

Chapter 5 – Bravo Company

When the Battalion's advance party left for East Timor in April, it contained the entire complement of Bravo's commanders and the Direct Fire Support Weapon Team. The Direct Fire Support Weapon Team was the first element deployed and it conducted its handover on Everest (height 1700 metres), a feature which all callsigns would eventually be tasked to secure throughout the operation. Shortly thereafter, the platoons flew in to relieve A Company 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment at Fort Bobonaro and Fort Marko.

The first six weeks of the operation saw each Platoon rotate through Forward Operating Base/ Everest security, patrolling and platoon independent operations staged from Fort Marko. The patrolling was generally a mix of 'green' field patrols and 'blue' village patrols. In this time a few short-notice operations were launched to chase militia, but nothing conclusive was forthcoming. At the end of this period, the unit reoriented its boundaries and Bravo became firmly entrenched in the Bobonaro Sub-district, an area which is 400km² and contains approximately 30 000 Timorese. The dramatic beauty of the countryside and cold climate was indicative of the fact that the Company spent most of its time operating between 800 and 2200 metres above sea level! With this sort of complex terrain, half the operations launched from the Base were done using helicopters – usually the Kiwi's venerable UH-1H 'Hueys'.

With all callsigns well and truly conditioned, the next period of time saw an increase in reconnaissance style patrolling to gather information and secure the likely infiltration routes into the Bobonaro area. With the loss of Fort Marko, the reorientation also enabled Bravo to regularly release a Platoon to Delta Company for security duties along the border with West Timor.

In the lead up to the election period the Company was involved in various unit operations to shape the environment thereby ensuring free and fair elections were held on the Battalion's watch. This enabled the callsigns to split into their Teams and operate as smaller elements.

With the elections safely and successfully behind the Company, the last and hardest third of the operation continued in a similar fashion as before – patrolling, patrolling, patrolling.

As the Company moves from East Timor, it will transition back to its previous role as part of the Australian Defence Force's Special Forces capability. Even though many of Bravos men will move on, there is no doubt that the standards of professional excellence, camaraderie and enthusiasm they have displayed will go with them.

Postscript: G24 provided the Company with the best Civil Military Affairs (CMA) support imaginable and are as much a part of Bravo as anyone. The successes of the Company are also theirs.

Callsign 20 - CHQ

The Company Headquarters of Bravo is a motley crew with an average age of about 65 and more wrinkles collectively than that of an entire Rifle Company!

The Command Team – the titular head of the organisation is the Officer Commanding, Brett Andersen. He's supported by the Executive Officer, Miles 'Tuna' Salom, who was occasionally allowed out for an airing. Whilst the Company Sergeant Major, Bill 'Bren-Gun Billy' Chapman, was the senior soldier and resident tough guy for Bravo.

The Intelligence Team – Clinton 'C.I.-INT' Firth and Raymond Khoo attempted to keep us in the information loop and despite what we all portrayed, we knew that deep down, they really did know *something...*

The Signals Team – headed up by Stephen ‘Straughnie’ Straughan and backed up by Peter Jakimoff and Grant Stephens. Although they assured us we had communications throughout the operation, they spent the best part of six months trying to figure out which part of the atmosphere the system was working in and why we couldn’t speak to anyone!

The Clerical Team – besides ensuring our compasses maintained their luminescence, Guy ‘the Silverback’ Potterat could think of nothing better to do than lead a column of armoured fighting vehicles against an army of T-80 tanks in Europe.

The Logistics Team – keeping Bravo in bombs, bullets and beans (plus a healthy supply of toilet paper) are the Q’ies... Al ‘Johari’ Joyce – the Kojak of Q, Pol ‘I’m not a bloody LEC (Local Employed Civilian)’ Lee, and the last man to believe Elvis is dead – Danny Cullen.

The Medical Team – ‘Ned’ Lindley and James Milliss, Bravo’s medics, had a busy six months fixing people up. They were only ever happy if they were stitching a wound, putting a drip in someone, delivering a baby or diagnosing diseases. It’s lucky the locals accommodated them with these and other medical disasters.

The Electrical Mechanical Engineer Team – Craftsman Croft was the shop steward of the RAEMEWU (RAEME Worker’s Union). As a fully paid up member of the union, he has been instrumental in introducing better working conditions – like the grounding of weapons which could kill someone!

