

Chapter 1 - Preparation

At 1730 hours on 16 April 2001 the advance party consisting of 221 personnel arrived in Dili aboard the HMAS Jarvis Bay, thus commencing the deployment of the 4 RAR Battalion Group as Rotation 4 of Australia's commitment to the UN Force in East Timor. The advance party was followed by a further three contingents at four day intervals. The deployment was the culmination of a rigorous preparation schedule conducted principally over the previous six months, but in reality since February 2000. It involved units located in four states, New South Wales (4th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (Commando)), South Australia (16th Air Defence Regiment), Queensland (2nd Combat Engineer Regiment, 5th Aviation Regiment, 2/14 Queensland Mounted Infantry and 131 Locating Battery) and the Northern Territory (1st Combat Service Support Battalion and 2nd Cavalry Regiment).

4 RAR (Cdo)

The first stage in preparing the Battalion Group for deployment was to establish the appropriate organisational structure suitable to its tasking in East Timor. This proved more difficult than first thought and involved significant changes to the existing structures in most elements. Attached elements were able to liaise with the Battalion Group deployed to East Timor at the time to determine likely dispositions. For 4 RAR it meant complete re-organisation from the existing two commando companies structure to a light infantry model with four companies. This involved the establishment of Alpha Company in June 2000, Delta Company in November 2000 and an overall growth across the unit from 220 personnel to 670 personnel.

Alpha Coy was raised in June and found immediate working accommodation in Tobruk Lines, sharing the Lines with the Joint Incident Response Unit which was formed to support the Olympic Games. Major John Blake and Warrant Officer Alan Lynch assumed responsibility for preparing a Company of largely IET soldiers from Singleton, for operations in East Timor.

Sydney's hosting of the Olympic Games also provided an opportunity for elements of the Battalion to become operationally focused. An enhanced Charlie Company under Major Sean O'Leary remained on four hours notice to move as a standby response force, and individuals assisted Headquarters Special Operations to monitor events from Garden Island. Whilst imposing movement restrictions on sub-units it allowed them to focus on basic infantry minor tactics around the Holsworthy training area. For soldiers recently graduated from Infantry Centre Singleton, this time proved invaluable in the development of individual and collective skills.

The presence of a troop from 2/14 QMI under the control of Major Mick Hanna, provided an excellent opportunity for an introduction into M113 Armoured Personnel Carriers. Additional training opportunities were also made available through the presence of Blackhawk and Iroquois helicopters, in Sydney to support the Olympic Games.

The key personnel for the raising of Delta Company started to arrive early in October of 2000. Major Anthony Thomas and Warrant Officer Class Two Ian "Bones" Brady had prepared a very busy schedule to train the soldiers and the period that followed definitely tested and trained the soldiers for what they would need during Operation TANAGER. On the 1 November, over twenty years after it had been placed in mothballs, Delta Company rose from the ashes and prepared for operations.

During the first month, sections were given the opportunity to stretch their legs and see what the predominantly young soldiers of the company could do. The section training culminated with a busy schedule devised by the staff at Canungra to harden the company up. Delta Company's four platoons

had their skill base honed to a fine edge. This served them well for the final training and assessment phases conducted in Jimna, Wide Bay Training Area and at Shoalwater Bay Training Area during the period January - March 2001.

By November 2000, 4 RAR was well into its lead-up program. In the midst of increasing manning, conducting collective training and planning, the unit was presented with another hurdle; relocation. The plan to move 4 RAR (Cdo) from Jordan Lines to Tobruk Lines, 5/7 RAR's previous barracks, was set into motion by the Battalion XO, Major Brian Campbell. A move had been expected and on the drawing board for quite some time, however lead-up for East Timor had lowered the priority of this move.

Alpha Company, having already occupied buildings in Tobruk Lines in June, meant that 4 RAR already had a foot in the door and a firm grounding prior to setting the wheels in motion. Preliminary works were conducted on the old Tobruk Lines in order to properly accommodate the now 600 plus strong Battalion, as well as the swelled HQ element. The establishment as well as the layout of the new facilities had to be geared towards catering for not only the Battalion and its 'OPTANAGER' ancillaries, but also with a view to the future ie the continuing development of the Commando capability.

By December the Battalion had re-located to Tobruk Lines, Holsworthy. Cosmetic works would continue right up until the Battalion's departure, as well as through the deployment, overseen by Rear Details.

