East Timorese refugees as they returned from camps in West Timor. The refugees (also known as returnees) had been held in West Timor since their forced migration in September 1999. These camps maintained very poor living conditions but many refugees were convinced by militia propaganda that the situation was too unsafe to return to East Timor so remained in West Timor.

Nonetheless, it was normal for 100 – 200 returnees to return to East Timor each week through JP Alpha. Alpha Company was responsible for providing security to these returnees as they were processed and screened at the Batugade Transit camp. This process commonly occurred on Tuesdays and Thursdays and Charlie Company or a patrol from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment would also assist in this task if the refugees were to remain overnight.

Alpha Company was responsible for assisting in the return of over 5000 refugees in the six month deployment. On one occasion in September 2001, 319 refugees were processed in one day. This was a very important process in the rehabilitation of East Timor as many refugees were able to return to their former villages, reuniting many families torn apart by the violent acts of TNI and the militia in 1999.

## **RSI Operations**

In addition to the numerous large-scale operations, the Battalion's RSI assets were committed to several operations throughout the tour. These operations were commonly designed to conduct long term reconnaissance and surveillance on areas of particular interest where threat elements were likely to operate.

### **Op FALCON 12 July – 6 August 2001**

Op FALCON was instigated following the attack on the Alpha Company patrol during Op PREDATOR. Elements from Reconnaissance (Recon) Platoon and 131 Locating Battery (131 Loc Bty) deployed to AO Oyster on the TCL south west of Balibo. 131 Loc Bty were able to deploy with the long range Ground Surveillance Radars and long range digital cameras to provide overwatch of likely infiltration routes, market activity and the TNI post in West Timor. As a result of this operation the Battalion's understanding of TNI activity at market locations on the TCL was greatly enhanced.

### **Op EAGLE 20 June – 30 July 2001**

Acting on intelligence from refugees returning into AO Matilda across the border south of JP Memo to the Sassa / Atus area, reconnaissance and surveillance assets were deployed to the area to monitor any such movement and maintain security of the TCL in the lead up to the elections. This was a combined operation involving Recon Platoon and elements from 131 Loc Bty. A mixture of overt HA patrols, covert Observation Posts (OPs) and patrols were conducted in order to maximise the collection of information through both traditional means of covert patrols and from local supporters. The operation was invaluable in providing security to the southern flank of the AO preventing any easy infiltration routes of refugees or threat elements into the 4RAR AO whilst enhancing the working relationships with the locals in this area.

### **Op IDA 25 May – 7 June 2001**

Op IDA was a two week operation conducted by Recon Pl in the Foho Leolaca area, designed to conduct aggressive patrols through a known militia infiltration area. This area is possibly the most rugged terrain in the whole of East Timor with particularly steep ridge lines covered with primary jungle, a network of cave systems and an altitude ranging from 800m – 2000m.

These patrols improved ties with villages that had rarely seen PKF in the past. In addition, several footpaths were mapped and detailed terrain analysis conducted. Further patrols have benefited from

the relationships developed by Recon Platoon with several locals volunteering to act as guides throughout the rugged terrain.

### **Op DESERAMA 3 May – 16 August 2001**

Following reports that the militia may have previously used caves as a means to cache weapons and food, 4RAR commenced a detailed reconnaissance program led by specialist reconnaissance elements to identify these cave systems and determine the possibility of their use by militia groups. This operation focused on the terrain to the south of Bobonaro around the Everest Mountain range to the border with the NZ Battalion. The operation provided conclusive evidence that these caves were not in use by militia elements thereby allowing the Battalion group to focus on other areas of threat and interest.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of the major operations conducted by 4RAR during its tour from 25 April – 25 October 2001. Whilst there were several other operations during the 4RAR tour this chapter has attempted to illustrate those operations which have had a lasting impact on the deployment, many of which were coordinated at Battalion level. The vast majority of 4RAR operations were conducted in close proximity to the TCL in response to the perceived and actual location of threat elements during the deployment. This included early TCL violations by TNI, the violent involvement by militia members at the TCL markets, shallow cross border raids such as the attack on the Alpha Company patrol or the threatened return of high numbers of refugees. This was noticeably different from earlier Battalion rotations where several operations and contacts with the militia occurred away from the TCL in the middle of the Battalion AO.

The 4RAR Battalion Group made extensive and very effective use of shaping operations. It is assessed that these operations had significant influence on both threat elements and friendly locals in the lead up to the elections, resulting in such a successful result. The operations including CHALLENGER, the TITAN series and PAVEWAY were conducted in full view of potential threat elements in West Timor. Soon after each activity TNI attempted to conduct similar operations obviously being influenced by the 4RAR operations.

Finally, the type of threat encountered by 4RAR during its deployment was significantly different to that experienced by earlier battalions. The threat had become much more asymmetric than it was in 1999 and 2000. In 2001 4RAR faced attacks planned against civilians such as the grenade attack on the Maubusa markets, the ever-present potential for political violence and the continued threat against Australian soldiers of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Group. This required a more sophisticated operational approach including enhanced cooperation from the locals as they often were in a position to provide early warning to such attacks. At the same time the Battalion's operations required to be more intelligence led than ever.

4RAR handed over responsibility for AO Matilda to 2RAR on 25 October 2001. The fact that the militia and all other threat elements were denied the opportunity to operate in AO Matilda, that political tension was minimised to the point that it was almost non-existent during and after the elections, that over 5000 refugees were returned to East Timor during the deployment, that over 700 former militia now reside peacefully in AO Matilda and that all 4RAR soldiers that deployed to East Timor returned home safely, indicates the success of the 4RAR Battalion Group's operations.