Now that you know about the HQ, you have to wonder ...

Callsign 21 – Langford’s Platoon

‘Timor? Didn’t that finish last year?’

Popular held belief amongst militia elements.

It was with great relief that the men of 21 collectively stepped ashore in Dili off *HMAS Jervis Bay* on 20 April 2001. Having missed the ‘big push’ (INTERFET) of 1999, we were keen from the outset of our tour to capitalise on any and all opportunities given. Within 24 hours, the Platoon found itself out hot on the heels of possible ‘THREATFOR’ in the Aidabasala salient, as well as reacting to any sniff of militia in Cailaco and the area around Marko. This set the pace for the remainder of the operation.

21A, led fearlessly by Sergeant (the sexiest soldier in East Timor) Smith, and Corporal (Admiral Viking) Ward have been singing, ‘the hills are alive, with the sounds of music’ throughout the Bobonaro TAOR. Brian and the boys have kept themselves entertained throughout the low tempo moments of the tour, thanks largely to the Section buffoon, Lance Corporal (I’ve got too much sugar in my system and I do not have access to my Playstation) Jamie Doyle.

Second in Command (21C) (shhh!!! you must whisper when discussing this callsign), have spent the majority of their tour in the field (or so they reckon!). They often went out with a complete callsign and 7 days rations. Although, it was a planning factor that Private Russell (gee, I can’t wait to go on Recreational Out of Country Leave (ROCL) and conduct my own operations in my F470) Morris comes back minus an arm or a leg, then it’s fair to say the Sergeant Weston (what’s for breakfast/lunch/dinner?) Hennessey ran out of rations and had to utilise Russell’s now absent appendage in the emergency ration plan.

And then there is Platoon Headquarters. Despite everyone in the Platoon regarding us as REMF’s (a colloquial term of endearment), Sergeant Tony Compton and Captain Ian Langford have been working tirelessly in support of our elements in the field. We have been frequently entertained by our Platoon Signallers, Tony Rokov and Anthony Tremlett.

There are many memories that the boys will take away from the trip and not enough room on one page to give justice to any of them. Alternatively, the following is a summary of the collective thoughts, impressions, and feelings throughout our tour:

Platoon Headquarters (Captain I. Langford, Sergeant A. Compton, Bombardier A. Rokov and Private A. Tremlett)

- *"Sir (Officer Commanding), this callsign is postured for 'no notice' operations!"*

21A (Sergeant B. Smith, Lance Corporal J. Doyle, Privates J. Wiles, D. Twinning, H. Au and S. Bolton)

- *"Hail to the chimps!"*

21B (Admiral P. Ward, Privates R. Bland (21C), S. Lowe, R. Johns, A. Rokov/A. Tremlett and A. Harding)

- *"Vikings, vikings, everywhere ..."*

21C (Sergeant W. Hennessey, Corporal L. Fegen, Privates R. Morriss, B. Burrowes, B. Wood, and D. West)

- *"Food, give me more food, or we'll eat Westy"*

21D (Corporal B. Ferris, Lance Corporal M. Ryan, Privates M. Gaiyich, T. Gawthorne, E. Gonzales, and J. Tatton)

- *"We did them a favour burning the house down!"*

Things we'd like to see:

- 2 RAR on Chapter 6.
- 2 weeks for Recreational Out of Country Leave (ROCL) like ASNCE, HQSECTWEST, FLSG, HQ UNTAET, and the UNMO's get.
- B Coy in Afghanistan this time next year.
- Dogs that can do gun piquet as well as operate M203's!

Callsign 22 – Fogarty's Platoon

Callsign 22 was happy to deploy to East Timor after an arduous build-up. The Platoon agreed that the militia would be a push over after an Armored Personnel Carrier tried its best to kill the majority of 22A while conducting pre-deployment training. As a result Steve Shaw and Ben Sykes were left back in Australia to have a 'couple' of beers on behalf of the Platoon for ANZAC Day. The platoon also left behind Roger Renni, who after being on five previous operational deployments with the Poms, decided that this whole East Timor business was a bit of a bore and decided to stay home to go to the dentist instead.