Bravo Company started its East Timor preparation after coming off line as the Australian Defence Force's full-time Commando capability. An early decision was made between the incumbent Officer Commanding and Officer Commanding designate to maintain Commando Platoon structures for the operation. This proved to be a sound decision that minimised disruption and enabled an increased degree of tactical flexibility that was successfully proven during pre-deployment training and the operation.

Sadly, during pre-deployment training, several soldiers were seriously injured in an Armoured Personnel Carrier accident at Wide Bay. The Company and Platoon Medics proved their worth during the accident by conducting the initial triage and trauma management that saved life and limb. Luckily no fatalities occurred and Lance Corporal Trainor with Privates Prins, Sykes and Shaw either made the starting line-up for the operation, or came across as reinforcements during the tour.

The pre-deployment training program was a well-balanced blend of company and battalion driven activities. From field firing ranges in Singleton and Holsworthy to the military training areas of South Queensland, Battalion elements saw them all. Between January and March 2001, the Battalion travelled extensively in order to prepare for active service. A Command Post Exercise conducted in Brisbane for the Headquarters as well as a series of field exercises conducted for all attached elements in the Wide Bay Training Area, Shoalwater Bay Training Area and the Queensland Township of Jimna proved to be invaluable. There was no doubt that these assessed activities left the Battalion in an excellent posture for its deployment. Although the scenarios presented to the Companies and the Headquarters were thought to be somewhat exaggerated, they proved to be beneficial. It proved to all members of the Battalion that good, realistic training is paramount in any level of preparation.

Prior to deployment, the unit underwent Deployed Forces Support Unit (DFSU) training, a required training regime for all battalion groups. DFSU training consisted of various lectures and lessons ranging from Rules of Engagement (ROE) and Orders For Opening Fire (OFOF) training, to pay/allowance and customs lectures. All soldiers deployed with the 4 RAR Battalion Group were required to get the 'tick in the box' before being acknowledged as 'ready' to deploy. Of course, ROE and OFOF training gained the most attention, running the soldiers through dramatised scenarios based on possible situations they could face. Never before have soldiers had to be so knowledgeable of their right and responsibilities in war time, as the view for this type of training was for OFOF and ROE to be instinctive in tense and volatile situations.

Just as the preparation had been challenging, the deployment was not without drama, with all elements experiencing the challenges of ANSETT aircraft being grounded due to maintenance concerns. Despite this, morale remained high in anticipation of the six months ahead.

Civil Military Affairs

Given the nature of Civil Military Affairs (CMA) and its diverse scope of operations, it was only fitting that the Battalion's CMA Group be formed with 28 people from five Corps who were spread across two units that were based in separate states 1600 kilometres apart. The training challenges presented by this situation to the members of CMA group were unique; however, they eventually proved to be the basis for a strong and balanced team.

Following the decision for the 16th Air Defence Regiment to provide personnel to the 4th Battalion's Civil Military Affairs Group in late October 2000, there was little time to be wasted despite having another six months until deployment. The final structure included a mixed rank group of thirteen personnel from the Air Defence Regiment and was rounded out with a further fifteen from the 4RAR, again of mixed rank and Corps.

The training of the team covered the wide range of scenarios that we were likely to encounter once working in AO Matilda. A key area included the development of individual Tetum language skills across the CMA group. This aim saw a selection of 4 RAR personnel enjoying the hospitality of the ADF School of Languages for three months in late 2000, whilst the Woodside team hosted language instructors in the Adelaide hills early in the New Year. The language skills developed during these lessons proved to be essential for the conduct of effective interaction with the local communities in East Timor, despite the additional pre-deployment time away from home and late nights studying. So much so that Captain Antonio Pagan later established and conducted several intensive in-country language courses, which proved to be of infinite value.

The Battalion training phase from February 2001 allowed the two CMA elements to finally be united and start developing a working relationship, both within the CMA teams and with the 4th Battalion. Timor Prelude, Reign, Dusk and Dawn were all exercises that provided the development opportunities required to advance CMA from classroom theory to operational practice, as well as allowing us to see a great deal of the eastern seaboard of Australia. With experience provided by the 1st Field Regiment, who provided the 6th Battalion CMA Team, ongoing training covered a wide range of issues. These included a diverse range of CMA topics such as the use of interpreters, Timorese culture, Laws of Armed Conflict, Non Government Organisations, the needs of refugees, negotiation, conflict resolution and the structure of the United Nations. In addition, the CMA group also had to complete the more familiar details of weapon, vehicle and medical requirements for the Op TANAGER deployment, as for the remainder of the Battalion Group.

The training of the CMA Group provided unique challenges and meant that the six-month operational deployment really meant closer to ten months away from homes and families. The value however, has been reflected in the success of the CMA teams, both with their integration into the Bobonaro District communities and their assistance to the Battalion operations throughout the AUSBATT AO. The diversity of Corps and experience has proven to be our strength and it was with confidence that we faced the challenges beyond Anzac Day 2001.

131 Locating Battery - Surveillance Troop

The Troop was raised on 1 December 2000 with Warrant Officer Danny McGinley as the Troop Sergeant Major (TSM) and Sergeant Les Bowman as the Troop Sergeant. They set about forming the troop, developing the necessary training programs and gathering the equipment which would be needed to support the 4 RAR Battalion Group in East Timor (EM). At this stage the soon to be Troop Commander Captain Joe Ellul was still posted to the 1st Field Regiment and would not be posted into the troop until 15 January 2001. The soldiers forming the troop also would not start training until the 15 January due to unit and course commitments. The first task was to produce a training program for the period from January to April. This was assisted by an initial Military Appreciation Process exercise conducted at 4 RAR in December 2000. Danny McGinley co-ordinated planning with Les Bowman, and Captain Rob Harvey in EM, on any additional administrative or training issues which would affect troop preparation for EM.

After Christmas leave the troop was finally together on the 15 January 2001. Day one saw a status check conducted for all members on all the relevant paper work associated with overseas deployments. Day two saw the troop move straight into the individual training phase. The soldiers came from different backgrounds ranging from surveyors, meteorologists and radar operators. A lot of lessons were learnt and skills enhanced during this period of training. The role of being a surveillance operator was new to most of them and to their credit they worked hard to achieve very good results leading up to and during the collective training phase. Through Command Post Exercises conducted in January and February 2001 the troop headquarters was getting used to working within a battalion size group organisation, and subsequently new troop Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) were developed during this period. With final range shoots and helicopter training conducted, the troop prepared for the Mission Rehearsal Exercise (MRE) at Shoal Water Bay. The MRE prepared the troop to work within the Battalion Group organisation. The detachment's tasks varied from coastal surveillance to providing overwatch to junction points. It was during the MRE that the soldiers started working well with the 4 RAR Recon Platoon members and establishing mutually compatible SOPs for EM.

The DFSU training conducted at Enoggera was very thorough indeed and Sergeant Les Bowman and his team worked hard to co-ordinate the endless paperwork jungle that DFSU training produces. With the trunks in the shipping containers, and final leave taken, the troop was ready for the long trip to EM. Everyone in the troop had mixed feelings at the airport as we said goodbye to our loved ones and made the flight to Darwin. The transit from Darwin to Dili aboard the HMAS JERVIS BAY was smooth with only a couple of guys feeling a wee bit sea sick, but generally all had a good time. The size and steepness of the mountains, which appeared on the horizon as we approached East Timor, confirmed all previous reports from previous detachments operating with 1 RAR. As we docked at the wharf, Dili was a shock to us even though we had seen plenty of pictures of it during training. The smells and sights hit home that we were definitely in another country. Onto the trucks and we were away to our overnight accommodation and subsequent road trip to Balibo which we were thankful was done during the dry season.

4 CSST Early Days – 15 January - 16 April 2001

November 2000 saw the commencement of preparations and planning for the 4th Combat Service Support Team (4 CSST) to deploy as the formation level logistic element, with the 4 RAR Battalion Group. The Headquarters of 4 CSST was able to select personnel, in order to achieve the highest possible standard of combat service support. Each of the 140 staff from 4 CSST was selected for their skills and attributes that would allow them to achieve the diverse tasking that 4 CSST would face once deployed on Operation TANAGER. 110 personnel of the 4 CSST manning consisted predominantly of staff from the 1st Combat Service Support Battalion (1 CSSB) and the 1st Brigade units, with the remaining soldiers and officers being made available from units across the ADF.