The early days of the deployment saw the Platoon busy with work parties and fort security, their pride and joy being laying the foundations for the 'gazebo'. Pat Ward was having flash backs to his days as a plumber and Mick Shaw was attempting to make a life size replica of the Venice Beach gym or the Alcatraz exercise yard (it was hard to tell which one it was). Despite being on operations, morale was a bit low as Bobonaro did not have a cook. As a result the Platoon attempted to eat its weight in pork chops daily. The early weeks were spiced up by the 'Battle of Saburai' whereby 22A and B were treated to Timor's version of the Welsh planks.

The Platoon then headed to the badlands of Foho Leolaco. The patrol's deception was sound as fully cammed soldiers deployed from a large white chopper. We covered some pretty rugged terrain and had our first battle with the real enemy in Timor - lantana. If this plant ever became a cash crop East Timor would certainly prosper. The patrol was pretty uneventful, but there was a moment of excitement when Sean Parrington came close to contacting a dangerous looking pig - or was it the 'Foho Animal'? With keen eyes 'Putty-arms' Ryder identified the first militia sign of the operation, a freshly dropped first aid dressing. This piece of sign was remarkable as it had a striking resemblance to dressings used by AUSBATT soldiers. It also had a striking resemblance to the one that had been attached to 'Putty Trackers' webbing less than a minute earlier. To this day members of that patrol are still dumbfounded by this resemblance. The patrol was not without incident when Dave 'Pup' McLachlan was attacked by a rogue scorpion that savaged his right pinkie!

After an all too brief stay at Marko, the Platoon moved back to Bobo for another round of Forward Operating Base security. Most members took the opportunity to hit the gym in an attempt to get huge

for leave. It was around this time that the gym area started to look like Jimmy Sharman's boxing tent with a number of the Platoon expending energy and pent-up frustrations on the boxing bag and focus pads. Under the watchful eye of 'the Wide Boy' (Nick Hill) and Barry Humphries, many a boxing circuit was conducted. This training was put to good use when the 'Unofficial Light-heavyweight Title of Bobonaro' was contested by two members of the platoon. The title is still vacant as the spirited bout ended in a split points decision.

It was with much relief that the Platoon started to rotate on leave. The majority of the boys returned with interesting stories of wine, women and song. The Platoon continued its patrolling program without a great deal of excitement. The operational tempo appeared to be too much for Private 'the Hammer' Jones, who decided that cutting a gaping hole in his foot with his fighting knife was better than deploying on Operation PENGUIN. After walking from one side of the Area of Operation to the Tactical Control Line, most of the Platoon agreed with him. The constant patrols gave the boys a good opportunity to learn the local language and experience the local culture. Included in the education was observing 'rat soccer' and skeet shooting, with flying foxes replacing clay pigeons. 22C/D were also deployed to the Tactical Control Line to track down the infamous villain 'Armundo the Rogue Trader', but Armundo was too elusive and will live to fight another day.

With the elections wrapping up the 'Seven Deadly Sins' looked forward to cracking a beer in Australia and hooking in next year.

Callsign 23 – Wakelin's Platoon

Keen students of military history, our Platoon pre-deployment training had borrowed heavily from the lessons of Borneo and Rhodesia, with emphasis placed on patrolling and ambushing (the boss was also keen on bunker busting but his erstwhile Non-Commissioned Officers' managed to convince him that perhaps this was an unlikely scenario). This was coupled with the mandatory unit exercises at Jimna, Wide Bay and Shoalwater which some would argue did more to test ones patience and sense of humour than raise collective ability. The Platoon, however, threw itself into it with gusto and new blokes learnt from the old, forming a tight bond that was to see us through the tour in often difficult and frustrating times.

We landed in Dili with a keen desire to get into the Area of Operations (AO) as quickly as possible and get into contact with the Militia. The callsign shunned urban patrols, avoiding the obligatory low slung leg rigs of our Rifle Company cousins and hard looks worn for the benefit of film crews. We concentrated on 'green' patrols in the scrub, clearing ground, conducting Observation Points and track squats, and proving that it is possible to move a Platoon in single file through lantana at night. We also conducted a number of 'blue' patrols focusing on the provision of humanitarian assistance. The Platoon medics - Kent Strout, Tim Crellin and Haydn Tyson ran these expertly and undoubtedly did much to ease individual suffering and enhance the units standing in the local community.