1 CSSB, who had previously deployed with INTERFET, were no strangers to the task ahead of them and the training program that was set for the early months of 2001 proved both rigorous and rewarding. Secondary to the high level of technical ability requirement, and in particular the ability to execute combat service support, 4 CSST focus on training was quite specifically based upon force protection and Infantry Minor Tactics (IMT). This training included an extensive patrolling program, JNCO leader development, riot training, a high level of weapon training, and a myriad of specialist skills including language, culture and history training. The pre-deployment training culminated in the conduct, with all elements of the Battalion Group, of the Mission Rehearsal Exercise.

At the commencement of the MRE, in March 2001, all personnel of 4 CSST were relieved that they had seen the last of the Close Training Area and Robertson Barracks, and could now focus upon enhancing their technical skills to suit the impending operation. The deployment, by road to Shoalwater Bay, tested the robustness of 4 CSST as they avoided entrapment, by as little as 30 minutes, from the rising waters of the Georgina River and other unpredictable waterways across the Northern Territory.

The MRE provided a variety of tasking that put us in good stead for the future operation. The MRE came and went, and our 'Assessors' from 7 Brigade ensured we completed the MRE with an enhanced level of situational awareness of East Timor and the many idiosyncrasies of providing combat service support with the United Nations.

Before dawn on 16 April 2001, the advance party proudly donned their blue caps and arm bands, were issued their weapons and said their final farewells to family and friends to commence the six month deployment in East Timor. The level of training and preparation conducted by 4 CSST ensured that the 140 personnel deploying to support the 4 RAR Battalion Group was one of the best-prepared logistic units, to deploy on operations, in the history of the Australian Army.

13 Combat Engineer Troop

On 8 January 2001 at 0730 hours, 35 soldiers from all over Australia, with a mixture of engineer trades and experience, came together on parade for the first time. As the roll was called, the troop staff pondered the challenges that confronted them over the next four months. This troop was different from a normal Combat Engineer Troop (CET), as it had been tailor-made for the task of supporting 4 RAR, and was consequently designed to operate independent of its parent unit, the 2nd Combat Engineer Regiment. Therefore, it had to include all the key trades found in the Regiment; however, they had to be stripped from their specialist sub-units and rolled in together to form an independent Troop. At the end of the training phase, these guys would need to be capable of living on top of each other for six months, and be capable of providing the engineer support normally afforded a Battalion by an entire Squadron. Hardly a challenge!

The headquarters staff had already prepared a training program designed to bring this motley bunch up to speed, so the first order of business was to allocate everyone to their new sections and get started with what promised to be a very busy schedule. First up, we needed to smash through the team building process so we could get on with the more complex training tasks. We started with a number of section level activities before bringing everyone together as a Troop. We had little to no redundancy in the timeline, so it was basically full on from the outset as we still needed to cover the pre-deployment administration, medicals, inoculations and paper work, on top of revising our engineering skills. We started with basic individual skills such as additional drivers licences and refreshing weapon qualifications, before moving onto section skills, again concentrating on the basic soldier skills of IMTs and practicing SOP's both on the engineer side and the 4th Battalion Group's.

With all the basics out of the way, we then deployed to Canungra for our first real chance to get the troop together as one, where all the individual and section skills were exercised over a two week deployment. The first five days were allocated for IMTs, covering all possible scenarios, such as confrontation with Militia, Militia attack on locals, members coming across injured locals after an attack, just to name a few. In true Canungra fashion it rained for five days solid, with river crossings being washed out and roads becoming unpassable. If you didn't know any better, you could be excused for thinking we were training for wet season rotation and not the dry. After we eventually dried out, we moved into our specialist skill phase where we exercised the Troop, as it would be operating in country. We had only the equipment that we would have on the ground in East Timor, and it was soon evident this wasn't a lot. Nevertheless, we set about repairing roads and culverts, and constructing strong points etc. We had already identified tasks for our plumbers, electricians and carpenters during an earlier reconnaissance, and we used reports from previous engineer contingents to identify the most common tasks that would confront us in East Timor. The deployment to Canungra proved very valuable, particularly for Troop HQ who were able to practise their command post procedures, and were also able to see the troop operate together for the first time. The key lesson from the deployment was that we would be undermanned, and short of equipment and material, so we would have to be smart in the way we did business. Fortunately, Sappers have a reputation for being cunning and resourceful, albeit that this is sometimes mistaken for being slightly light-fingered.