The Platoon led the way not only in the field, but also in that hallowed institution - the Fort Bobonaro gym. Led by MAG 7 (the Platoon MAG 58 Gunners: Glenn Curran, Alex White and Jason Roberts) the callsign took more supplements and shifted more pig than the Company combined. This was also probably a key factor in 23 being the only Platoon in the unit to carry three MAG 58's throughout the deployment and not bleat...sorry Hanks, yes there was a Minimi as well!

23 kept its sense of humour throughout, never being shy to take the proverbial out of each other or our sister Platoons. The callsign derived hours of amusement from Pat Ward's reaction to the 21 JULIET tag. Dean 'Rufus' Rule the Platoon Sergeant, regaled all with his tales of the battles of WW2, raising morale and doing a great job of flying top cover.

The tour, although rewarding, was in many ways not what we'd hoped for. If we'd had our way the callsign would have been kitted up in T10 parachutes, with a Dakota on standby ready to put us into contact Rhodesian Light Infantry style. There was just no aircraft, parachutes or enough militia.

23 Memorable Moments

Platoon Headquarters: Steve Wakelin planned every patrol he led to include a night approach in marching order over difficult terrain, with the odd deception thrown in. We just wish that the Commanding Officer hadn't gone one better on the Quick Reaction Force test exercise, making us spend 12 hours of darkness in marching order cutting our way through lantana - to cover only 900m! This impressed Phil Nield, who inevitably would be carrying half the boss's rations, water, warm gear etc. that he had decided he didn't need prior to the patrol.

23A: Thinking we were about to be flanked by militia whilst in our night Laying Up Point, only to discover that a mob of cows had lined out and were steadily advancing on our position.

23B: Laying silent in a Laying Up Point at night to be awoken by a horrific scream from Scott Kunde, whose nightmares were to continue, startling the team until his transfer to 64B.

23C: Being stuck on Everest, desperate to get back for Recreational Out of Country Leave, only to have the Super Puma, with us in it, nearly lose its rear rotor on landing at Bobonaro!

23D: Being dispatched to a remote village to escort Civilian Police (CIVPOL) to a murder scene, waiting six hours to get approval for a Peacekeeping Force helo to CASEVAC a wounded woman, while another dignitary undoubtedly was burning up air hours visiting the troops.

Callsign 64B – Direct Fire Support Weapons (DFSW) Team

In B Coy the DFSW Team was deployed in two Surveillance Reconnaissance Vehicles (SRV). By May 2001 a number of changes occurred, callsign 26 became callsign 64B, new faces were exchanged for old and new tasks were assigned. Corporal Mick Sloman was given the con (what was 21 to do without him?) Also to make the change over from 22 was Private Shane Bell the team's second in command. He just made fighting weight to get there after receiving double rations, which made his pack heavier than him! Shane had to be strapped to the SRV so he wouldn't float away.

Up the front with Mick is the vehicles former machine gunner Private Adrian 'Boong Chook' Gasperini. The Boong Chook became the driver after showing his skills with CMA's vehicle and trying to slow down Craftsman Paul Bendell by testing the breaking strain of his neck with a low hanging wire. With Paul being too fast for the streets of East Timor, he's now up top full-time, keeping low behind his Mag 58. In 'Posh' Bells car was Private Mick 'Bull' Durham, who after tamping down the Heli-pad with his boots a couple of times, packed away his mint biscuits and headed off to callsign 23.

Once upon a time we had a driver called Private Shannon McLear, however he disappeared to Australia...

Private Ben 'APC' Sykes eventually stepped into the vacancy after redecorating the inside of an M113, proving that a Commando's skin is still stronger than armour! Will he decide to try canvas next time? Watch this space. The latest edition to have a go is Private Scotty 'Doctor Who' Kunde, who with a few phone books should be able to see over the top of the cupola, let alone use the gun. As more horse power was needed, short timer Ben went off to 22 for an APC retest and the next winner (read as replacement) was Private Andrew 'P.J.' Hudson - 'Horse' to everyone else. Besides being made in Australia, Horse is also a part time pyjama model!



20A & 20B 'blue pit' Mazonp



CS 64B in the FOB